

Don't hit the child!

**NATIONAL ACTION PLAN
TO REDUCE CORPORAL
PUNISHMENT OF
CHILDREN 2010–2015**

SUMMARY

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National action plan to reduce corporal punishment of children 2010–2015

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health set up on 2 March 2009 a working group to draw up a proposal for a national plan of action to prevent and reduce corporal punishment of children. The assignment is linked with the Internal Security Programme adopted by the Government in 2008. According to it, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health is to draw up an extensive national information programme to combat corporal punishment of children. This work is also linked with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, according to which the child is entitled to lead a safe and violence-free life and to special protection. Another contributory document is the Council of Europe's strategy against corporal punishment of children aiming at developing good practices in the member states and bringing about necessary amendments to relevant legislation.

In accordance with its assignment the working group should investigate the matter in particular from the points of view of the churches and religious communities and immigrants.

The plan of action includes targets that extend to the year 2015. The objective is to strengthen the child's human dignity and to increase reciprocal respect between the children and parents so that no child would be faced with corporal punishment but could grow in a favourable, tender, understanding and inclusive atmosphere. The programme aims to continue and add momentum to the good development that has taken place in Finland over the past two decades so that attitudes against corporal punishment will be consistently strengthened among both children and adults and that corporal punishment experienced by children will be reduced all the time. A further objective is to diminish regional differences and differences between population groups in both the prevalence of corporal punishment and children's and adults' attitudes towards it. The action programme aims to contribute to making follow-up studies on corporal punishment an established practice. Such studies have been e.g. a child victim study, an attitude study among adults and an attitude study to be made among children.

The development strengthening the human dignity of the child and reciprocal respect between children and parents will be boosted and the impact of the message of the programme to reduce corporal punishment will be ensured by a joint attitude campaign of various actors in 2011.

Key words: child welfare, corporal punishment, education, punishment, rights of the child

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FINAL REPORT OF THE WORKING GROUP ON PREVENTING AND REDUCING CORPORAL PUNISHMENT OF CHILDREN

1. WORKING GROUP BACKGROUND AND ASSIGNMENT

Working group background

On 2 March 2009, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health appointed a working group (STM022:00/2009) to draft a proposal for a National Action Plan to prevent and reduce corporal punishment of children. This assignment was derived from the Internal Security Programme adopted by the Government in 2008, according to which the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health is to draw up an extensive national information programme to combat corporal punishment of children.

The work of the working group was also related to the *Policy programme for the well-being of children, youth and families* adopted by the 2nd Government of Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen; one of its key goals was to reduce domestic violence and violence against children and adolescents. The programme stated that it is feasible to address the reducing of violence and the improving of safety as a broad-based initiative focusing on prevention, highlighting the duties and responsibilities of youth work, schools, daycare and families.

Another aim of the policy programme was to engage in publicity on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, particularly in its anniversary year 2009. The right to a safe life free from violence and to special protection is a fundamental right of all children. The Convention on the Rights of the Child states that children must be protected “from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation”. It is the responsibilities of the states parties to the Convention to take action to safeguard these rights. The year 2011 marks the 20th anniversary of the national ratification of the Convention in Finland.

The work of the working group is also related to the corporal punishment campaign of the Council of Europe (www.coe.int/children), in which Finland has been an active participant. The purpose of the Council of Europe has been to engender good practices in its member states and to bring about the necessary legislative amendments. During the campaign year 2009, the Council of Europe drafted guidelines for reducing violence against children. Corporal punishment was prohibited by law in Finland as early as in 1984. The Council of Europe notes in its guidelines that legislation is not enough. Reducing corporal punishment in the everyday lives of children and families can only be ensured by influencing attitudes about child upbringing and the functioning of services involving children and of the justice system. The Council of Europe has recommended that its member states draw up national strategies for preventing corporal punishment of children.

Working group assignment

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health appointed a working group to draft a broad-based National Action Plan for preventing and reducing corporal punishment of children and adolescents. The working group was appointed for the period 2 March to 31 December 2009, subsequently extended to the period 1 January to 31 March 2010. In practice, however, the work continued until September 2010. The original assignment is appended to this report. (Appendix 5.)

The members of the working group were selected from among actors who have been significantly involved in combating corporal punishment in recent years. Not all relevant parties could be represented in the working group, so the Ministry encouraged the working group to consult outside experts as required. According to the assignment, the brief was to be explored from the perspective of churches, other religious communities and immigrants in particular.

Towards the end of its term, on 17 February 2010, the working group organised a seminar to present the National Action Plan to reduce corporal punishment of children and adolescents and to prompt public debate on the matter. The guest speaker at the seminar was Professor Staffan Janson of the University of Örebro in Sweden, who gave a talk on achievements in this area in Sweden. Finland and Sweden were the first countries in the world to outlaw corporal punishment of children. There were 60 participants at the seminar.

In spring 2010, the Office of the Ombudsman for Children conducted a Webropol survey among children and adolescents on behalf of the working group. The purpose of the survey was to poll children and adolescents on why parents use corporal punishment, how it could be effectively reduced, and how children and adolescents could best be provided with information on it. The chapter describing the findings of the survey was written by Senior Officer Mirka Jalonen-Alava of the Office of the Ombudsman for Children. These findings were taken into account in drafting proposals for action. (Annex)

The working group also commissioned paediatrician Annlis Söderholm MD to prepare a review of scientific research into the adverse impacts of corporal punishment. Some of the material submitted by her is incorporated in chapter 4. Heikki Sariola, a member of the working group, compiled material from the comparative data on child victims in 1988 and 2009. The chairman and members of the working group contributed to the preparation of the present report.

In the course of its work, the working group consulted the following:

Police College of Finland (study on experiences of violence among immigrant children and adolescents): *Juha Kääriäinen*, Senior Researcher

Police College of Finland: *Sanna-Mari Humppi*, Researcher

Finnish Prosecution Service (how prosecutors see corporal punishment): *Anu Mantila*, State Prosecutor

Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Department for Promotion of Welfare and Health (child care clinics and school health care): *Marjaana Pelkonen*, Senior Officer
National Board of Education (measures taken by schools): *Heidi Peltonen*, Senior Advisor

Ministry of the Interior, Migration Department (immigrant children): *Meri-Sisko Eskola*

Ministry of Justice (relevant legislative amendments): *Matti Marttunen*, Senior Specialist

Mannerheim League for Child Welfare (low-threshold services, Internet hotline for children and parents): *Anne Kinturi*, Director

Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Finland: *Matti Esko*, Head of Family Issues

Catholic Church of Finland: *Anu Hamann*, Information Secretary

Orthodox Church of Finland: *Tarja Lehmuskoski*, religion teacher

Finnish Islamic Council: *Anas Haijar*, Deputy Chairman of the Board

Jewish Congregation of Helsinki: *Dan Kántor*, Executive Secretary

Pentecostal Movement in Finland: *Ari Kattainen*, parish priest, child and family work

Finnish Somali League: *Saed Guled Aden*, information officer

Suomen Romanimissio: *Tuula Åkerlund*, Executive Director

SaamiSoster ry: *Ristenrauna Magga*, Executive Director

Monika – Multicultural Women’s Association in Finland: *Reet Nurmi*, Executive Director

Family Federation, Centre for Multicultural Expertise (Kotipuu): *Anne Alitorppa-Niitamo* MA Psych

Federation of Mother and Child Homes and Shelters: *Roope Karjalainen*, Jussi officer

Federation of Mother and Child Homes and Shelters: *Mikko Oranen*, head of child welfare development

Finnish Paediatric Society: *Annlis Söderholm*, paediatrician

Finnish Association for Child and Family Guidance: *Sirpa Taskinen*, Chairman

Network of organisations of parents of disabled children: *Rauni Lollo*, Executive Director

Herättäjä-yhdistys [Revivalist society]: Simo Juntunen, Chairman

Central Committee of Conservative Laestadian Congregations (SRKL): Olavi Voittonen, Chairman of the Board

Finnish Lutheran Mission: Timo Rämä, Head of Missionary Activities

2. PROPOSAL FOR A NATIONAL ACTION PLAN TO PREVENT AND REDUCE CORPORAL PUNISHMENT OF CHILDREN

What is corporal punishment?

