



# Parents' use of physical discipline: The thoughts, feelings and words of Australian children

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*We [can] help adults see things  
in a different way ...*

- 1. Why are children physically punished? Children's explanations**
- 2. Why do parents either make a decision to hit their child, or hit their child without forethought? The child's perspective**
- 3. How do children describe the surroundings in which children are hit?**
- 4. What actually happens when a parent hits a child? What the child sees, hears, and feels**
- 5. How are adults who hit children perceived by children?**
- 6. How do children think adults' feel after hitting a child?**
- 7. How do children behave and feel after they have been hit?**
- 8. What do children think of this sequence of events?**

*To say ... through the hit... "don't do it again"*

*(10 yo girl)*

*...to put the child back in line...the act that they did was that bad that they needed to be fixed or they needed discipline...and a quick fix was just to hit (16 yo boy)*

*... you've been naughty or you've done something wrong (9yo boy)*

*... they've done something bad (9yo girl)*

*...if you're a really naughty person and you answer back and stuff ... they get very annoyed and they get up and give you a smack (9yo boy)*

*For kicking the footy inside... we made heaps of marks on the wall. Kicking your brother... running away ... swearing at a policeman. I did that once. I got smacked for it... (9yo boy)*

*[My brother] ... accidentally scratched my Dad's car and he picked him up off his bike and dragged him along to the back door with one arm... (12 yo girl)*

*Dad said 'you're not the parent...you shouldn't be doing any of that [hitting your sister]' ... I got smacked then and I got sent to my room (12 yo boy)*

*I often argue ...I don't mean to swear but ... she'll get all angry ... and Mum might squeeze my arms really tight, really near the muscles, and that hurts. (12 yo girl)*

*... it's the only way the child will learn (9yo girl)*

*...if you don't get hit or smacked... you tend to keep on doing it because to you, you think it's okay... (14 yo boy)*

*If it gets to the point where they've been warned and threatened... I think I would have to resort to that (16 yo boy).*

*... adults would get very very frustrated sometimes, and ...they ... get frustrated enough to, not to seriously hurt the child, but to shake them or slap them or something (13 yo girl)*

*Mum ...and...Dad... just get really angry (10 yo boy)*

*They might get out of control or they might just be so angry that they... poke or hit (12 yo girl)*

*... they can't hold their temper (9 yo boy)*

*... it just gets too much for the parents and ... they can't just sit down and talk ... (14 yo boy)*

*... they think it's the best way. Like they might have been smacked or something when they were younger... they think that telling off ... won't get the message through and they have to physically hurt them (12 yo boy)*

*... because people have been doing it for so long... it's just what they do (11yo boy)*

*I think most people ... think it's the way. It's just something that happens in life (12 yo boy)*

*... I think people just wanna do it. You have the choice of smacking or not, and they choose to smack... they were prob'ly smacked when they were children, and they think it's still the right way (12 yo boy)*

*[Parents] are just being sort of lost not knowing what else to do (13 yo girl)*

*Sometimes they go overboard... I don't think a lot of parents mean to smack, or want to smack... it just happens like all of a sudden. (12 yo girl)*

*... when you smack someone, you feel better (11 yo boy)*

*... it's basically just frustration... like it's ... a bit punishment, but I think it's a just a bit letting out feelings. (13 yo girl)*

*... who's really stopping them? It's a tough job you know... [parents] do a lot for the kid (10 yo boy)*

*Parents don't smack children in front of other people usually... (12 yo girl)*

*...if you were smacking your child would you really want people to watch you smack your child ... to think, 'why did you do that? You could have done something else' (12 yo girl)*

*...the child will probably get embarrassed that it's [sic] getting hit and ... might want to cry... if it's a public place...they probably won't want everybody watching (12yo boy)*

*...usually they do it [hit] when no one else can see...because more and more it's becoming not so common...It's probably just as common, but ... some people are starting to see that that's not the way and...other people ... just wanna keep doing it, but they don't wanna get in trouble, so they just do it under cover (12 yo boy)*

*If [an adult] physical contact with [another adult], like punching 'em, it's against the law... And that's exact same for smacking. But if it's in your house, if you're a kid...it's OK because they're your kids... if you are a kid, it doesn't really matter; because you don't have any, you barely have any say (9yo boy)*

*They just have their hand up, and the little child is standing down, and they ... slap them (8yo girl).*

*You hear a loud bang [made by] someone else's hand. A big person tells 'em off; punishing you (12 yo girl)*

