

A Christian statement supporting legislation to end corporal punishment of children

We believe that the adoption of legislation to prohibit corporal punishment of children in all settings is a crucial step towards a compassionate, non-violent society. We support the aims of the Global Initiative to End all Corporal Punishment of Children.

Corporal punishment of children has for too long been a common part of our tradition and culture. But physical punishment as a form of discipline is incompatible with the core religious values of respect for human dignity, justice and non-violence and evidence of the harm it causes both in the short and long-term is well documented.

Some Christian groups use their religion to justify physical punishment and may argue that it is sanctioned in scriptural texts such as in Proverbs 13:24: “Those who spare the rod hate their children, but those who love them are diligent to discipline them.” But it is not appropriate to take such texts out of their ancient cultural context to justify violence towards children. As Christians, our reading of the Bible is done in the light of Jesus’ teaching and example. Jesus treated children with respect and placed them in the middle of the group, as in Mark 9:37: “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.”

The word “discipline” is for many people synonymous with physical punishment. But the word comes from the same root as “disciple”. Positive non-violent discipline is about guiding children and teaching by adult example. It is based on empathy, compassion and an understanding of how children develop. Positive discipline is both respectful and kind and it is the best way to promote self-discipline.

People often express concern that banning corporal punishment will mean that many good and loving parents will face prosecution for “light” physical chastisement. But as in other countries where children enjoy equal protection under the law, parents will not be charged and prosecuted unless doing so is necessary to protect the child from significant harm. We want to emphasise that law reform should go hand in hand with support for parents, widespread education and the promotion of positive discipline.

Through working with others and honouring children’s human right to equal protection under the law, we can put our faith into action and make significant progress towards a less violent society.