Swedish author Astrid Lindgren was a champion of the rights of children throughout her adult life. Receiving the peace prize of German booksellers in 1978, she gave her famous speech *'Niemals Gewalt'* (Never violence), which featured a concrete illustration of corporal punishment from a child's perspective. She recounted how, at the age of 20, she had met an elderly parson's wife who reported an experience she had had when her son had been a small child. The boy had done something that his young mother felt must be punished:

"The mother said that the boy had to go out himself and find a thin branch with which to spank him. The boy went out and was gone for a long time. Finally he returned, crying, and said: 'I couldn't find a branch anywhere, but here's a stone that you can throw at me.' Then the mother began to cry too, suddenly seeing it through the child's eyes..."

She put the stone on a shelf in the kitchen as a perpetual reminder to herself: never violence"...

Astrid Lindgren went on: "I believe that all too often we fail to see situations from the child's point of view. The result is that we end up teaching our children a lesson different from the one we thought we were teaching them."

Corporal punishment is an action where an adult exercising superior physical strength aims to cause a child pain or discomfort, though not physical injury, in order to punish the child or otherwise control his/her behaviour. In other words, corporal punishment is a form of violence which is or has been acceptable in all cultures at some point in their history and which adults who use it believe to be justifiable in punishing a child. Legislation has played a part in the changing of attitudes. Corporal punishment was prohibited by law in Finland as early as in 1984.

The term 'corporal punishment' does not incorporate the word 'violence', and this is true of its equivalents in Finnish and Swedish as well.¹ The term appears in the current Child Custody and Right of Access Act but is misleading as such, because it gives the impression that this is a normal procedure in bringing up children. In the 2000s, the concept 'corporal violence' was introduced by the Central Union for Child Welfare in public debate in Finland to highlight the difference between discipline and violence.

The present working group is also in favour of using the concept 'corporal violence' systematically henceforth. At the same time, the working group stresses that corporal punishment is technically an offence of assault against a child and as such must be addressed as seriously as similar offences against adults. Most violence against children is hidden crime.

¹ In Finnish, the use of violence in bringing up children may be referred to by the term *kurittaminen*, which simply means 'discipline'. Cf. the question: "Have you been disciplined?"

Progress is good but must be boosted and secured

A clear majority of Finns, 68%, does not consider that corporal punishment is acceptable in bringing up children. However, in the most recent survey conducted by the Central Union for Child Welfare in 2007, 26% of the respondents still accepted corporal punishment as a means of discipline, at least in exceptional cases.

Comparative data on child victims have shown that corporal punishment of children has significantly declined in Finland over the past 20 years. This trend is the most conspicuous in mild violence, i.e. acts referred to as ‘discipline’. For example, in 2008 the percentage of 9th-grade pupils who had experienced shoving, shaking or hair-pulling at some time in their lives was half of what it had been in 1988. Slapping and whipping had declined even more, being experienced by 10% of 9th-grade respondents in the 2008 survey at some time in their lives.

According to the comparative data on child victims, 8% of 9th-graders had experienced mild violence during the past 12 months (12% of girls and 5% of boys).

This good progress towards eliminating violence against children and making it publicly unacceptable must be boosted and secured.

Many kinds of support are needed: for child upbringing, for parental coping, and for substance abuse problems

“First we have to find out why parents use corporal punishment on children. We can’t solve the problem if we don’t know its cause. If the parents are tired and take it out on the child, they must be given the opportunity to handle their tiredness without violence, or without the child suffering. The parents may not realise that they are taking their anger out on the child, and they have to be told to stop. Health care and other people need to ask how the children themselves feel: are they treated badly or violently, and do they feel good at home.” (Girl, aged 7 to 12)

In order to find effective means for reducing corporal punishment, we must explore the reasons underlying the violence. The reasons for using corporal punishment in child upbringing may be roughly divided into three categories:

- 1) the parent loses self-control because of exhaustion and fatigue,
- 2) the parent behaves violently against a child because of a mental health problem or substance abuse, or
- 3) the parent considers that violence is justified and uses it systematically as a means of discipline.

The results of the child survey highlight the importance of choosing the right means for addressing violence.

When a parent hits a child for disciplinary purposes because of the parent’s own exhaustion and fatigue, the parent usually regrets this and feels bad about it, aware that he/she has done something wrong. It is an important factor in preventing corporal punishment to have means available for helping parents cope, for instance home services for families with children or other types of support in everyday life. Parents could also be counselled in how to use talking and guidance as means of child upbringing.

If parental violence is due to mental health problems or substance abuse on part of the parent, it is important to ensure the parent's treatment and rehabilitation. In addition to rehabilitation, the entire family must be provided with counselling to normalise family relationships and to support the parents in using more positive methods of child upbringing. The needs of the child must also be carefully investigated, and child welfare measures taken if necessary in the case of a particular child or family.

If the parent considers that violence is acceptable in bringing up a child and uses it systematically for disciplinary purposes, the parent either does not know that corporal punishment is detrimental to the child besides being illegal, or else the parent is deliberately acting unlawfully. It may also be the case that the parent is from another culture where alternative methods of child upbringing simply do not exist. In such situations, providing education and information in a variety of languages is crucially important, in the form of parent education and counselling and the providing of concrete support for reorienting child upbringing practices. Actively informing parents about the sanctions enforced in Finland for the use of corporal punishment may also have a preventive effect.

Parents may also have unreasonable expectations regarding their child if they do not know enough about child growth and development. They may expect a small child to behave in a more adult way than is consistent with the child's age. It is important to inform parents about normal child development through child care clinics and family counselling. Concrete practical advice on child care and nurturing may also reduce the risk of resorting to corporal punishment.

A variety of measures to support parenthood and child upbringing is needed to alleviate the impact of underlying factors: support to help in everyday life, reducing the stressfulness of work, providing child-oriented mental health or substance abuse rehabilitation and information, with material available in various languages.

Key target groups: parents of small children and special needs children, and immigrant families

Corporal punishment is most commonly inflicted on a small child of under school age. If the parents have not resorted to corporal punishment when the child is small, they are not likely to do so later. Small children have the hardest time telling anyone outside the family about corporal punishment. They also have no way of knowing that corporal punishment is not allowed.

Therefore the main point in developing services is to focus the measures on those services where small children and their parents are most frequently encountered: child care clinics; oral health care and basic health care; early childhood education and care, preschool education, schools; parish groups for children and parents of small children; open forums and family-oriented services of NGOs such as family cafés and peer groups; and helplines and online services for parents with small children.

Measures needed include education and publicity, concrete support for positive parenthood and child upbringing at home, and enhancing the expertise of adults providing services so that they know to address child upbringing issues, know how to talk to children, and know how to support families as necessary to change their practices. Home services for families with children and similar support to help parents

cope with fatigue and stress are also important. The reconciliation of work and family life is also a factor in helping the everyday life of a family with small children.

Another important target group emerging from a previous study consists of the parents of disabled and chronically ill children. A study conducted in Sweden showed that disabled children were twice as likely to experience violence at home than healthy children. No similar study on corporal punishment of disabled and chronically ill children has been conducted in Finland. It would be necessary to undertake a survey of the situation of disabled and chronically ill children.

There is nothing to indicate that the situation in Finland were any better than in Sweden. On the contrary, it is well known that the parents of disabled and chronically ill children are often extremely exhausted, having to fight for the rights of their child and the services required. Therefore support services to help the parents of disabled and chronically ill children to cope with their everyday lives, and child upbringing methods and the need for help with them must also be brought up as necessary.

A third important target group in reducing corporal punishment alongside families with small children and families with special needs children consists of immigrant families. Immigrants often come to Finland from countries where corporal punishment is not prohibited by law. They need to be provided with information in their own language about Finnish legislation and the rights of the child, besides being given support and guidance in the use of non-violent child upbringing methods. Immigrant communities, churches and religious communities are important in disseminating information and in reforming child upbringing habits.

