St John’s Ambulance supports the call on the Welsh Assembly to fulfil its promise to
ban the physical punishment of children. We are committed to all measures that
protect children from harm and promote their health and well-being.

We consider the current defence of “reasonable punishment” for common assault of
children (under section 58 of the Children Act 2004) to be dangerous for the
following reasons:

- The definition of common assault excludes anything that causes a visible
  injury to a child but does not exclude assaults that risk serious injury, for
  example blows to head or stomach, or assaults that cause children pain or
  humiliation. The law is also potentially discriminatory as children with dark
  skins are less likely to show bruising.
- A small but significant proportion of parents escalate from ‘mild’ smacking to
  serious assaults. This is because smacking, while sometimes effective in
  stopping a child misbehaving in the short term, is ineffective in teaching the
  child to behave well in the long term. Parents, particularly those in stressful
  circumstances, then go on to smack harder.
- Research studies have shown that physical punishment in childhood is linked
  to many adverse behaviours, including aggression in childhood and adult life,
  mental health problems, substance-abuse, domestic violence, criminal and
  antisocial behaviour.
- Even a mild smack may have unintended consequences. For example a
  blow may hit the wrong target where the child is struggling and, for example,
  cause eye or ear injuries, or may cause a small child to topple over and hurt
  themselves on furniture. Thus no smack is ever ‘safe’.

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