

MEDIA STATEMENT

Positive discipline only long term solution to developing children into responsible adults

Cape Town, 16 September 2007 – Following community consultations on the draft Children's Amendment Bill that were held in four provinces during August, the Portfolio Committee on Social Development announced that public hearings will be held in Parliament on Tuesday, 18 September 2007.

The National Assembly will consider some of the issues that were raised during the provincial consultations, and will afford another platform to various groups to discuss the merits of banning corporal punishment in homes, as included in the current draft of the Bill.

Children and youth who also presented during the provincial consultations gave unanimous support for the ban of corporal punishment in homes and recommended the promotion of positive and guiding relationships between parents and children.

Their views are strongly endorsed by a working group on corporal punishment, which includes child rights advocates and experts on prevention and management of abuse and neglect, child development, child law and child care from various civil society and faith based organizations, such as the SA Council of Churches (SACC).

“What the ban will achieve, in essence, is to protect all children regardless of who they are or where they live, while introducing measures to develop and popularize positive methods to discipline children,” says Keith Vermeulen of the SACC.

Another member of the working group is Childline, whose Joanne van Niekerk says:

“Shifting from physical punishment to positive discipline is a long-term solution which will help us decrease the levels of social and family conflicts and violence and develop today's children into well-adjusted and more responsible adults.”

“Positive discipline which excludes beatings and smacking improves how parents relate to children. It does not lessen parents’ rights to discipline children, nor does it erode their parental control. On the contrary, it strengthens family relationships and builds better communication, trust and respect,” explains van Niekerk.

Positive discipline is the core message of the working group, which presented this and other arguments during the public hearings, emphasizing that South Africa needed to:

- develop resources for prevention and early intervention programmes, including teaching parents and child minders positive parenting skills;
- strengthen services for children living on the streets and improving their access to early childhood development services; and
- improve systems that operate child and youth-care centres.

The current draft Bill addresses these recommendations. It recommends effective and positive disciplining of children while obligating the state to provide parents and the public with information and education on positive child-rearing strategies that are based on non-violence, self-discipline and respect for the human rights of others.

The Social Development committee will also hear submissions from groups that are against the ban of corporal punishment.

Despite such calls to exclude the ban from the final Bill, numerous valid reasons exist to oblige parliament – and society – to outlaw smacking and hitting of children as a way of disciplining them. The organizations and bodies represented in the working group are aware of numerous reports and instances which indicate that many South African children are subjected to beatings with belts, sticks, cables and hosepipes on a daily basis.

“We mustn’t underestimate the contribution of violence experienced in childhood to the violent nature of our society,” concludes Carol Bower, an independent consultant specializing in child rights and prevention of abuse.

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Additional information for reporters and editors:

Five studies conducted since 1997 show evidence that on average, the behaviour of children whose parents use corporal punishment got worse. They also demonstrate a strong association between corporal punishment and children's aggression and anti-social conduct.

Traditionally, African communities and cultures have an integral and progressive approach toward disciplining children. As examples, two isiXhosa sayings recommend anti-violent relationships and means of resolving conflict with children. They are:

“Imbeko ayikhiwa ngoswazi” (Respect cannot be built with a stick)

“Induku ayinamzi” (Beatings do not build a home).

Similar expressions exist in other southern African languages. An isiZulu proverb says that you cannot raise a child with a stick – *“umntwana akakhuliswa ngoswazi”* – which is paralleled in the xiTsonga proverb that you do not raise a family with a stick – *“nhonga a yi aka muti”*.

A number of religions agree: Judeo-Christian and Islamic texts tell of the importance of kindness and respect towards children as the cornerstone of adult and social relationships with the younger generation. So, while some within churches and religious communities support corporal punishment, many others believe that it is no longer appropriate in today's world – where any violation of a person's human rights may be regarded as an unacceptable way of correcting undesirable or anti-social behavior. A more contemporary idiom, “hurt people hurt people”, sums up the traditional saying that “violence begets violence.”

Issued on behalf of the working group on ban of corporal punishment

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