The working group would like to point out how important the message given out by churches and other religious communities concerning parenting principles is for the other target groups too. *Regional differences in attitudes should be taken into account in efforts to reduce corporal punishment. Surveys among children indicate that corporal punishment is more generally accepted in northern Finland than in southern Finland. Therefore children must be particularly focused on in efforts to prevent intimate partner violence in northern Finland.*

Basic message of the National Plan of Action: upholding the human dignity of the child

The working group wishes to emphasise that children have equal human dignity as the basic message of communications and opinion leadership involved in the prevention of corporal punishment. The key points in opinion leadership are:

- Children and adults must mutually respect and value each other,
- Children are entitled to a positive upbringing and a safe and good life,
- Children are not objects for adults' actions but human beings with rights,
- Human dignity dictates that no violence is acceptable,
- Childhood is a valuable life stage in its own right,
- Corporal punishment is a serious threat to children's growth and development.

Goalsetting for the National Action Plan to 2015

The goal is to strengthen the human dignity of children and to increase mutual respect between children and parents so that no child would have to encounter corporal

punishment and all children could grow up in a positive, nurturing, understanding and inclusive environment.

The aim is to continue and accelerate the progress made over the past two decades so as to strengthen attitudes against corporal punishment among both adults and children and so as to continue to reduce the occurrence of corporal punishment.

Regional and demographic differences in the occurrence of corporal punishment should decrease, and attitudes of both adults and children to it should change.

The purpose of the National Action Plan is to contribute to the following:

- that the percentage of respondents having experienced corporal punishment in the next child victim study in 2012 will be half of that in 2008, also within various demographic groups and regions (e.g. immigrant children),
- that attitude studies conducted among adults in 2012 (by the Central Union for Child Welfare) will show an equally negative attitude to corporal punishment as to intimate partner violence between adults, and
- that in attitude studies conducted among children (by UNICEF) the percentage of respondents for whom corporal punishment is acceptable will be half of its present level, and that the percentage of children condoning corporal punishment in northern Finland will decrease.

Proposed measures and parties responsible

1. Reinforce support in social services for fatigued parents to help them cope

Increase availability of home services especially for families with small children, many children or disabled or chronically ill children, and single-parent households. Offer home services through child care clinics and early childhood education and care services so that parents do not have to be clients of child welfare services to apply.

Responsibility: Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Ministry of Education and Culture, local authorities

2. Provide support services for parents with mental health and substance abuse problems, taking into account the children's need for support too

Train personnel in various services to identify parents' mental health and substance abuse problems and to pick up on children's reports to this effect. When treating mental health and substance abuse problems in parents, always investigate whether they have children in their care who need support, and at the same time help heal the family's interaction skills and teach positive upbringing skills.

Support the proposals of the working group on securing treatment for substance-abusing pregnant women (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2009:4). Provide support for the ongoing work of the working group developing support services for children of parents with substance abuse problems (STM:00/2010).

Responsibility: Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Ministry of Education and Culture, National Institute for Health and Welfare; local authorities

Partners: NGOs

3. Organise support for child upbringing at home on a low-threshold principle in connection with various existing services and online

Offer and organise services for families with children in a cluster so that preventive and low-threshold support services are available for child upbringing at home too. Organise support for positive upbringing on the education partnership principle by child care clinics, early childhood education and care services and schools. It is important to influence the child upbringing attitudes of both mothers and fathers to promote positive upbringing.

Provide support for families and child upbringing at home together with schools as part of student social services and multi-professional cooperation, strengthening the link between school and home. Exploit the potential of the 'extensive health examinations' for the whole family provided for in the new welfare clinic and school health care decree for supporting child upbringing at home. According to the Decree, extensive health examinations for families expecting a baby shall involve an investigation of the wellbeing of the family through an interview and other means as necessary. Extensive health examinations for children of under school age and for schoolchildren shall involve an interview with the parents and an investigation of the wellbeing of the family insofar as this is necessary for organising and providing care and support.

Leverage the expertise of NGOs and parishes, and online services, in promoting positive child upbringing at home. Encourage parishes, revival movements and other religious and spiritual organisations to commit to working with parents and families to discourage corporal punishment.

Allocate funds from the Slot Machine Association (RAY) to parental online services through existing actors (the parental hotline and online service of the Mannerheim League for Child Welfare, the youth online service of the Family Federation) and encourage local authorities to enter into cooperation to provide online services for parental support.

Reuse the material produced for previous campaigns, such as the *Don't hit the child!* DVD and brochure by the Central Union for Child Welfare; secure funding for material production and distribution. Child upbringing advice for parents is available in the brochure *Tyyne rauhallisesti* (Keep calm) produced by the Central Union for Child Welfare, which can be ordered at <http://www.alalyolasta.fi/>, and the parental website of the Mannerheim League for Child Welfare, <http://www.mll.fi/vanhempainnetti/>.

Responsibility: Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Ministry of Education and Culture, National Board of Education, National Institute for Health and Welfare; local authorities

Partners: Central Union for Child Welfare, churches and other religious organisations, revivalist movements and spiritual communities

4. Include the rights of the child in the basic and complementary education of all occupational groups working with children

Include the rights of the child in the basic and complementary education of all occupational groups working with children. This must include the human rights of the child, adults' faculties for interaction and other working with children and adolescents of various ages, and the reduction of corporal punishment and other violence towards children.

Explore the potential for including a shared study module on the rights of the child and child empowerment skills in the vocational basic training of various occupational groups as a compulsory module. The Ministry of Education and Culture should assign the national responsibility for development of this teaching to a university or a university of applied sciences.

Responsibility: Universities, universities of applied sciences, vocational education institutions, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Ministry of Education and Culture

5. Increase children's trust in services

Improve the skills for interacting with children of adults employed in social services, advice employees in how to consider the children's perspective and how to explain services – including child welfare services – so that children can understand them. It is important particularly for employees in student social services to be well known among children and adolescents so that there is a low threshold to approaching these services.

Leverage the experiential expertise of children in improving the quality of services. As part of the quality assessment, investigate how well children trust the services. The survey for children and adolescents appended to this report is recommended as a basis for conversation and as an information-gathering tool.

Police visits to schools should include talking about intimate partner violence and telling pupils what will happen if they report a case of domestic violence.

The aim is to assure children that they can talk about violence they have experienced without fear or suspicion of retaliation.

Responsibility: Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (Kaste programme), National Institute of Health and Welfare, local authorities, National Police Board

Partners: NGOs

6. Focus on services for families with small children at child care clinics and in early childhood education and care in the efforts to prevent corporal punishment

At child care clinics

- Produce material about the rights of the child and positive upbringing, and include this material in the maternity package,
- Ensure that positive upbringing and avoiding corporal punishment are topics covered in family counselling,
- Have a discussion with both the mother and the father about bringing up the child, as part of the health examination for the whole family.

In early childhood education

- When revising the Day-care Act, add the goals of reducing corporal punishment and supporting positive upbringing to the legislative amendment and to the preamble to the National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care (VASU),
- Include these topics in open early childhood education and care services, family clubs and playgroups.

Responsibility: Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, National Institute for Health and Welfare, Ministry of Education and Culture, local authorities

Partners: NGOs, churches and other religious organisations, revivalist movements and spiritual communities

7. Strengthen the role of schools in human rights education, specifically in advising that corporal punishment is prohibited by law

Strengthen the human rights education element in the pending reform of the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education. Ensure that changes made to the National Core Curricula for Basic Education and General Upper Secondary Education in 2010 are translated into practice in schools. Include safety skills training for children in school curricula.

Provide teachers with information on the rights of the child and child welfare legislation in teacher training and further education, and provide them with tools to teach children that all violence is unacceptable.

Enhance the presence of school nurses in the school community and strengthen their expertise in identifying signs of violence against children and adolescents and in listening to and supporting children and adolescents. Leverage the health examination for the whole family as an opportunity to discuss child upbringing principles. Address positive upbringing goals in the cooperation between school and home.

Include the rights of the child and prevention of corporal violence in the training of school assistants and morning and afternoon activities instructors.

Responsibility: Ministry of Education and Culture, National Board of Education, teacher training departments, parties providing further education for teachers and student social services personnel, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, local authorities

8. Include the human rights perspective in integration services and liaise with immigrant organisations

Inform immigrants immediately on arrival about children's rights, positive upbringing and the prohibition on corporal punishment. Produce materials in minority languages. Ensure that there are nationally uniform materials and policies in place for providing information for immigrants on arrival. Every immigrant must receive this information.

In reforming the integration legislation, include in the service goals and training contents the taking into account of the family as a whole and human rights education, with a specific focus on children's rights.

