

Between 1996 and 2022, 14 bills were introduced in Parliament to ban corporal discipline. Supporters of these bills see all corporal discipline as ineffective and harmful to children.

# Should Parents be Permitted to Use Corporal Discipline?



## The Underlying Principle:

- > Parents, not the civil government, are in the best position to raise their own children. The Canadian government ought to respect the institution of the family and the role of parents and should not interfere except in cases of criminal abuse or neglect.
- > There are a variety of parenting styles on everything from approaches to discipline to use of screen time to nutritional choices. The government must not prescribe particular parenting methods for families.
- > Banning corporal discipline (otherwise referred to as 'physical discipline' or simply 'spanking') criminalizes parents who believe physical discipline is an effective way to guide and teach their children.

## Evidence:

If corporal discipline were in fact proven to be harmful to children, there would be reason to support banning it. The evidence, however, tells us otherwise.

- > Studies in support of banning corporal discipline often fail to distinguish between harsh physical punishment and careful, measured physical discipline as defined by the current law. Instead, findings on physically aggressive hitting are commonly applied to other contexts without clarification.
- > There is strong evidence to suggest that when physical discipline is administered within the limits of Canadian law, it is as good as or better than other forms of discipline.
- > Studies fail to prove the commonly held belief that all forms of physical discipline cause behavioural problems in children.
- > The methods used to supposedly prove that physical discipline is harmful would call into question other discipline methods including those that are more commonly believed to be effective, such as timeouts, warnings, talking about the risks of various actions, or even receiving help from professionals such as psychotherapists, educators, or physicians.
- > Supporters of banning corporal discipline fail to demonstrate effective alternative methods.



## International Example:

In 1979, Sweden became the first nation in the world to outlaw all physical discipline. Criminal statistics show a corresponding increase in crimes against minors and crimes by minors. Additionally, parents in Sweden are less willing to impose any disciplinary consequences or make decisions for their children.

**“The decision not to criminalize [corporal punishment]... is not grounded in devaluation of the child, but in a concern that**

**to do so risks ruining lives and breaking up families**

**– a burden that in large part would be borne by children and outweigh any benefit derived from applying the criminal process”**

– Former Chief Justice Beverley McLachlin



## Questions to ask:



- #1 Do you agree that parents have the authority to raise their own children and should be able to do so in the way they believe is best, without undue interference from the state?
- #2 Do you agree there is a lack of evidence that careful, measured corporal discipline harms children?
- #3 How will you ensure that parents are not criminalized for using mild corporal discipline?

*For more information on this issue, check out ARPA Canada's policy report on Corporal Discipline!*