

Family Education Trust

(Family and Youth Concern)

A Company Limited by Guarantee No. 3503533; Registered Charity No. 1070500

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Children's Commissioners are trespassing where they have no business in seeking to impose anti-smacking views by force of law

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In their demand for a new law making it a criminal offence for parents to smack their children, the UK's four children's commissioners are championing a radical children's rights agenda and not acting as the true champions of children, according to the Family Education Trust.

The Trust's Director, Norman Wells, commented:

'The commissioners seem to have lost all sense of proportion. There is already legislation in place to protect children from violence and ill-treatment and the vast majority of parents are well able to tell the difference between a disciplinary smack and genuine child abuse. Public opinion polls tell us that 85-90 per cent of the general public supports the use of mild physical correction as a form of discipline. If the commissioners had their way, loving parents could be subjected to social service investigations and even find themselves in court for disciplining their children in a way that hasn't caused the slightest degree of harm.'

The commissioners' statement makes reference to other European countries that have imposed laws against smacking, but omits to note that in Sweden, the first country to legislate against smacking in 1979, reported cases of child abuse increased almost fivefold between 1981-1994, and there was a 519 per cent increase in incidents of child-on-child violence between 1984-1994.

The statement further asserts that the UK is required to impose a ban on all smacking in order to fulfil its human rights obligations. However, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is silent on the issue and the European Court of Human Rights has repeatedly insisted that 'a certain level of severity' must be reached for physical punishment to fall foul of the European Convention on Human Rights.

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Trustees: Arthur Cornell MEd F.Coll.P (Chairman); Betty, Lady Grantchester; Eric Hester BA (Vice Chairman)
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Sponsors: John Bonnar MA MD FRCOG; Peter Dawson OBE BSc FRSA; The Baroness Elles; The Duke of Montrose;
The Baroness O' Cathain OBE; Professor Dennis O'Keeffe; Sir John Peel KCVO FRCS FRCP; J S Scott MD FRCS FRCOG

Norman Wells noted:

'The use of a moderate disciplinary smack is perfectly consistent with respect for a child's human dignity and physical integrity. The commissioners seem to have lost sight of the fact that parents are authority figures in their children's lives, charged with the responsibility of caring for their children, nurturing them, and correcting them where necessary. As with any other authority figure, parents need to have sanctions at their disposal when their children misbehave, and they must be free to exercise their discretion and judgment with respect to their use.'

'In seeking to dictate how parents may and may not bring up their children, the commissioners are trespassing on territory where they have no business.'

For further information:

Norman Wells 020 8894 2525

Family Education Trust is an educational charity committed to promoting stable family life and the welfare of children and young people.

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