Recruit representatives of immigrants and ethnic communities for social welfare and health care services and use them as trainers for integration services. Increase publicity about child welfare services in minority languages to breed confidence.

Work with ethnic minorities and immigrant organisations to prevent and reduce corporal punishment.

Encourage religious organisations working among immigrants to highlight the themes of opposing corporal punishment and supporting positive upbringing. Bringing up a child without violence does not mean that no boundaries may be set; parents need practical assistance in how to set limits for children without violence.

Encourage youth services in local authorities to provide immigrant children and adolescents information about their rights and about national legislation.

Responsibility: Ministry of the Interior, Centres of Economic Development, Transport and the Environment, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health

Partners: Immigrant organisations, other NGOs, religious communities

9. Ensure the continuity of online services providing information for children on human rights and resisting violence

Ensure the continuity of online services providing information for children and adolescents on their rights and on corporal punishment. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health must direct RAY subsidies to a low-threshold online service for children.

Responsibility: Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Slot Machine Association (RAY)

Partners: Family Federation, Folkhälsan, Mannerheim League for Child Welfare, Federation of Mother and Child Homes and Shelters, Ombudsman for Children

10. Conduct an extensive opinion and publicity campaign, ‘Children have a right to positive upbringing’, in 2011

Adopt the theme ‘Children have a right to a positive upbringing – No to all violence’ for the shared opinion and publicity campaign of all national bodies involved with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 2011. This year marks the 20th anniversary of the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in Finland. Link the campaign to Finland’s presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers.

Aim to implement the campaign jointly with ministries, the Ombudsman for Children, NGOs, churches and religious communities. Seek broad-based partnerships, including local authorities and professional organisations of people working with children. Also involve organisations of parents of disabled and chronically ill children. The purpose of this is to prompt increased public debate also within and in the publications of churches, revivalist movements and religious and spiritual organisations. Opinion leadership measures towards journalists and the media in general should form part of the campaign, and the social media should be leveraged too.

The target group also includes various parties that organise activities for children and families, such as sport and recreation clubs, leisure groups and hobby, family and

parents' organisations. Implementing the campaign will require a part-time employee (funding from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health or the National Institute for Health and Welfare).

Responsibility: Government Policy Programme for the Well-being of Children, Youth and Families; Ministry of Education and Culture, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, National Institute for Health and Welfare, local authorities

Partners: NGOs, Ombudsman for Children, churches and religious communities

11. Address the reducing of corporal punishment in efforts to prevent intimate partner violence

Intimate partner violence in a family increases the risk of corporal punishment being inflicted on children. Ensure that the reducing of corporal punishment is addressed in efforts to prevent intimate partner violence and in official networks locally and regionally when training professionals and planning services.

Responsibility: Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Ministry of Health and Education, National Agency for Health and Welfare, Regional State Administrative Agencies, local authorities, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of the Interior, National Police Board

12. Improve cooperation between authorities

Increase information and training about confidentiality requirements for officials involved with children so that they are familiar with the provisions and know how to apply them in practice. The central government should draw up instructions for the appropriate authorities, and these should include how to operate in online services.

Develop a national operating model for reporting suspected crimes against children to the police, for the use of child welfare services in social work. The purpose with this is to consolidate the currently disparate regional practices and to make the treatment of children falling victim to violence more equitable.

Investigate a model developed in the Netherlands where officials may use a dedicated network to share information and concerns about the development of children and adolescents amongst themselves or with parents.

Responsibility: Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Ministry of Education and Culture, Ministry of Justice, National Police Board

13. Consolidate practices in the judicial system

Aim to ensure that pre-trial investigation materials in cases of violence against children are of as high a quality as possible (interviews with children and other parties involved, expert statements). Regional differences should be equalised and the process speeded up. Quality may be improved by assigning police officers specialising in offences against children to these cases. Continue through training to improve the skills of police officers in interviewing and encountering children. Children's experiences should be leveraged in improving operations. Focus on closer cooperation between the police and the prosecutor at the pre-trial investigation stage.

To speed up the processing of expert statements, the responsibility for funding medical examinations or forensic psychiatric examinations in pre-trial investigations of cases of violence against a child should be transferred to the central government as with sexual offences.

Support the piloting and introduction of the ‘children’s house’ model in Finland to consolidate cooperation between authorities regarding actions to reduce violence against children, to improve the quality of pre-trial investigations and to minimise the adverse impact on children.

Speed up the process of appointing a trustee for a child in cases where a parent is suspected of an offence.

Endorse the Government bill now being debated by Parliament (78/2010), proposing an amendment to chapter 21 section 16 of the Penal Code to make a public prosecution offence of minor assault against a minor or family member. The term ‘family member’ in this context will need to be defined as precisely as possible. Increase training for the police and for employees of the judicial system.

Responsibility: Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, National Police Board

14. Ensure regular collecting of information on the prevalence of corporal punishment and attitudes to it

The child victim study, which explores the prevalence of violence against children, should be made a regular part of the government’s information-collecting process. The study should be conducted regularly at intervals of four or five years.

Monitoring the National Action Plan requires the next child victim study, adult attitude study and child attitude study to be conducted in 2012. The adult attitude study should be conducted by the Central Union for Child Welfare and the child attitude study by UNICEF. The central government should cover the cost of these studies.

Information is also needed on the attitudes of professionals working with children and employees in the judicial system. Promote a separate study on this.

Responsibility: Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Justice

Partners: Central Union for Child Welfare, UNICEF

15. Promote respect for the rights and human dignity of the child and the reducing of corporal punishment in Finland’s human rights policy, bilateral relations and multilateral actions at the UN, Council of Europe and EU levels

Responsibility: Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Ministry of Education and Culture, Ministry of the Interior

16. Assess the situation again in 2015

Reducing corporal punishment is a methodical, long-term effort. After reviewing the results in 2015, perform a new national assessment involving various parties and led by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health to determine what action to take next.

Responsibility: Ministry of Social Affairs and Health

3. VIEWS OF CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS ON HOW TO REDUCE CORPORAL PUNISHMENT

General information on the survey of children and adolescents

In March 2010, the working group conducted an online Webropol survey among children over the age of 7 and adolescents to find out what they thought would be the best ways to reduce corporal punishment. The practical arrangements for conducting the survey were managed by the Office of the Ombudsman for Children. The questionnaire was tested in cooperation mainly with NGO's working with children and children themselves. Several partners around the country encouraged children and adolescents to respond to the survey. Another aim here was to pilot initiatives to encourage children to participate in the development of services.

Over a period of just under a month, 375 responses were received. The survey asked children and adolescents why some parents use corporal punishment in bringing up their children, what would be the most effective and least effective ways of reducing corporal punishment, what factors might prevent a child from getting help, and how children should be informed of these things.

The respondents consisted of 66% girls and 34% boys. Most (84%) of the respondents were under 16 years old and in comprehensive school; of these, 54% were in a lower-level school. There were no responses in Swedish. The questionnaire contained five multiple-choice questions and ten open questions. The questionnaire is appended to this report. The following is a discussion of the responses to the five multiple-choice questions and examples and a summary of the freeform responses to the multiple-choice and open questions. The direct quotes are labelled with a G for girl or B for boy and the age group of the respondent quoted.

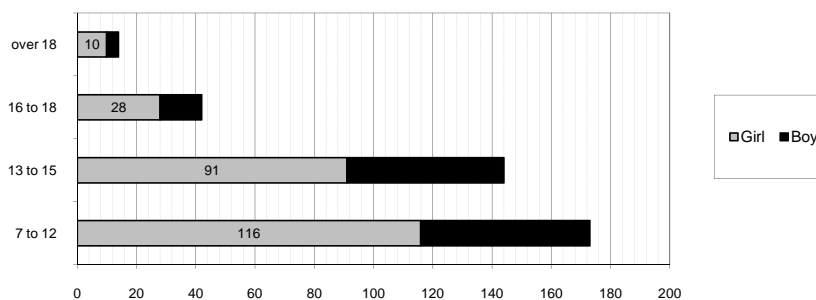


Figure 10. Gender and age of the respondents (N=373).

