

absolute prohibition because of the rights of parents to exercise their responsibilities and duties in the bringing up of their children.

Both empirical and anecdotal evidence confirm a wide spread impression that smacking of young children is widely prevalent in developed, industrialised countries, including Australia. Evidence is also available which shows that physical punishment lies embedded in the cultures of these countries. In particular there is consistent evidence from the area of child psychology that the degree of parental punitiveness is positively correlated with various forms of psychopathology especially delinquency and acting out behaviour.

There are five countries in Europe which have already banned physical punishment in the home. Of these, Sweden was the first to take that step in 1979. Reports indicate that good preparation in the form of education campaigns has resulted in a smooth transformation to a no-smacking society.

Whilst proponents of no-smacking can present a rational case for their argument there is a good deal of opposition to change, not least in Australia. It is not only 'red-necks' who do so - even well-disposed people object on the grounds that change means more control and interference in family life and that the mild and occasional smack does not make for lasting harm.

It must be expected that any change that would involve the laws that govern parental behaviour would have to be preceded by a campaign of public education designed to change attitudes to the physical punishment of children. This transformation could take some time to achieve.

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[Peter Newell has a work background in journalism and social issues advocacy. He has been coordinator of EPOCH (UK) since its inception. The book cited above describes that organisation's work and rationale. The model bill proposed to change the law on physical punishment is in Appendix 3]

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Since this article was written, a major new study in this field has been published which draws on additional research and gives further information on legislative and overseas developments. The study, by Judy Cashmore and Nicola de Haas, is titled *Legal and social aspects of the physical punishment of children*. It was commissioned by the Commonwealth Dept. of Human Services and Health under the auspices of the National Child Protection Council.

International Foster Care Conference and International Youth in Care Network Conference

The Biennial International Foster Care Conference was held in Bergen Norway July 24-29 1995. An International Conference of the International Youth in Care Network was held at the same time and there were some useful linkages between the two conferences. Four Australians attended the IFCO conference, Janet Blainey and Lloyd Owen from Victoria, Anne-Louise Nilsson from Queensland and Flora Fairlie from New South Wales.

The Conference theme was Building Bridges and sessions were organised around the bridge to a caring society, the bridge between the two families, the bridge from care needer to caregiver and the bridge to independence. Some emphasis was given to the importance of including the views of children and young people in decision making processes and the important trend of seeing foster care less as substitute care and more as a means of supporting children in a way which enables family problems to be addressed. This will most often mean greater inclusion of the birth parents in the process. This policy shift is reflected in some videos which have been produced by the Children's Welfare Association of Victoria and which were shown at the conference in a workshop session. They triggered lively discussion which acknowledged the difficulties which can arise in this part of bridge building, but also affirmed the importance for the child of actively attending to these birth family /foster family issues.

This theme was also powerfully presented in a series of dramatic skits put on at various points in conference proceedings by the young people from IYICN who were running their own conference parallel to the IFCO conference. As well as poignantly displaying the stresses flowing from shortfalls in parent behaviour, social workers and the system got a humorous but healthy critical serve pointing to the need to attend carefully to detail in the life of the child, and to listen. It is inspiring and exciting to hear the voices of these young people speaking up through the activities of the organisations of children and young people in care, (IYICN, AAYPIC and the rapidly forming State and Territory equivalents in Australia) as is their increasing involvement in the Boards of agencies, in staff selection processes and in policy making.

Also of note were our efforts in the direction of increasing Australian involvement in IFCO and presenting a bid for Australia to host the 1999 Conference. Final decisions are yet to be made, but a case was presented with the support of many agencies, the Government of Victoria and Foster Parent Associations from around Australia. The 1997 IFCO Conference is in Vancouver Canada. The theme of the this conference will be 'Fostering: A Caring Circle'. To join the mailing list write to:

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