

VIOLENCE BREEDS VIOLENCE

THE CASE AGAINST SMACKING

Written by Penelope Leach and Peter
Newell of EPOCH

The law protects adults from violence at the hands of anyone else. Why shouldn't it protect children too?

What's so wrong with hitting children?

Most people agree that it is wrong to settle arguments between adult people with blows. And children are people too. Why should they not have equal protection from all forms of violence – particularly when they are among the most vulnerable physically?

Physical punishments are not only wrong, they don't work either. A whack on the bottom may stop a child for that moment. But it won't stop them doing the same thing later on because being hit does not teach anything useful. It doesn't teach children how you want them to behave, and it doesn't teach them to try to please you. Research evidence shows that children who have been slapped or hit are usually so overwhelmed with anger and hurt feelings that they cannot remember what they were punished for.

Most parents in Britain hit their children

A research project at Nottingham University found that 62 per cent of the 700 parents interviewed hit their one year-old child; almost all (97 per cent) hit their four year-old – and seven per cent of these four year-olds are hit at least once a day. By the age of seven, at least eight per cent are being hit once a day and 41 per cent once a week or more. Three-quarters of seven year-olds are either hit or threatened with an implement (91 per cent of boys and 62 per cent of girls). By the age of 11, 18 per cent are being hit once or more a week. The figures in this research, by John and Elizabeth Newson, which are based on face-to-face interviews are probably underestimates. And they find that hitting is not decreasing. Interviews with a large sample of parents

as recently as 1985 found that almost two thirds are still smacking.

What do you mean by 'physical punishment'?

Any action which is meant to cause pain to a child, such as hitting, slapping, smacking, with a hand or with a slipper, strap, stick or other implement is physical punishment. It also includes violent shaking and any kind of forcible imprisonment, such as being locked in a room or cupboard or tied in a cot.

Surely a tap on the legs doesn't count?

Yes it does. Lots of parents 'tap' babies, but many, many more smack four year-olds. Hitting doesn't work except to relieve parents' feelings. If you let yourself smack your toddler for fiddling with the TV, what can you do when the toddler fiddles again except smack again – harder? And what can you do with the five year-old who refuses to stay in a bedroom to 'cool off' except lock the door. . . ?

Surely you need to use physical force to keep children safe?

There is a difference between using your strength to snatch a child away from a hot stove or prevent them running into a busy road, and intentionally causing pain as punishment.

Won't every parent sometimes lose his or her temper and hit their child?

While hitting children remains acceptable, the answer is probably 'yes' even though hitting other adults (or even pets) is not acceptable. If hitting children was equally unacceptable, most parents would never do it and the few who sometimes did would regret it and try not to.

Is the ordinary kind of smacking that goes on in loving homes worth all this fuss?

Violence does breed violence and is a problem in today's society. Hitting at home is not the only cause of that violence, but there is plenty of evidence to suggest that ending hitting at home would help to reduce it. Children model their behaviour on their parents. Parents who use physical punishment are directly teaching their children that physical force is an acceptable way to get what you want. Research shows a clear link between being hit at home and being a bully at school – and when children who have been physically punished grow up they are more likely to use violence themselves. If we want less violent adults we have to

Office Of The
Commissioner For Children

'Physical
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Between April -
July 1989

'The majority of British parents we have interviewed seem to believe that physical punishment is an inevitable and probably necessary aspect of ordinary child upbringing'

John and Elizabeth Newson

bring them up believing that physical force is not acceptable.

Aren't ordinary physical punishment and child abuse two quite different things?

The acceptance of physical punishment in our society causes a dangerous confusion. When serious cases of child abuse and battering have been investigated, they have often been found to have started with occasional smacks. Also most people responsible for seriously injuring children are found to have been physically punished in their childhood.

Even light blows can accidentally cause serious injury to small children – 'clips round the ear' have burst ear drums and permanently damaged hearing, and smacks catching a child off balance have led to falls and head injuries.

What should replace physical punishment?

Abandoning physical punishment doesn't mean abandoning good behaviour, or consistent limits for children. Rewards work better than punishments for children, just as they do for adults. And the best responses to bad behaviour are those that the child can see are directly linked to it: your immediate disapproval, irritation or anger, the removal of the toy or playmate the child is hurting, or the ending of the game or meal which is being ruined for everyone else.

HOW CHILDREN LEARN TO BEHAVE

Your child wants to learn. And in particular he or she wants to know how to behave, because, whether it looks that way or not, your child wants to please you. But children can only learn at the pace their particular physical, mental and emotional development allows. Trying to teach them to behave in ways that aren't yet possible for them, or trying to make them grow up faster than they can, will only store up sad and unnecessary trouble for you both. The very quickest way to lose your child's co-operation is to ask the impossible and imply that unless you get it, your child will lose your love.

Babyhood

Your baby is born human – but doesn't know what it takes to be a person. To find out, he or she needs a long apprenticeship.

Like any apprentice your child learns by being with you: imitating you, trying things out and getting them wrong, trying again and getting them right.

Practical ways to avoid smacking babies

Causing crying is against your own interests, because you spend half your time trying to stop your baby crying.

- ❑ Force isn't the best way to get something from a baby, who will hold on tighter the more you pull. You don't need to smack: offering a swop usually works.
- ❑ 'Baby-proofing' living space is worthwhile. In Sweden all young families can get free safety gadgets to 'reduce family friction'. In the UK you'll have to buy and fit them yourself, but every stair gate, fireguard or cupboard lock is worthwhile. If there is nothing dangerous or breakable in reach, there is less to worry about.
- ❑ You don't have to smack hands that get into danger: grabbing them is quicker and attracts just as much attention.
- ❑ If you feel about to lose your temper, make sure the baby is in a safe place like a cot or playpen and leave the room until you've cooled down. The baby may cry at being left, but that's better than crying at being hit.