Advice and mutual respect are needed for bringing up children

There were 323 responses to the open question ‘Why do some parents use violence in raising children?’ The most common reasons cited for parental violence involved a lack of parental skills on part of the parents and disobedience on part of the children. The respondents also discussed the fatigue and stress that adults suffer at work. Many other background factors influencing parental behaviour were also cited. Most of the responses were brief, but there were also some lengthy analyses of why violent discipline is used.

About half of the respondents considered that parents use corporal punishment because they do not have adequate parental skills, or are not aware of any other means for bringing up children and setting limits, or do not believe that such means work. These parents resort to violence to underline their authority, to set limits or to ‘teach the children a lesson’. Violence is for them an efficient and quick way to bring a child into line. Some of the respondents described corporal punishment as a tool for instilling fear and respect in the child, highlighting a lack of authority and power in parents today. A few respondents said that smart parents do not hit their children.

“I can’t believe that sensible parents would hit their children. I’d think that only alcoholics are like that. When they’re drunk, something like that can happen. Or parents who are a bit ‘mental’, you know?” (G 7–12 years)

“People resort to violence when they can’t handle a situation by talking. Feelings are released in strong and uncontrollable ways, and physical punishment or fear of it often makes children obey more quickly.” (G 16–18 years)

“They don’t know how to channel their negative emotions. After the first time, resorting to violence becomes easier and easier.” (G 16–18 years)

“If a child does not do what they are told, the adult may get mad and hit them. That doesn’t make sense. You can talk things out, you don’t need to hit them.” (G 7–12 years)

About one respondent in five cited children’s disobedience as the reason for corporal punishment: a child breaking ground rules or otherwise acting in a frustrating or annoying way. However, only 12 respondents indicated that they themselves approve of mild corporal punishment, such as finger snaps or pulling the hair, in certain situations. The respondents in this survey were not asked directly whether they themselves approve of corporal punishment.

“Parents use violence because the children won’t do what they say. Violence is the last resort. Usually if adults tell children to do something and they just ignore it, the adults may get tired and pull the children’s hair. If the adults are tired when they get home after a hard day’s work and the children won’t do what they’re told, they may use violence. I don’t think you should hit children, ever, just like with adults. But if there’s no discipline, what will the young people of the future be like? Grounding them is no good. Adolescents will just ignore the parents. And what about small children aged 2 or 3 who don’t understand what is said to them? I think it’s OK if a parent holds the child by the ear, not hard, but so that if the child tries to run away it will hurt. The parent is not pulling the ear and hurting the child, it’s the child itself causing the hurt. This can help an unruly child stay still and listen. Or a finger snap. That’s OK too.” (G 13–15 years)

“Kids can be really difficult and disobedient sometimes, and a tired parent can just snap. After all, violence is the quickest and easiest way to make a kid quiet and obedient. Parent exhaustion.” (G 16–18 years)

A number of factors were identified as causes of violent parental behaviour, and it was considered that violence is not always intentional. Many of the respondents believed that parents exercising corporal punishment do not know what types of punishment have been prohibited by law. Corporal punishment may be a problem-solving method learned by the parent through being subjected to it himself or herself as a child.

“Because they don’t know how to bring up kids. Mostly I suppose because the parents themselves have been beaten as kids.” (G 13–15 years)

“Maybe the parents have been brought up with corporal punishment and don’t realise that it’s wrong. But they should know it’s wrong.” (G 7–12 years)

“If they’ve experienced violence themselves as children, or if they lash out against the child in frustration. Mostly parents who resort to violence are having problems and cannot express their anger and resentment in any normal way.” (G 13–15 years)

Adults can lose their temper with children for many reasons, and not all are able to control themselves. Stress, fatigue, depression, mental health problems, and irritation and other bad feelings caused by outside tensions were also cited as contributing

factors. Other possible reasons for unacceptable behaviour mentioned included alcohol and other substance abuse, pressures in working life and everyday life such as money problems, or sadness and conflicts with other persons such as one's spouse.

“Alcohol use should be monitored more, it's a common problem in Finland. Work load could also be a reason. Work stress is terrible, my mum does nothing but work. And she takes her stress out on me.” (G 16–18 years)

“I suppose it's because they feel bad and take it out on the kids, so if the kids want to play with the parents who are tired and drinking, they don't have the energy for any kid stuff, and then they hit them.” (G 7–12 years)

“They're often stressed and can't listen to the kids complaining. It gets on their nerves, and some just hit them. It's not right, because kids can't notice that adults are stressed and can't understand it.” (G 7–12 years)

Some responses indicated that violence as a means of punishment or education was not considered acceptable, that it was unjust and inefficient, decreasing trust and causing traumas. *“They're trying to teach their kids that you can't do some things. I don't think you should use corporal punishment in bringing up kids.”* (B 7–12 years)

“Adults who use violence in bringing up children must regret it. I think they believe that the children learn better if they use corporal punishment, and so on. But I believe they'll regret the mistake they made.” (G 7–12 years)

“They may think that you have to show a child where the limits are and what the consequences are of breaking those limits, by violence if necessary. Violence causes children to fear breaking the limits, and so they do what the parents tell them to do, which is exactly what they want. I don't think this is right, because it makes the children fear all sorts of other things too, even everyday things.” (G 7–12 years)

Helping parents in their everyday lives should be the primary intervention

The respondents were asked to choose two of the options given in Table 1 that they thought would be the most effective in reducing corporal punishment, and two that they thought would be the least effective. The majority of the respondents (N=372) chose 'Parents should be helped with problems' and 'Parents should be helped in reducing the use of alcohol and with mental problems' as the most effective methods of intervention. The highest number of 'least effective' votes was given to 'Children should obey more' and 'Police intervention'. Opinions were divided on asking children and on intervention by outsiders. About 250 respondents gave reasons for why they chose a particular alternative as most or least effective. A dozen respondents said that all alternatives are equally valid and did not want to single out

any one of them. The following is a summary of the reasons given for and against each alternative.

Table 1. The most effective and least effective means for reducing corporal punishment.

	Most effective	Least effective
Parents should be helped with problems so that they would not take their frustration and exhaustion out on children.	189	43
Parents should be helped in reducing the use of alcohol and with mental problems.	167	39
Parents should be advised on the upbringing of children, and child health clinics, day care centres, schools, newspapers and TV should counsel parents to never hit a child.	127	61
Adults outside the family should be more observant and intervene as soon as they notice something. These adults include friends and relatives, the staff at child health clinics, day care and schools as well as health care and child welfare units, and the police.	116	87
Children should be asked more often about their opinion on these matters at child health clinics, at day care and at school, and during health care visits.	103	94
Children should be given more information about the treatment they are entitled to receive at home. This information could be provided at day care or at school, in connection with youth work as well as on the Internet.	108	62
Children should obey and respect their parents more.	82	171
The police should intervene if there is a problem, and parents should be punished in court more often for mistreating children.	85	152

Many respondents felt that helping and supporting the parents is particularly important, since they did not believe that parents intentionally hurt their children; rather, violence was seen as the involuntary release of negative feelings and a loss of self-control. Parents were not considered to be responsible for ‘stress attacks’, which were ascribed for instance to a heavy day at work or problems with intimate relationships or other things. A lack of parental skills, problem-solving skills and self-control were also cited as reasons. Some respondents proposed solutions to this: more time off with the family, holidays, hobbies and meeting friends. Consulting experts, e.g. parental counselling, was also considered a good idea. Some respondents suggested that children should participate in household work more: *“Kids could help their parents do the laundry or something so that they wouldn’t be stressed after a hard working day and could relax.”* (B 7–12 years) Many (102) respondents explained why this method would be the best, and only 5 spoke against it. The negative responses noted that it would not be a good idea to burden children with adult worries, that parents would refuse outside help, and that *“if you’re tired, you should take a holiday”*.

Alcohol and mental problems were considered major contributing factors in violent behaviour. These are serious problems with repercussions for children, and addressing these quickly was considered crucial for ensuring a safe environment for children, for coping and also for the central government budget. *“Adults should get*

treatment in time”, wrote one respondent, while another said that alcoholic beverages should have conspicuous warning labels on them. Some respondents considered that these problems stem from negative feelings and (work-related) fatigue, and that the first point is therefore more important. Seven respondents considered this approach weak, with varying reasons. Some had understood this statement to mean that children should help their parents in these matters and did not consider that this was a good idea. One respondent considered that these were the adult’s own problems, while some thought it more important to explore issues of health and conceptions of punishment.

