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No to the Use of Physical Punishment

Barnardos believes that we, as a society, need to make the statement that hitting a child is as unacceptable, indeed as unlawful, as inflicting violence upon an adult. Ireland has signed up to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which requires prohibition of all forms of corporal punishment. However, corporal punishment is still permitted in the home and care settings by the existence of the common law defence “reasonable chastisement”. This effectively sanctions physical intervention as an acceptable form of punishment of children.

In 2005, European Committee of Social Rights found Ireland to be in breach of its human rights obligations under the European Social Charter due to its failure to protect children from physical violence by their parent or guardian.

While legislation is required to signal the message that slapping a child as a disciplinary measure is unacceptable, further work with parents in using alternative approaches to managing difficult behaviour is needed. Through our work, Barnardos are focused on assisting parents to deal with problems within the home in a positive manner. Slapping a child is not a solution and we encourage preventative and other disciplinary measures, consistent with maintaining a child’s human dignity.