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Resources

[Protecting Children from Physical Abuse](#)

[Social Workers Toolbox - Alternatives to Smacking / Corporal Punishments](#)

[Physical punishment and child outcomes: a narrative review of prospective studies](#)

[Identifying Child Physical Abuse & How to Prevent It | NSPCC](#)

[NSPCC Campaign - End Physical Punishment](#)

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Guidance for Professionals

We recognise that this can be a tricky area of practice given the grey area in law. Remember the points raised in 'criminal charges'

To support your practice, we have developed a Physical Chastisement - guide for professionals – [access here](#) (add link once final amendments are made)

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Long term effects

Children who experience physical punishment are:

- 2.6x more likely to experience mental health problems than children who do not experience physical punishment
- 2.3x more likely to go on to experience significant harm through more serious forms of physical abuse.

[Evidence](#) suggests that children who are physically punished are more likely to believe that violence is accepted by society, which may lead to violence in adulthood.

Professional understanding of difference between physical abuse and chastisement

[Bury Safeguarding Partnership](#)



1

Physical Chastisement

Physical chastisement is often associated with smacking, spanking or hitting. [Cambridge Dictionary](#) defines smacking as *hitting someone forcefully with the flat inside part of your hand, producing a short loud noise, often to punish a child.*

Outside of what could be deemed physical chastisement, physical punishment can include, but is not limited to, slapping, pinching, pulling, hitting with an object, making someone eat substances or endure stressful positions for long periods.

2

Law

The law in England still allows physical chastisement of children, with a defence of 'reasonable punishment'. This leaves a grey area.

The law is not clear about what is 'reasonable' punishment and what is abuse. It leaves it open to interpretation which leaves children at risk of harm and makes it more difficult for professionals to keep children safe.

3

Criminal Charges

Any form of physical punishment that leaves a mark (no matter how small), or if the child is hit with a fist/closed hand, or an object is considered 'unreasonable'. It would also be deemed unreasonable if smacking became any more than an isolated incident.

Any incident that uses enough force to cause injury is considered assault and is not considered reasonable punishment and can result in criminal charges. ([NSPCC](#)).

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Physical Chastisement and Cultural Competency

Being culturally competent does not include agreeing with oppressive practices that can be disguised as cultural issues.

There are a various cultural attitudes to parenting, discipline and the use of physical punishment of children. Consequently, some parents may be unfamiliar or actively disagree with the legal and moral principles which forbid parents to hit their children.