About half of the 58 thought that parents who hit their children do not necessarily know that corporal punishment is illegal or where the limit is. Knowledge of this could help them understand and listen to their children, with advice for difficult situations. This method was considered unadvisable by 29 respondents, who did not believe that there was any such widespread lack of knowledge and that this approach therefore would be poor or ineffective, because people are stubborn and have deep-rooted habits.

The suggestion that someone from outside the family should intervene was an opinion-divider: some respondents thought it was obvious that as soon as someone notices a family having problems an intervention must be made, while others considered that the risk of misunderstanding was too great and that intervening in a family’s affairs would be an invasion of privacy. Many considered that an outsider intervening in a family’s everyday life seems like prying; but on the other hand, it was considered important for a family to have trusted people they can turn to. However, opinions vary as to who such persons might be. Acquaintances are usually best placed to notice if problems arise, but they do not necessarily want to do anything about it, nor would the family want them to. Some respondents worried about what would eventually happen to the child in a situation like this. Some respondents (4) suggested house calls as a good means of help and intervention.

A sharp division was found in the reasons given for responses to the suggestion that children should be asked (35/37). Those who thought this a bad idea considered that asking the children would be frightening, as this is a matter on which the parents may have threatened the child; it could also cause anxiety and misunderstanding, as the children would not necessarily know what is going on. Those who favoured this approach believed that small children in particular would be frank and willing to talk and that they would trust professionals. It was also considered important to ask depressed children how they are doing. A survey conducted at school was considered a good option. However, talking about unpleasant and unexpected things should not have repercussions, even if talking to a professional who is a complete stranger. The important thing would be to ensure that children do not consider that the violence is their fault. On the other hand, if children were aware of their rights, they would be up front about their experiences and would not need to be asked.

“Children need to be asked in more detail how things are at home. Both those who do really well at school and those who bully others or are passive. Any child may have problems.” (G 16–18 years)

Those who favoured the ‘Children should get more information’ suggestion (53 responses with reasons) considered that children have the right to know what kind of treatment they are entitled to, and that this information would help children speak out about violence. Others (25 responses with reasons) considered that this would be useless, since most children already know that corporal punishment is prohibited, and

even children who know this would not necessarily dare to tell anyone about it. Children should be told about their responsibilities too.

‘Children should obey more’ was felt by many (103 responses with reasons) to be the least effective way of reducing corporal punishment. Only 30 respondents were in favour of this and gave reasons for it. One third of these felt that obeying was the best solution, because children are meant to listen to and obey their parents. Disobedience was considered to irritate unnecessarily an already nervous parent, and it was also considered that parents already take care a lot of things on behalf of their children. The majority, however, considered that obeying is the least effective approach; they did not believe that corporal punishment would end if the child just were quiet and obedient all the time. *“Children don’t need to respect parents who use violence against them.”* It is not in a child’s nature to please other people all the time, and you cannot force children to be obedient. Some respondents felt that adults have too much power as it is. The influence of alcohol and other factors mixing up an adult’s mental state mean that the adult may not even think about whether a child doing something perceived as annoying was doing it on purpose or not. Concern was voiced by respondents for very small children, since they do not necessarily even understand what is happening.

‘Police intervention’ and more severe punishments was favoured by 27 respondents with reasons and opposed by 93. Those who were in favour of quick police intervention considered that the police have the authority and deterrent allowing them to intervene in serious situations. However, only 8 respondents called for severe or more severe penalties. Far more respondents were against the idea of police intervention. Since children love their parents, it would be unreasonable for parents to get into trouble. Police intervention was considered a measure too drastic and one that might even make the domestic situation worse and require the family to explain themselves to other people continuously. A fine might act as a deterrent in an ideal case, but the majority of respondents did not believe that fines would help; in a worst case scenario, they would simply tax the family’s finances even further and have only a negative impact on the child. Some respondents noted that the child should be told first what is going on if the police intervene and also when they will intervene, so that the situation would not be frightening. Taking children elsewhere to ask them their opinion was considered important.

“But if somebody intervenes, I think it would be good if the kids weren’t taken out of their own home and if the parents weren’t put in jail. It would be much better if the family tried to get along together.”
(G 7–12 years)

The most critical responses noted that every case of corporal punishment is unique and therefore the selection of most effective and least effective means is different for each case. *“First we have to find out why parents use corporal punishment on children. We can’t solve the problem if we don’t know its cause.”* (G 7–12 years) The parents have to be asked why they hit their child, and outsiders must avoid passing judgment in black-and-white terms.

The respondents suggested that in corporal punishment situations other adults should intervene immediately. They also considered that children encountering violence should have shelters and safe families available. On the other hand, they felt that families should not be broken up but that the adults should be offered anger management training and therapy. The respondents believed that corporal punishment would continue to affect the children punished later in life.

The responses called for mutual respect in families and talking things out. Disciplinary methods proposed included agreeing on ground rules beforehand between parents and children. The respondents had plenty of suggestions for child education methods to reduce corporal punishment. These included briefings, brochures, courses and TV programmes with children relating their experiences. There could be good parenting courses. Information could be provided through TV, radio, the Internet, child care clinics and helplines. The following is a discussion of the views of children and adolescents and their opinions as to what prevents children from getting help and how children should be told that corporal punishment is illegal.

Fear of consequences can prevent a child from getting help

Respondents were asked to name the three main reasons that can prevent children from getting help. Responses were given by 373 children. The reason most frequently cited was fear. The respondents worried about how the parents might react and suspected that getting help would only make the parents more violent (232/373). They also thought that a child seeking help because of corporal punishment would encounter retaliatory measures from the parents, since help provided by the authorities comes too slowly, according to many of the respondents. The respondents further considered that violent parents may pre-emptively threaten their children with violence to stop them from getting help; on the other hand, mistreated children may not know what the consequences of them getting help might be. Responses included statements to the effect that children may believe their parents if they say they will stop using violence but then break their promise; children continue to trust their parents instead of getting help.

“Children are afraid of their parents, especially if they are violent. Who would want to make an already violent parent angry?” (G 7–12 years)

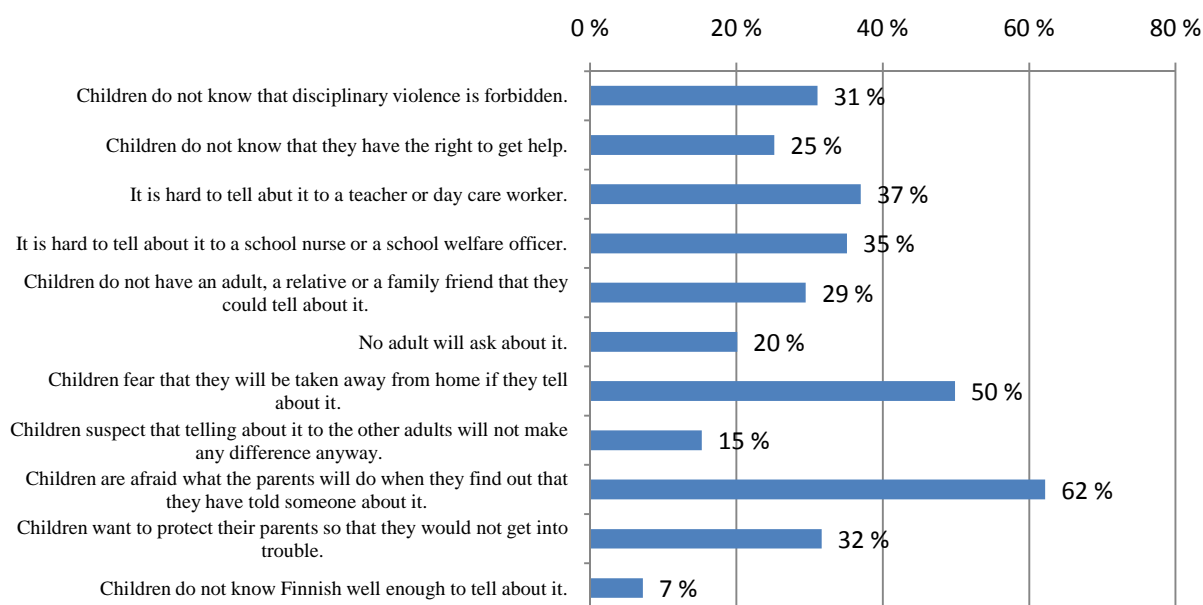


Figure 11. Things that can prevent a child from getting help in cases of corporal punishment.

