



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

# Ending physical punishment in Wales

## Information for the social services workforce

The Children (Abolition of Defence of Reasonable Punishment) (Wales) Act 2020 came into force on 21 March 2022. Physically punishing children is now illegal in Wales.

As a professional social worker in Wales, here's what you need to know.

### What is physical punishment?

There are lots of types of physical punishment. It can mean smacking, hitting, slapping and shaking.

But there are other types too.

It isn't possible to give a set list of what makes up physical punishment because it can be anything where a child is punished using physical force.



### Why is this law important?

The overarching objective of this law is to protect children's rights by prohibiting physical punishment of children by parents and those acting in loco parentis. This gives children the same protection from assault as adults. The law is clear - easy for children, parents, professionals and the public to understand.

The intended effect, combined with an awareness-raising campaign and support for parents, is to bring about a further reduction in the use and tolerance of the physical punishment of children in Wales.

This is important because research suggests that any type of physical punishment could be harmful to children.

### What's changed?

From 21 March 2022, no one in Wales can use the 'defence of reasonable punishment' as a defence to common assault.

All physical punishment is illegal in Wales.

### Does the new law apply to everybody in Wales?

Yes, it applies to everyone - parents or anyone who is responsible for a child while the parent is absent (in loco parentis).

And as with other laws, it applies to visitors to Wales too.

Stopio Cosbi  
Corfforol

Ending Physical  
Punishment



## What happens if people use physical punishment?

They will be breaking the law.

The new law is not intended to prevent parents from disciplining their children. However, if they use physical punishment to discipline a child in their care they could be charged with common assault. They may get a criminal record which is the same for any criminal offence.

Across Wales advice and support is available to encourage people to stop using physical punishment and find positive ways to manage children's behaviour.

In cases where the police decide further action is required, there will be an option of a rehabilitative alternative to prosecution. If the police decide this is appropriate, they can refer an individual into out of court parenting support to encourage positive parenting techniques and help avoid re-offending. This additional support will be delivered by local authorities.



## What does this mean for my sector?

The new law means that the defence of reasonable punishment cannot be considered by the police when they are investigating an alleged assault of a child by their parent or person acting in loco parentis.

You should refer to the Wales Safeguarding Procedures, and its Practice Guide on Safeguarding children in relation to the Children (Abolition of Defence of Reasonable Punishment) (Wales) Act 2020, when dealing with incidents of physical punishment. You should also continue to keep up to date with your sector's updates to guidance and training.

Across all sectors, removing the defence of reasonable punishment means that practitioners can provide clear, unambiguous advice to parents and carers that any level of physical punishment is illegal in Wales.



## Where can I find out more?

Information about ending physical punishment can be found at:  
[gov.wales/EndPhysicalPunishment](https://gov.wales/EndPhysicalPunishment)

The *Parenting. Give it time* campaign provides positive parenting tips and expert advice:  
[gov.wales/giveittime](https://gov.wales/giveittime)

Wales Safeguarding Procedures:  
[safeguarding.wales](https://safeguarding.wales)

Wales Safeguarding Procedures (Practice Guide):  
[\*Safeguarding children in relation to the Children \(Abolition of Defence of Reasonable Punishment\) \(Wales\) Act 2020\*](#)

**Times have changed. Attitudes have changed.  
There is no place for physical punishment in a modern Wales.**