



CHILDREN ARE UNBEATABLE!

Campaign Against the Use of Physical Punishment



Families Matter: Supporting Families in Northern Ireland

The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety's Proposals on a Regional Family and Parenting Strategy.

Children are Unbeatable! is a UK alliance and its Northern Ireland members are keen to respond to the DHSSPS consultation on Families Matter: Supporting Families in Northern Ireland and to the particular section, entitled 'Positive Parenting'.

Children are Unbeatable! works to seek full legal reform so that children will have the same protection as adults from physical punishment within the law, and to promote positive parenting methods which reinforce discipline in a non-violent way.

Its membership of over 200 organisations and individuals agree that the purpose of changing the law to give children the same protection as adults is not to prosecute parents but to change attitudes and to send clear messages, that it is no more acceptable to hit a child than it is to hit anyone else and that the law should say so.

Therefore we welcome the section referring to 'Positive Parenting' but suggest that additional information is included as follows:

- 1) While the law on physical punishment was changed last year in Northern Ireland, Children are Unbeatable! wants to see full legal reform so that the defence of reasonable chastisement is removed entirely.
- 2) The wording in 5.12 will be difficult to understand for many – even members of Children are Unbeatable! and is a reinforcement of the current confusion about the application of the law.
- 3) Full legal reform has been strongly recommended by children's organisations and by national and international bodies; for example, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has twice recommended equal protection reform to the UK (1995, 2002) and there is little doubt of the Committee's response to the continuing lack of equal protection for children and young people, when the UK Government presents its next report in July 2007.

- 4) Equal protection reform has also been supported by the UK Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights, the House of Commons Health Select Committee and the National Assembly for Wales. Yet, with Article 2 of the Law Reform Miscellaneous Provisions, the Government in Northern Ireland is still giving the message to parents and adults that it is acceptable to use physical punishment against children and young people. This creates parental confusion, legal ambiguity, professional uncertainty and policy inconsistency.

We in Children are Unbeatable! urge that the law is changed in order to enable a clear message for parents - that the use of physical punishment is not a legally acceptable method of discipline. During this month – March 2007 - the Netherlands became the 18th country to ban all forms of corporal punishment by parents and carers. The UK must join the list!

Once full legal reform is achieved, it will be more effective to promote positive parenting methods.

The DHSSPS consultation refers to positive parenting through Sure Start projects and through funding to organisations. We want to see this widely disseminated throughout Northern Ireland and with the co-operation of the community and voluntary sector.

Children are Unbeatable! promotes the need for discipline through the use of alternative methods which do not use physical punishment. Through its membership, it can direct adults to sources of help and advice on discipline which encourage children to understand how and why they should behave and to develop skills of negotiation and compromise. In the light of recent research 'Promoting Positive Discipline. An Evaluation of the Alternatives to Physical Punishment Training Project' by Children are Unbeatable! founder members, Parents Advice Centre and Save the Children, it has been clearly indicated that there is a lack of consistent provision by health care professionals who deal with parents and children to recommend alternatives to physical punishment. We recommend the need for a uniform range of guidance and training to health professionals, so that children and young people will not suffer from physical punishment due to inadequate information for their parents.