The respondents also noted that not all children know that corporal punishment is prohibited (116/373). They felt that small children in particular may be ignorant of this. The respondents noted that small children consider that what their parents do must be right, the idea being that “*a child’s place is below adults*”. Small children do not necessarily know that things could be different; they imagine that corporal punishment is normal.

“A kid aged 4 to 6 can hardly know that corporal punishment is wrong and that the kid has the right to get help.” (G 7–12 years)

Children do not necessarily know that they have the right to get help (94/373) and do not know adults that they could freely talk to about their problem (110/373). In some cases, children may not speak Finnish well enough to be able to talk about sensitive matters such as this (27/373). Only some children would talk about corporal punishment to a person outside the family, since children do not know to whom they should turn and do not trust an outside adult to believe them. The respondents suspected that adults are not interested or that they simply do not care (57/373). Also, it is not easy to talk about private family matters to outsiders. Children may consider this shameful and be afraid of public opinion in the classroom if they tell the teacher and their classmates find out.

Some children felt that because of a lack of health check-ups at school they had no chance to talk to any adult. On the other hand, some children had difficulty talking to the school nurse, as she was seen as a distant person. Telling the teacher was not seen as a problem as such, but it does matter what the relationship between teacher and pupil is: children do not want to talk about corporal punishment with “*terrible teachers*”. Some of the respondents referred to their own experiences in noting that it is difficult to talk about violence to the teacher or day care worker (138/373) or to the school nurse or school social worker (131/373). On the other hand, adults generally

do not ask about this sort of thing, and 75 out of 373 respondents named this as one of the major obstacles to getting help.

“For me, my parents’ divorce was a tough spot, and the wounds still haven’t healed. It was really messy, and my school grades dropped by as much as three points. Everybody at school knew about it, they noticed that I became quieter and skipped school a lot, but nobody did anything about it.” (G 16–18 years)

“Telling about it to a grown-up you don’t know can be scary, and you don’t know if you can trust them completely.” (G 13–15 years)

“There’s a lot of talk about violence, but no one tells kids what they need to do if they are hit or how things will go if this happens. Being taken away from home and being put with strange people is frightening for kids, so they don’t dare tell anyone.” (G 16–18 years)

Some of the respondents thought that children do not talk about corporal punishment because they are afraid of being taken away from home (186/373), which is partly related to children wanting to protect their parents (118/373). Several responses referred to children’s fear of losing their parents and even of becoming homeless. One respondent said that, violence notwithstanding, children love their home and parents so much that the fear of losing their home trumps the fear of violence. Leaving home seems particularly difficult for children who are not especially socially oriented, said one of the respondents from personal experience (G 7–12 years).

“Children nevertheless love their parents, because despite all this they must have their good moments.” (G 13–15 years)

“I was so young that leaving home was a frightening thought that brought tears to my eyes. Home is home, and you want to stay there even if your father drinks and your mother is stressed.” (G 16–18 years)

“I’ve been through something like this, and I’ve always been afraid of having to go away from home.” (G 7–12 v.)

“It could be really difficult to talk about this if the kid is afraid of being taken into care and put in a foster family or children’s home. There are plenty of horror stories about evil foster mothers and miserable children’s homes.” (G 13–15 years)

The respondents noted that an important reason for children not telling adults about violence is that they are accustomed to it and may even think they deserve it. The respondents thought that children may blame themselves, belittle the violence they have experienced and feel themselves worthless. The respondents further said that children subjected to corporal punishment may become fearful and experience an urge to please the violent parents.

“And if the parents love the kid and are otherwise good parents, the kid may play down the violence and think it’s not worth it to make trouble.” (G 16–18 years)

School and the Internet are important information sources for children and adolescents

A total of 369 of the respondents responded to the question where they were asked to choose the three most important means for informing children and adolescents that corporal punishment is prohibited. About one fifth of these said that all of these means are good. More than 60% of the respondents considered that school is a good environment for informing children that corporal punishment is prohibited. They felt that school is the appropriate context for discussing the matter, as schoolchildren are of a suitable age, the information will reach all children, and teachers are trusted. Children would be sure to be made aware of this, as “*you can’t avoid the information in class*”.

“Teachers tell kids what is right and wrong about a lot of things, why not this too?” (G 13–15 years)

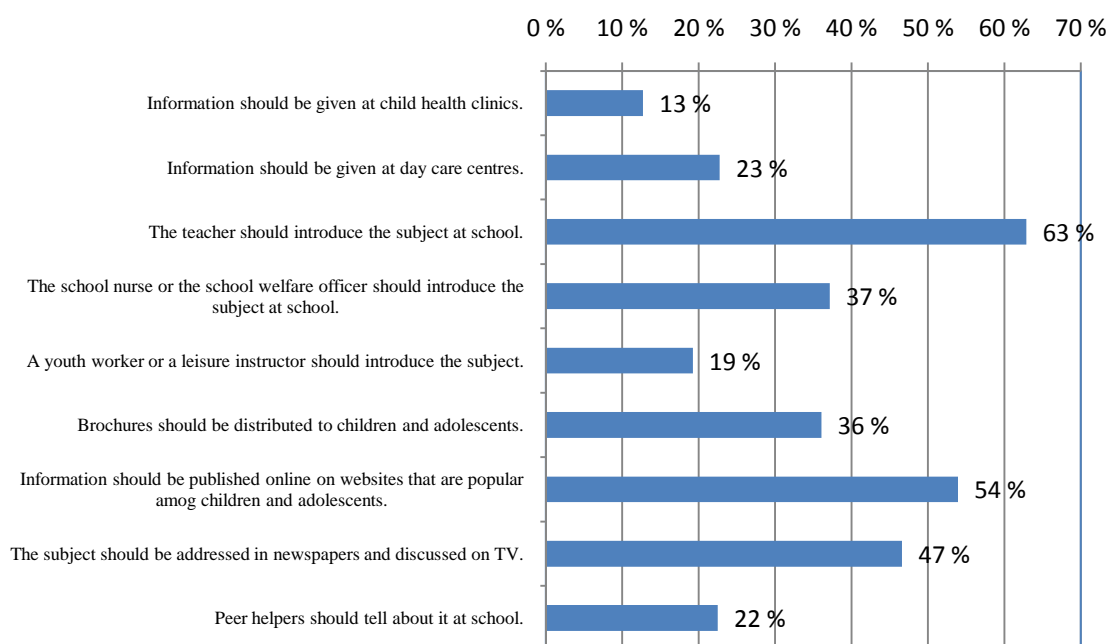


Figure 12. Most important means for informing children and adolescents.

The respondents also envisioned contexts at school where information could be distributed. Suggestions included discussions with children in small groups to have them think about ways of supporting a friend who had experienced violence and what they could do if they found out that someone had been subjected to corporal punishment. Morning assemblies and check-ups at school could also be useful for providing information. Respondents generally felt that school nurses would be the best choice for this role, as school nurses are generally regarded as more relaxed than teachers, trustworthy and nice. The respondents also said that peer helpers could talk

with children at school. Confirmation school and various clubs were also named as possible contexts for discussing corporal punishment.

“At least I’m at my breaking point when I visit the school nurse, I’d tell her everything if there were anything to tell.” (B 13–15 years)

“Supporters [peer helpers] are safety at school.” (G 16–18 years)

More than half of the respondents considered that the Internet is a good means of distributing information to children and adolescents. They explained that information spreads fast online and that most children and adolescents are active users. There is a lot of information online, and it can be accessed at leisure. The respondents noted that it is easier to discuss difficult things and share experiences if you are anonymous. Two thirds of the respondents who mentioned brochures thought that they would be good, as they can be read at leisure and reread. Some respondents thought that brochures would probably not be read.

