



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

#TalkParenting

Online engagement update



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Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.
This document is also available in Welsh.

#TalkParenting – Online engagement update

The Welsh Government has a long standing commitment to supporting parents to adopt positive approaches to managing their children's behaviour and promoting their development. As part of this, the TalkParenting hashtag was adopted to raise awareness and generate an online conversation around the topic. This report highlights the social media reach achieved for the #TalkParenting conversation and summarises the views of those that took part in the online engagement survey.

Background

The Programme for Government sets out our commitment to supporting parents, which includes an intention to seek cross party support for legislation to end the defence of "Reasonable Punishment". The proposed legislation aims to bring about attitudinal change in the way parents raise and discipline their children, by making physical punishment unacceptable and by promoting positive alternatives.

Prior to the formal consultation, the Welsh Government utilised the TalkParenting page and hashtag to start the conversation and generate awareness of the Welsh Government's effort to demonstrate their commitment to positive parenting and to children's rights. As part of this, an online engagement survey was used to gather the views of those taking part in the online #TalkParenting conversation. Social media including Facebook and Twitter were used to promote and encourage participation in the online engagement survey.

The online engagement survey was carried out in order to generate widespread awareness and discussion and was available to anyone interested in taking part in the #TalkParenting conversation. This could include children, young people, parents, and non-parents living in or outside of Wales. Due to its online nature, views expressed are not necessarily representative of the whole population of Wales; nevertheless they do provide a useful insight into the topic. The key points are set out later in this update.

#TalkParenting engagement figures

The online engagement survey ran from 2nd October to 24th November 2017. The #TalkParenting post was used on two of the Welsh Government's key Facebook pages. These are the Flying Start Wales Facebook page and the Parenting. Give it Time Facebook page. The figures for the #TalkParenting post are as follows:

- shared 153 times; and
- 'liked' 34 times.

During the same time, the highlight figures for twitter for #TalkParenting were:

- Total tweets – 452
- Retweets – 319
- Total potential impressions – 742,461
- Total potential reach – 344,192
- Total Twitter users – 152
- Average number of followers – 2,264

The informal #TalkParenting conversation was then followed by a formal consultation on the proposal to prohibit physical punishment of children by removing the defence of reasonable punishment between 9th January and 2 April 2018¹). The TalkParenting hashtag was used again during this period to promote the consultation. The highlight figures for the #TalkParenting post on Twitter during the consultation were:

- Total tweets – 1,594
- Retweets – 1,012
- Total potential impressions – 4,455,845
- Total potential reach – 817,303
- Total Twitter users – 267
- Average number of followers – 3,070

Whilst these figures only provide a rough estimate of engagement and awareness with the #TalkParenting, analysis shows that there were only 9 total tweets and 4 retweets for #TalkParenting in between these two periods of activity (25th November to 8th January). Whilst these time periods are not equal, these figures suggest there may have been stronger engagement with the hashtag and therefore greater online conversation around the topic during the periods that the online engagement survey and formal consultation were running.

#TalkParenting online engagement survey summary

The informal #TalkParenting online engagement survey was open to anyone interested in taking part in the online conversation about parenting. It included some questions about:

- managing children's behaviour;
- understanding of the law on physical punishment of children and the meaning of corporal punishment;
- views on the physical punishment of children; and
- awareness of information and advice about positive parenting and usefulness of parenting support.

It received 1,298 completed responses. Of these 878 (69%) were completed by those stating they were the parent, legal guardian or carer of a child under 18 years old.

