

## Press Release

### International SpankOut Day - Give Children a Warm and Non-violent Childhood

(26/4/2021)

The Against Child Abuse (ACA) was established in 1979 as the only non-governmental organization specializes in child protection. We keep striving to eliminate all forms of child abuse in Hong Kong for promoting a caring and non-violent environment. According to the SWD Child Protection Registry Statistical Report, there were 389 newly reported physical abuse cases in 2020. The percentage of physical abuse cases in the overall number of child abuse cases was 41.4% and it accounted for the majority of different types of child abuse. We are worried that more physical abuse cases have not yet been disclosed due to COVID-19. Guiding children is necessary but parents should make use of non-violent parenting methods. It is believed that corporal punishment can be effectively reduced if children and parents are assisted as early as possible.

### 24th April SpankOut Day Exhibition and Game Booths

In support of the International SpankOut Day on 30 April, the Against Child Abuse organized the SpankOut Day Exhibition and Game Booths in the Rink of Chuk Yuen North Estate and the Against Child Abuse Chuk Yuen Centre on 24 April to promote the “Zero” tolerance of violence against children and positive parenting to replace corporal punishment.

### Child abuse cases might be hidden due to COVID-19

Although the number of newly reported physical abuse cases decreased by about 10% when compared with the figure in 2019 (430 physical abuse cases in 2019), we are worried that the decrease was because of distancing measures of COVID-19 such as closure of schools and community facilities. There was a drop in the number of regular health visits and social service contacts. Children in some families are vulnerable and at higher risk without the regular oversight by teachers, health workers, or social workers, who could identify and report the suspected child abuse cases in an earlier stage.

### Increase in parent-child conflicts

Since the beginning of 2020, affected by the pandemic, schools have been closed, children and their parents have stayed at home for a long time, and parents have to shoulder the role of teachers, which has intensified parent-child conflicts. For those parents with emotional problem or SEN children, the feelings of anxiety and stress might be compounded by the impact of the pandemic such as unemployment, reduced income and reduced access to services and support, in addition to worries about physical health. Some parents also did not allow their SEN children to take medicine as there

was no schooling for them, despite the fact that it might cause behavioural and emotional problems of children. Moreover, some children were addicted to computer games and online games. Even if the pandemic gradually eases, they may have difficulties in adjustment of resuming daily schedule and contacts with the society. Therefore, they particularly need support during this critical period to relieve stress and maintain a positive relationship with their children.

### **Corporal punishment brought negative impacts of distant parent-child relationship and physical and mental harm**

Corporal punishment of children is prevalent in Hong Kong families and considered to be a method of discipline. And physical abuse always begins with a mild corporal punishment. Many studies have indicated that corporal punishment is not a positive and effective way to discipline children, but will adversely affect children's physical and psychological growth in the long run, including:

- direct physical harm
- negative impacts on mental health
- poor moral internalisation and increased antisocial behaviour
- increased aggression in children
- increased violent and criminal behaviour in adults
- damaged family relationships
- increased acceptance and use of other forms of violence

### **Replacing corporal punishment with learning positive parenting, listening to children's voices and regular parent-child communication**

Positive parenting is an approach that puts an emphasis on developing a healthy relationship with the child and setting expectations around behavior rather than punishment and what not to do. It involves awareness of children's feelings, understanding their developmental needs, recognizing and encouraging their desirable behaviours and setting and keeping sensible limits and giving them a sense of security. Positive parenting is also a long-term solution that develops children's self-discipline, fostering non-violence, empathy, self-respect and respect for others.

### **It is time to stop and think about legislation to totally ban corporal punishment on children**

With regards to the negative impacts of corporal punishment, the government has not enacted a total ban of corporal punishment on children. In 1976, the government enacted "Child Care Service Regulations" stating that no person shall administer corporal punishment to a child in child care centre. Flogging on young offenders as a form of corporal punishment was banned in Hong Kong penal system in 1990. In September 1991, the government amended "Education Regulations" to ban

corporal punishment on students. Unfortunately, until now, there is no legal prohibition of corporal punishment on children in the families. Prolonged use of corporal punishment, regardless of how trivial the act is, may later escalate to physical child abuse. Hence, the immediate prohibition of all corporal punishment on children is necessary.

### **We have the following recommendations:**

1. To prohibit all corporal punishment on children including in the family by law. The bottom line of zero tolerance for violence should be set by legislation which also educates the importance of child protection. We are determined to take necessary measures to protect children and families. Until now, 62 countries or states have passed by laws to ban all forms of corporal punishment (please refer to the attachment). We hope that Hong Kong can become one of them to totally ban corporal punishment on children by law. Children have the right to grow up without fear and violence. Prohibition of all corporal punishment does not equal to let all the abusive parents get into jail. Compulsory parent education and counseling services for parents can be one of the approaches.
2. To provide assistance for parents to acquire positive parenting knowledge and skills and support them in difficult circumstances. Education on non-violent conflict resolution must start early.
3. To establish a mechanism of mandatory reporting of suspected child abuse cases, requiring professionals who come into contact with children to report suspected child abuse cases within a specified time, so as to speed up professional intervention to provide timely and appropriate support. For example, once schools find that children are suspected of being abused, they should report or follow up immediately to prevent further injury to children.

Large numbers of children around the world are still waiting for the realisation of their basic human right to protection from violent punishment. We appeal to stop all forms of corporal punishment on children and cultivate a safe and warm environment for children. We strive to provide home visitation service, counseling service, parent treatment group and hotline service. Parents, children, professionals and the public are encouraged to call our Hotline at 2755 1122 to report suspected cases of child abuse or ask for professional assistances.

**We wish that every day is a SpankOut Day!**

### **Enquiries:**

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### Attachment

In the following 62 countries or states, children are protected by law from all corporal punishment:

	Country		Country
1	Sweden	32	Tunisia
2	Finland	33	Poland
3	Norway	34	South Sudan
4	Austria	35	Cabo Verde
5	Cyprus	36	Honduras
6	Denmark	37	North Macedonia
7	Latvia	38	Andorra
8	Croatia	39	Estonia
9	Germany	40	Nicaragua
10	Israel	41	San Marino
11	Bulgaria	42	Argentina
12	Turkmenistan	43	Bolivia
13	Iceland	44	Brazil
14	Romania	45	Malta
15	Ukraine	46	Benin
16	Hungary	47	Ireland
17	Greece	48	Peru
18	Togo	49	Mongolia
19	Spain	50	Montenegro
20	Venezuela	51	Paraguay
21	Uruguay	52	Slovenia
22	Portugal	53	Lithuania
23	New Zealand	54	Nepal
24	Netherlands	55	Georgia
25	Liechtenstein	56	South Africa
26	Luxembourg	57	France
27	Republic of Moldova	58	Republic of Kosovo
28	Costa Rica	59	Japan
29	Albania	60	Seychelles
30	Congo (Republic of)	61	Guinea
31	Kenya	62	Republic of Korea

Source : <https://endcorporalpunishment.org/countdown/>