“A lot of people are online, I suppose, and the information would spread quickly from popular sites?” (G 7–12 years)

“Brochures are good, because you can read them when you want, and if the teacher talked about it then the whole class could talk about it together.” (G 7–12 years)

Opinions were divided on the media: about half of those who commented on it thought that the media are good and effective in conveying information on corporal punishment, while the other half criticised the role of the media in addressing children and adolescents. The reason for this, according to the critical respondents, was that only parents read the newspapers.

“This should be on TV and in the papers so that the parents couldn’t avoid it; parents are always watching TV or reading newspapers. :D” (B 7–12 years)

“Children’s programmes. (Inserts in Pikku kakkonen).” (B 13–15 years)

Slightly more than 10 % of the respondents considered that child care clinics were one of the best channels for conveying information. Children would receive information at an early age, and child care clinics see all children in every age group. On the other hand, about one in five of those with responses about child care clinics noted that at the time of those visits the children would be *“too young and too naive to understand the information”*. Similar opinions were voiced concerning talking about corporal punishment at daycare centres.

“Child care clinics? What would little kids understand about it?” (G 13–15 years)

“Every kid in Finland goes to a daycare centre or school, so the information would reach everyone.” (G 7–12 v.)

Of those respondents who commented on information being provided by youth workers or leisure instructors, about half considered them suitable 'educators'. The good thing is that there is a low threshold for these adults to chat with children. Children have immediate rapport with youth workers and leisure instructors, but they are also distant enough. However, one third of those who commented on this considered it a bad idea: *sports is about free time, and it would be embarrassing to bring education into it.*

"It would be a bit stupid if at practice the coach suddenly started talking about domestic violence..." (G 13–15 years)

Some of the respondents said that children should be told about corporal punishment at home. They felt that not only parents but other family members such as grandparents should talk about it, and friends of the children also.

Some of the respondents suggested more information aimed at parents, including experiences of children subjected to corporal punishment. Awareness of the child's viewpoint could help adults avoid using corporal punishment, according to these respondents. Parents need concrete advice on how to avoid using corporal punishment.

"I believe violence against children could be reduced by advising adults as to what they SHOULD do or CAN do in difficult situations where they tend to resort to physical punishment. Just saying you can't hit your kids is downright naive; you should go deeper and explore why adults hit their kids." (G 16–18 years)

The survey was informative and thought-provoking

Finally, the respondents were asked what they thought of the corporal punishment survey; 95% of the respondents answered this question. About 70% of those who answered considered the survey to be good or very good, explaining that corporal punishment is something that children should be made aware of. Children and adolescents also valued being asked for their opinions.

"Very well and instructively done. I hope corporal punishment goes away for good!"
(B 7–12 years)

"This survey is really good. It's good that kids can say what they think!" (G 7–12 years)

"This was a very good survey. It made me think about things and gave me confidence about myself." (G 16–18 years)

"It made me think about what's right and what's not." (G 13–15 years)

About 8 % of those who commented on the survey considered it poor or very poor, as they considered it boring, a compulsory assignment in class, poorly designed or useless.

“It’s no use, because no one can do anything about it anyway.”
(G 16–18 years)

Nevertheless, many of the respondents considered the survey useful: *“It was difficult to give answers, but it was very useful.”* (B 7–12 years)

Summary of the survey of children and adolescents

Children and adolescents feel that corporal punishment is mainly used by parents who need help in some way. This behaviour may stem from exhaustion, lack of conflict resolution skills, alcohol use, mental health problems or other problems.

On the other hand, it was found that there is scope for improvement in the mutual respect between children and parents. Many of the respondents believed that parents exercising corporal punishment do not know what types of punishment have been prohibited by law. Corporal punishment may be a problem-solving method learned by the parent through being subjected to it himself or herself as a child.

Therefore the respondents felt that the best ways to address corporal punishment would be to support families in their everyday lives in as many ways as possible while providing information on what is unacceptable punishment. A wide range of help should be available for adults with children, from household management to education, especially in problem situations. Parents should also have opportunities for relaxation and free time, both alone and with their families. The role of children in contributing to household work was also brought up.

Police intervention and legal sanctions were considered necessary in extreme situations but not relevant in preventing spontaneous corporal punishment.

Reasons cited for why children do not get help included uncertainty and worry about what the parents would do to the children when they learned of it and what would happen to the family. The fear of having to leave home was mentioned in this context. Family matters were considered too sensitive to discuss with outsiders. It was thought important that children had reliable adults to turn to outside the home. These could be relatives, teachers or other professionals. In any case, sensitivity and a broad-minded approach are necessary when dealing with family matters. Children’s opinions should be heard and respected, and children should be told of any unexpected developments in advance. Children do not know enough about how the authorities operate and do not trust public services enough.

Children should be given information about corporal punishment and their rights in a variety of ways, above all at school and on the Internet. The role of the school was particularly emphasised in the responses. Nevertheless, the principal responsibility rests with the parents, so reaching them with information is the primary concern. Giving parents educational instruction and information on the rights of children was seen as important. There should be advice and training available particularly with a view to conflict resolution. Ground rules and limits should be agreed openly with children. Children do not necessarily understand why they should not do something, so they should be given explanations too. The responses also voiced a concern about the status of small children in cases of corporal punishment. It is important in such cases that adults outside the family are alert to situations and symptoms so that they can provide help as needed.

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WHAT WAYS?

What would be the best ways to reduce disciplinary violence?

4. From the possible ways listed below, select (x) - up to two (2) ways that are the most important and - up to two (2) ways that are the poorest/worst in your opinion.	Most important ☺	Worst ☹
Parents should be helped with problems so that they would not take their frustration and exhaustion out on children.		
Parents should be helped in reducing the use of alcohol and with mental problems.		
Parents should be advised on the upbringing of children, and child health clinics, day care centres, schools, newspapers and TV should counsel parents to never hit a child.		
Adults outside the family should be more observant and intervene as soon as they notice something. These adults include friends and relatives, the staff at child health clinics, day care and schools as well as health care and child welfare units, and the police.		
Children should be asked more often about their opinion on these matters at child health clinics, at day care and at school, and during health care visits.		
Children should be given more information about the treatment they are entitled to receive at home. This information could be provided at day care or at school, in connection with youth work as well as on the Internet.		
Children should obey and respect their parents more.		
The police should intervene if there is a problem and parents should be punished in court more often for mistreating children.		

4. Please give the reasons for your choices of the most important ways. ☺

5. Please give the reasons for your choices of the worst ways. ☹

6. Do you have any other thoughts on reducing disciplinary violence?

⇒

HOW TO GET HELP?

Some parents use violence in raising children, even though it is forbidden by law. Forbidden by law means that children have the right to get help.

7. What can prevent a child from getting help? From the list below, select the three (3) most important reasons in your opinion.	(x)
Children don't know that disciplinary violence is forbidden.	
Children don't know that they have the right to get help.	
It's hard to tell about it to a teacher or day care worker .	
It's hard to tell about it to a school nurse or a school welfare officer .	
Children don't have an adult, a relative or a family friend that they could tell about it .	
No adult will ask about it.	
Children fear that they will be taken away from home if they tell about it .	
Children suspect that telling about it to other adults won't make any difference anyway.	
Children are afraid what the parents will do when they find out that they have told someone about it .	
Children want to protect their parents so that they wouldn't get into trouble .	
Children don't know Finnish well enough to tell about it .	

8. Please give the reasons for your choices.

9. Can you think of any other reasons that were not mentioned above?

⇒

HOW TO GET INFORMATION?

How could the awareness of children and adolescents be raised about the fact that disciplinary violence is forbidden?

10. Select three (3) of the most important ways to give information to children and adolescents:	(x)
Information should be given at child health clinics .	
Information should be given at day care centres .	
The teacher should introduce the subject at school.	
The school nurse or the school welfare officer should introduce the subject at school.	
A youth worker or a leisure instructor should introduce the subject.	
Brochures should be distributed to children and adolescents.	
Information should be published online on websites that are popular among children and adolescents.	
The subject should be addressed in newspapers and discussed on TV .	
Prefects should tell about it at school.	

11. Please give the reasons for your choices.

12. Can you think of some other important way to tell children that violence should not be a part of their upbringing?

THANK YOU!

13. Do you have any other thoughts on reducing violence against children?

What did you think about this survey?

Thank you for your answers!

We appreciate you taking the time to complete the survey.
Your answers will be very helpful in considering ways to reduce disciplinary violence.