Most people (98%) agreed that they enjoyed spending time with their child and felt confident managing their child's behaviour (92%). The results suggest that a range of different techniques had been used in the last six months to manage their children's behaviour with many reporting that they had used more than one. The most frequently reported techniques were: 'praising good behaviour' (90%), 'saying no' (89%) and 'using your own good behaviour to set an example' (87%). When asked which techniques were generally most effective the most popular response was also 'praising good behaviour' (56%) followed by 'reasoning with them' (35%) and 'developing routines e.g. around meals and sleep times' (30%). Respondents were then provided with a list of circumstances and asked whether they thought it would be appropriate to physically punish a child in any of them. There were mixed

¹ The results of the consultation are available on the Welsh Government website.

views on this but the most common reason given for when it may be appropriate was as a last resort (47% said yes). The least popular circumstance was when their behaviour was out of control (e.g. having a tantrum) where 31% said yes.

There were a number of questions around the law and physical punishment. When asked whether they thought the law allows parents to physically punish their children around three quarters (74%) thought that it did. Most thought it would allow 'physical punishment that left no mark at all on the child' (71%) and around half (48%) thought it would allow a 'temporary reddening of the skin'. Only a few respondents reported thinking that the law allowed physical punishment that 'leaves a bruise that lasts for a few days' (1%) or 'leaves marks and bruises that last for more than a few days but which do not result in permanent physical injury' (1%). When questioned on their understanding of the term "corporal punishment", 58% of respondents reported that they thought this referred to "physical punishment with or without an implement" and 21% said they were unsure. In addition, 21% of those that responded understood corporal punishment to refer to physical and emotional abuse and 17% thought it referred to physical punishment with an implement only (respondents could select more than one option so percentages do not add to 100%).

All respondents were asked to choose which statement from a list came closest to their own views about smacking. The same proportion of respondents (36%) selected the following statements: 'I think it is always wrong to smack a child, and I won't do it'; and 'I'm comfortable with the idea of smacking a child and will do it when I think it's necessary' whilst 27% reported that 'I don't like the idea of smacking a child, but I will do it if nothing else works'. Respondents were also asked if this was something they had always agreed with or whether they had changed their views over the years. Some did report that they had changed their mind on this subject. Of those that reported thinking it's always wrong to smack a child and wouldn't do it, 60% have always agreed and 12% have always disagreed. For the 36% who reported being comfortable with the idea of smacking a child and will do it when necessary, 88% of those have always agreed and none had always disagreed.

The survey asked to what extent respondents agreed with two statements about the law. In total, 63% agreed that the law should allow parents to smack their children whilst 30% disagreed. When asked if there should be a complete ban on parents smacking their children 30% in total agreed and 64% disagreed. Additionally 86% of respondents reported that they did not think a change in the law around the use of physical punishment to discipline a child would change their attitudes towards smacking whilst 8% said it would and 7% said they did not know.

Questions were also asked about use of parenting information and advice. Almost two thirds of respondents reported that they had seen or been given information on positive parenting or alternatives to physical punishment. Of those that said yes (62%), the most popular sources of advice reported were a friend or relative (33%), the internet (33%) and a health professional (26%). Respondents were then asked if the information and advice helped to improve their parenting skills or confidence of which 52% said it did help and 17% said it did not help. Additionally, respondents were asked whether they had heard of the "Parenting. Give it Time" campaign and

a few of the slogans were listed such as: “Bedtimes without the battles”; “Bathtime without the tears”. Whilst 20% reported that they had heard of the campaign over three quarters of respondents (77%) reported that they had not.

Summary

The TalkParenting hashtag and webpage were used to start the conversation around attitudes to parenting practices and the current legal situation on physical punishment. As part of this, an online engagement survey was used to provide a snapshot insight into the views of those engaging with #TalkParenting. Whilst the results are not generalisable or representative, they do suggest that the respondents may use a range of techniques to manage their children’s behaviour. They also indicate that there are varying opinions on the use of physical punishment and the law. In terms of parenting advice, the findings suggest parents surveyed may use a range of sources and some are aware of the “Parenting. Give it Time Campaign.

Following this start to the online conversation, #TalkParenting has now been used to promote the formal consultation on the proposal to prohibit physical punishment of children by removing the defence of reasonable punishment.