*The adult's face, they get really mad and they start getting their, they get quite angry, and they start yelling out, an' you can hear like, like they come up and their face is going red, like eeeeeee like that, like that they're feeling really mad. So they can't control their temper, so they just hit them (9 yo boy)*

*...[the adult's] got really mad so they started hitting you with their hands on your bottom and it really really hurts...[children] may understand or they may not...sometimes it leaves red marks, it's that hard (9yo girl)*

*[Dad] has a much louder voice than Mum. He'd scream, and he has a much bigger and harder hand... he sometimes still smacks us... he'd probably shove us in our room and not let us out, and then he'd just be angry*  
*(12 yo girl)*

*...large hand on bottom, pain is inflicted...It hurts. Sometimes you like, ...get a red mark...A smack, a big kaboom...like when the hand hits, like going really fast, and then it hits you really hard, and 'cause you're only a child and parents are a lot stronger, so that's why it hurts*  
*(9yo boy)*

*When someone just puts their hand up and just brings it forward and ... instead of grabbing 'em...just slap them. It could be hard or soft or anythink*  
*(8yo girl)*

*A smack is when someone gets their hand and smacks them with the front...it hurts a lot...You pull your arm back, get the person, and smack them on the bum ...throw your arm at them, and you hit them (9 yo boy)*

*It's not a very nice thing to do to people. They just mainly swing their arm and hit you (8 yo girl)*

*...it's the same thing as being told off but different sort of. The smack is a bit worser because you get something on your body but telling off you don't get anythink... [a smack] hurts and you feel the pain inside. (8 yo girl)*

*...sometimes parents think it is sort of their right, and it's not the parent's right to seriously physically hurt their children... parents have just gotta respect children more, which can be hard if they're being a pain*

*(13 yo girl)*

*[Parents] should respect their children ... not just smack them ... sure they'll be good, but is that what you wanna be doing with your kid, intimidate them ...hit them and yell at them... so they're good* (10 yo boy)

*Instead of adults using their mind and their head they use action instead* (9yo girl)

*I don't think your children will like respect you as much* (14 yo boy)

*I think my Mum and Dad have like actually matured in a way because they haven't smacked me since I was like four.* (12 yo boy)

*It prob'ly depends on the person, but they prob'ly feel ...a little bit sad, have a bit of regret but... if they do it regularly, it would prob'ly be fairly normal. (12 yo boy)*

*They would feel bad about themselves, guilty ... for actually hurting their own child and having to do that. (9 yo boy)*

*She'd feel the same, the same way she felt when she was going to do it [hit me] ...Like not wanting to do it, and feeling bad inside because she did it (8 yo boy)*

*The adults would feel bad about it, would feel guilty ... in which case there's no point, because I don't think it teaches the child much (13 yo girl)*

*... they feel like sad that they've actually hit you an' they don' wanna hit you, they just do it because they get very angry and they can't hold their temper. (9 yo boy)*

*... in pain it doesn't hurt the adult, in pain it hurts the kids more, but in the brain it hurts the adult more... in the mind. (9 yo boy)*

*... in so much pain if it's really hard, but ... I know I shouldn't have done it, but they shouldn't have smacked me either, so we're both in the wrong (12 yo girl)*

*Very sad because the child's the one that's getting hurt...thinking, "Oh no, I'm going to get hit, I'm hitting, I've been hit" and...then your heart just goes down... you get very sad' (10 yo girl).*

*Very, very, very, not feeling very comfortable and saying, 'I won't do it again because I might get hit again' (10 yo girl)*

*Often it hurts a lot and I often get a red mark, and so I'd start crying... (12 yo girl)*

*[Children] feel like they wanna smash something or they kick the wall or break something (11 yo boy)*

*Very heartbroken, sometimes... I just blurt it out all in my books, I just write down, 'oh you did this'. They've hurt my feeling for one. They've kind of let me down, 'cause I really trust. And if I was young I would say 'Oh, I really trust my parents, they won't do anything 'cause they're taking care of me' and then as soon as you get hit, you think 'oh no, I shouldn't have trusted' you know, because then you're really breaking your trust...in what you think of your parents or anyone. (10 yo girl)*

*I felt quite scared you know and went off ... I'm not happy I was hit and smacked... [I felt] very bad... he dragged me around a bit ... he didn't really hurt me... but ... I was very scared, an' you don't like your Dad doing things like that ... (10 yo boy)*

