

Press Release

Discipline of children: Parents must lead by example

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The parliamentary committee on Social Development has continued to debate the provisions of the Children's Amendment Bill. The Bill covers a wide range of essential services and issues relating to children. It includes a proposed abolition of corporal punishment.

Children in South Africa are physically, emotionally and socially the most vulnerable members of our society, yet they do not enjoy equal protection under the law and in fact are given the least protection against physical violence than any one else.

"Although supporters of corporal punishment refer repeatedly to 'spanking' and 'loving parental corporal punishment', they are sugar coating what for many South African children includes beatings with belts, fists, planks and hosepipes as well as humiliating and degrading insults." Said Samantha Waterhouse Advocacy Manager for Resources Aimed at the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (RAPCAN)

Children who presented at hearings before the committee in August this year indicated that adults are still able to beat children as and when they see fit, they called on government to provide programmes that will build positive and guiding relationships between parents and children.

Media articles indicating that the committee was intending to fine parents misrepresented the committee's discussion. *"The committee indicated that fining parents is not desirable and that they would prefer that parents be assisted through referral to parenting programmes and other support"* Said Paula Proudlock of the Children's Institute at UCT.

"We recognise that children must be disciplined, this can be achieved through a range of other measures which do not include inflicting pain and violence against a child" "children learn by example and parents must be supported and capacitated to provide this." Says Waterhouse. *"We live in a country plagued by interpersonal violence, this cycle is fed by the fact that many children are exposed at young ages to violence in their families, we must find new strategies to intervene in this culture of violence as early as possible"*

RAPCAN along with a number of other NGOs is calling for the following:

- For Government to recognise children's right to be protected from all forms of violence, and prohibit parental corporal punishment.
- The development of resources for prevention and early intervention programmes to teach parents positive parenting and discipline skills.
- An approach to the prosecution of parents that recognises that prosecuting parents may not always be in the best interests of the child where access to support programmes work towards strengthening the family.

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Other organisations supporting prohibition include: South African Council of Churches, Mthatha Child Abuse Resource Centre, Childline South Africa, Centre for Child Law UP, Community Law Centre UWC, Quaker Peace Centre, South African Human Rights Commission