

Christian Statement supporting the removal of the “reasonable punishment” defence

We believe that legislation to remove the defence of “reasonable punishment” is crucial because it reflects the compassionate, non-violent society we want for all children.

Physical punishment of children has for too long been a common part of our culture. But physical punishment as a form of discipline is incompatible with the core religious values of respect for children’s human dignity, justice and non-violence. There are no circumstances under which this painful and humiliating practice can be justified.

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 through the lens 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.*

We want to emphasise that law reform must go hand in hand with support for parents, widespread public education and the promotion of positive, non-violent discipline. But children should not have to wait for public opinion to change, or for the delivery of better services to families. While the law sends the message that it is defensible to hit a child, children will continue to be hit. And in “at risk” families, children may be exposed to severe assaults in the name of discipline.

The word “discipline” is for many people synonymous with physical punishment. But the root meaning of the word is “to teach” and positive non-violent discipline is about teaching children by adult example. It is based on empathy, compassion and an understanding of child development and is both respectful and kind. It involves supporting and guiding children and it is the best way to promote self-discipline.

People often express concern that banning smacking will mean that many good and loving parents will face prosecution for “light” smacking. But as in the many other European 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.

Evidence of the harm caused by physical punishment in the short and long-term is well documented and we are aware that its legality continues to undermine the work of child protection and parent educators.

This is an opportunity for us to honour children’s human right to equal protection and make significant progress towards a just and peaceful society.

In order of signing

The Most Revd Barry Morgan, Archbishop of Wales
The Very Revd Geoffrey Marshall, Dean of Brecon

The Bishop of St David's, The Rt Revd John Wyn Evans

The Revd Peter C Noble, *Lead Chaplain Cardiff Bay Local Ecumenical Partnership, Goleulong
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The Revd Simon Walkling, Synod Moderator Elect for the United Reformed Church National
Synod of Wales

Michael Jagessar Assembly Moderator Elect for the United Reformed Church General
Assembly of Wales

Datganiad Cristnogol yn cefnogi dileu amddiffyniad “cosb resymol”

Rydym ni o'r farn bod deddfwriaeth i ddileu amddiffyniad “cosb resymol” yn hanfodol oherwydd bod hynny'n adlewyrchu'r gymdeithas drugarog, ddi-drais rydym am ei sicrhau i bob plentyn.

Mae cosbi plant yn gorfforol wedi bod yn rhan gyffredin o'n diwylliant yn rhy hir. Ond mae disgyblu trwy ddefnyddio cosb gorfforol yn anghydnaws â gwerthoedd crefyddol craidd parch at urddas dynol plant, cyfiawnder a dulliau di-drais. Ni ellir cyfiawnhau'r arfer poenus, sarhaus hwn o dan unrhyw amgylchiadau.

Mae rhai grwpiau Cristnogol yn defnyddio eu crefydd i gyfiawnhau cosb gorfforol, ac efallai y byddant yn dadlau bod cyfiawnhad i hynny mewn testunau ysgrythurol megis Diarhebion 13:24: *Mae'r sawl sy'n atal y wialen yn casáu ei blentyn; mae'r un sy'n ei garu yn ei ddisgyblu o'r dechrau cyntaf.* Ond amhriodol yw tynnu testunau o'r fath allan o gyd-destun eu diwylliant hynafol er mwyn cyfiawnhau trais tuag at blant. Fel Cristnogion, rydym yn darllen y Beibl trwy lens dysgeidiaeth ac esiampl Iesu. Roedd Iesu yn trin plant â pharch ac yn eu rhoi yn y canol, fel y gwelwn ym Marc 9:37: *Mae pwy bynnag sy'n rhoi croeso i blentyn bach fel yma am eu bod yn perthyn i mi, yn rhoi croeso i mi.*

Rydym am bwysleisio bod rhaid i ddiwygio'r gyfraith fynd law yn llaw â chefnogaeth i rieni, addysg gyhoeddus eang a hyrwyddo disgyblaeth gadarnhaol, ddi-drais. Ond ni ddylai plant orfod aros i'r farn gyhoeddus newid, nac i deuluoedd dderbyn gwell gwasanaethau. Tra bod y gyfraith yn cyfleu'r neges bod modd amddiffyn y weithred o daro plant, bydd plant yn parhau i gael eu taro. Ac mewn teuluoedd “lle ceir risg”, gall plant wynebu ymosodiadau difrifol yn enw disgyblaeth.

I lawer o bobl mae'r gair “disgyblaeth” yn gyfystyr â chosb gorfforol. Ond ystyr gwreiddyn y gair yw “dysgu” ac ystyr disgyblaeth gadarnhaol, ddi-drais yw dysgu plant trwy esiampl oedolion. Mae wedi ei seilio ar empathi, cydymdeimlad a dealltwriaeth o ddatblygiad plant, ac mae'n barchus ac yn garedig. Mae'n golygu cynnal a thywys plant, a dyna'r ffordd orau o hybu hunan-ddisgyblaeth.

Mae pobl yn aml yn mynegi pryder y bydd gwahardd smacio yn golygu bod llawer o rieni da, cariadus yn wynebu erlyniad am smacio “ysgafn”. Ond fel yn y gwledydd eraill niferus yn Ewrop lle mae plant yn mwynhau amddiffyniad cyfartal o dan y gyfraith, ni fydd rhieni'n cael eu cyhuddo a'u herlyn oni bai bod hynny'n angenrheidiol i amddiffyn y plentyn rhag niwed sylweddol.

Mae digon o dystiolaeth wedi ei chofnodi ynghylch y niwed a achosir gan gosb gorfforol yn y tymor hir a byr, ac rydym yn ymwybodol bod cyfreithlondeb cosb o'r fath yn parhau i danseilio gwaith addysgwyr rhieni ac amddiffyn plant.

Mae hwn yn gyfle i ni anrhydeddu hawl dynol plant i amddiffyniad cyfartal a chymryd cam pwysig tuag at gymdeithas gyfiawn, heddychlon.