*It was just a hit on the backside and go to your room, and you sit up there and you think about it... you get hit, it hurts and you don't want to be hurt again so you don't re-do the action or you're gunna get hurt...you're just sore for a while, you can't sit down ...I don't remember it hurting that much but I guess the fact that you don't want to be hit again ...I guess the pain, you don't want to go through that again. (16 yo boy)*

*I reckon animals are more well treated ... in some cases (11 yo boy)*

*...slightly subordinate to adults ... I think you should respect all people... I personally don't think it's appropriate for them to physically punish me any more... that should be my say really, 'cause I think I am becoming a bit of a person, not a child anymore*

*(13 yo girl)*

*Being smacked is like being treated like something very little and not important to the rest of the world*

*(12 yo girl)*

*Being squashed (11 yo boy)*

*... sad, like you gunna cry ... (9yo boy)*

- *[Hitting children] will teach them to smack, and then it would just keep going...I think it's easier to talk so then you can, like, settle it, and it doesn't like turn into an argument with crying and stuff 'cause it's hurting (10 yo girl)*
- *[Hitting] hurts the kids, and it upsets the adults if they've done it, so it's stupid both ways... it hurts both people... if you're a parent, they're sad, and the kid's sad...It's stupid to smack kids. If it hurts the parents, an' it hurts the kids, what in the world point is there for doing it? (9 yo boy)*
- *It's wrong, it hurts. If they didn't like being smacked they shouldn't do it... they should ...find out another way instead of smacking (12 yo girl)*

*I just don't think it's really achieving much. It's just making the children feel alone, and it's just making them feel bad. You should make them feel that they've done something wrong ... but instead ...you're acting like a child yourself, you're just being just as bad as the child by smacking them (12 yo boy)*

*It's giving the message that it's OK to smack ... It's just a big cycle (12 yo boy)*

*I just think it's the wrong thing. I think there's too many bad things about it. It hurts ...their feelings and physically, and I wouldn't want [my children] to feel that way against me (12 yo girl)*

*If they're feeling bad about hitting their kid, they shouldn't be doing it...if the adult was hurting doing it at all, he would stop it (10 yo boy)*

*I'd like to say to parents... this is not the way to do it, to discipline, by hitting a child. Why? Think about it for a minute, any hitting, you can see a bruise but you can't see how it mentally affects someone and they'll carry that right through their childhood, right through their adulthood (12 yo girl)*

*Smacking is bad. It's sort of teaching, making us, wild like dogs. Like, they'd never smack criminals...you try and set us apart...saying 'we're important, we have rules', and you [adults] kinda break them (10 yo boy)*

*... the child will grow up... with that intention of smacking, with hurting people is the right thing*

*(12 yo boy)*

*... if they're really angry and feel really bad, and they don't wanna hurt their children they'll stop themselves.*

*(12 yo girl)*

*...if it's discipline they've done it on purpose...when you weigh up all the pros and cons of smacking, smacking is wrong... (16 yo boy)*

*Last time the adults prob'ly got smacked was when they were a little kid, and they wouldn't know what it felt like. I mean if I went up and smacked them, then they'd know, but children don't normally go up to their parents and go 'stop behaving like that' and smack them. (12 yo boy)*

*People are children too (8 yo girl)*

[Children and adults] *should be treated equally the same, like one shouldn't get more than the other in ways of better treatment, like treat them better just because they're older or younger* (10 yo girl)

[An adult] *should be a model, a role model to them and [adults] shouldn't smack them* (12 yo girl)

...children's rights should not be interpreted as a threat to adult or parental rights, which causes conflict which would not otherwise exist, but as an instrument which merely makes public existing conflict, inviting resolution.

(Cashmore, 1997:41, drawing on Minow, 1990)

Justice for children is a moral imperative. If we want children to respect others, we have to respect them...if the right to respect is not built into their early development and education and into government policy and services for them, there can be no serious prospect of developing a human rights culture in our future.

(Rayner, 2000:vi)

*[Children are] small and they can't fight back; you [adults] shouldn't take advantage of them for that reason. I think [children] have rights too... adults are ... there to teach their children, and if they do it the right way ... [it] can be some of the happiest times of your life, but if treated badly it can wreck the rest of your life.*

*(12 yo boy)*

*It's just not the way, hitting, like you shouldn't hit people, because there's a better way ... than hurting someone. (12 yo boy)*