

Should smacking ban get backing?

Most mothers believe the best way to discipline a naughty child is with a sharp smack. But this way of bringing kids into line could be banned.

Five European countries including Norway and Sweden have already outlawed smacking. Germany and Scotland are also considering a ban. So are we way behind the times and should we find other ways to discipline children?

Child experts have mixed views. Penelope Leach, author of best-selling *Baby and Child*, campaigns with anti-smacking group EPOCH.

She says "Children learn from example and every time you smack your child you tell him that aggression is okay.

"We all want our children to be self-disciplined but that comes through setting good examples not through endless punishment. The rule is to say no and mean it."

Lynette Burrows, mother of six and author of *Good Children*, says: "Smacking is the best way to deal with a young child who doesn't understand argument. It's much less harmful than using emotional punishment which can easily escalate and damage a child.

"Spoilt children are dreadful and if you don't smack your child when he's naughty he's likely to be spoilt because you are teaching him he can get away with things.

"It's completely wrong for so-called experts to say they know better than parents. And the problems if this law were passed would be truly horrifying."

Here, TESSA CUNNINGHAM talks to mothers with opposing views.

YES Violence solves nothing

Nurse Alice Cook has vowed never to raise a hand to her three-year-old son Jay – but she says that doesn't mean she's soft on discipline.

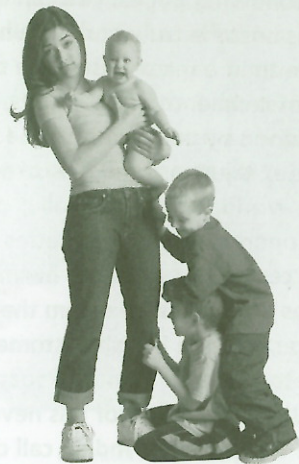
Alice, 39, who lives with husband Mick in London, says: "I would say I'm pretty firm with Jay. I set definite limits on what he can and can't do. He knows when I say no I mean it and I'm not going to give in even if he whines.

"It's much better to reward good behaviour and to teach by example. There are some things I insist on like bedtimes and brushing his teeth and I will not tolerate him hurting other children or drawing on the walls.

"But if he disobeys I don't punish him. I remove him from the situation and explain to him why I think he has behaved badly. For example he used to smack the cat. It never crossed my mind to smack him back.

"Instead whenever he did it I gave the cat a big cuddle. That showed Jay he wasn't going to get any attention by behaving naughtily and after a couple of weeks he stopped doing it.

"I try to keep one step ahead. I've made my home as childproof as I can and don't run round making sure he doesn't break things.



"The child will remember being smacked but not why.

"You may start off with a light slap but if the child keeps doing the same thing the thump will get harder. I definitely believe smacking should be banned.

"Of course he makes me furious but it's wrong to take out your frustrations on your child by hitting him. Instead I leave the room to cool off."

NO It helps kids to behave

Claire Elford was a nanny for seven years before starting her own family. Her job convinced her that naughty children who are never smacked can end up spoilt. Claire, 27, lives in London with husband Craig and children Amelia, three, and 18-month-old Archie.

She says, "The parents I worked for were often very soft on discipline and didn't believe in smacking so the kids got away with murder.

"They would whine until they got what they wanted by wearing their mums down. Many of them ended up spoilt because they knew they could get away with things.

"I vowed that was not going to happen with my children. I love them and I want them to grow up to be nice likeable people – not little monsters who think they can always have their own way.

"I definitely believe that light smacks are a very good way to discipline small children.

"They are too young to be reasoned with and simply get angry and frustrated if you sit them down and give them a long lecture on rights and wrongs. When Amelia is naughty I warn her not to carry on and if she persists I give her a light smack on the hand. She may cry but then she comes for a cuddle and we make up.

"Smacking defuses a situation. It's much more scary for a child to see her mum losing her temper than for the child to have a quick smack before the situation gets out of hand.

"But certainly by the times she's 10 I wouldn't expect to be smacking her."