From the earliest months, when your baby starts to be able to tell you apart from everyone else, he or she is totally dependent on you, emotionally and physically. Your power is absolute, and because of that must be used gently.

Babies cannot learn how to behave 'well' or 'properly' until they have learned to behave in any particular way on purpose. A baby's behaviour is either an involuntary expression of physical need (crying for hunger) or a spontaneous reaction to your behaviour. A baby does not understand you are separate and therefore s/he doesn't know that you do not feel as they are feeling. The waking and the crying, the desire to play at 3am may displease you, but is not meant to. Whatever your baby does or does not do, it is not to get at you.

Toddlers

Because curiosity to find out is much

Practical ways to avoid smacking toddlers

Try to avoid direct clashes: they teach toddlers nothing. Try to find a diversion or distraction instead.

- Don't even hope that your toddler will play safely without adult attention for more than a few minutes. Instead, cultivate eyes in the back of your head, and the ability to do two (or five) things at the same time.
- Use your superior size and strength to defuse situations rather than to hurt. A child who won't come out of the bath can be lifted. A child who hits out at you or the dog can be held safely and told 'No - that hurts'.
- If your child has driven you to distraction and will not listen to you and you've started to deliver a smack, divert the blow to the table or your knee. The sound will interrupt the behaviour and the child will hear what you say far better than if s/he was crying.
- If your child has a tantrum, try not to join in: try turning your back to the child and ignoring the scene. Singing to yourself may distract you from the noise and your desire to yell back. If you're in public and embarrassed, bodily remove the child to the nearest private screaming place. Do be ready with comfort when the yells change to tears; real tantrums terrify toddlers.
- Make sure you have some adult company for yourself some of the time.

stronger than memory, toddlers find it difficult to learn rules and regulations, like leaving the TV alone, or not dabbling in food. If you keep showing toddlers what they must and must not do, they will learn, but slowly. Your anger when your child does something you've told them and told them not to do' is pointless and unfair because he or she cannot understand.

By two or three, your child has discovered that he or she is separate from you, but only half welcomes this. One bit wants to get on with growing up and becoming independent; another bit finds

that scary and wants to be back as a babe in arms. That's why you get shouts of 'me do it 'self' one moment and tears and clinging the moment you take them at their word and leave them to struggle. Giving toddlers room to grow but not enough space to be lonely makes this a difficult stage for both of you.

When toddlers get angry and frustrated, throw tantrums, bite and kick, they are angry with themselves. The more competent and in control they feel, the calmer and easier they will be. And it is your constant calm and kindly control that provides those feelings. Toddlers cannot be 'good' or 'naughty' on purpose because they do not yet know right from wrong or understand what makes the difference. Why is it good to turn out a sandcastle and bad to turn out your bowl of pudding? Why do grown-ups say it is dirty to dabble in pee in the potty, when they dabble in bowls of soapy water?

Want those toys picked up? Tell her she must and she may easily refuse because she doesn't want to. If she refuses you can scold, shout, smack, reduce her to a jelly of misery - but you'll still have to pick up the toys yourself. But say 'Bet you can't pick all those up before I've made your bunk bed', and there's a good chance that she'll do the job with no tears for either of you. And while she's doing it, she's learning that toys live in the cupboard rather than on the floor.

Pre-school children

The payoff for helping toddlers *want* to do what they *ought* to do is a pleasant time for all of you. And that's very important. But it is even more important when your toddler is growing up. By the time they are three or four, they will understand most of your feelings; will remember most of your instructions and will be able to foresee the results of their own actions. When they reach that stage they will be able to choose to be 'good' or 'naughty'.

If your child reaches that stage feeling that you are basically loving, approving and on their side, they will want, most of the time, to please you. So, with many lapses, they will behave as you wish. But if they reach that stage feeling that you are against them, they may already have decided that trying to please you is hopeless; that it is no use minding when you are cross because it happens so often, and that it is too dangerous to love you because you seem not to love them.

Schoolchildren

At five, six and seven your child can

'Abandoning physical punishment doesn't mean abandoning good behaviour.'

'Children can only learn at the pace their particular physical, mental and emotional development allows.'

behave well, but don't expect they always will; remember your child is not a saint: he or she has moods and makes mistakes – don't you? And children sometimes do what they want instead of what they know they should, as everybody does. Children are people, just like the rest of us, but people with a lot still to learn.

This is often an age for filthy clothes and language, for defiance, cheek and 'dumb insolence' as well as for real sympathy, generosity and caring.

Children need parents to explain to them about grown-up behaviour and feelings, but they still need to be allowed to be children. They need assurance that one day they will become an adult person but that in the meantime, however idiotic their behaviour may be, they are loved and valued.

POSITIVE DISCIPLINE – WITHOUT VIOLENCE

Helping a child to learn good behaviour takes confidence: confidence that you are good enough as parents; and confidence to see bringing up children as a matter of co-operation rather than authority.

Rewards not punishments

People learn much more through co-operation and rewards than through coercion and punishments. Children are no exception. They do not need tangible rewards like sweets and presents (although they'll enjoy those when you feel like giving them). The reward your child really wants is your attention. They want to be noticed, talked to, to share things with you. Sometimes they will want all your attention, and whine and cling if they can't have it. At almost every stage of childhood, children will do whatever they must to get your attention; if certain behaviour guarantees that you'll ignore them until they stop, they will stop pretty quickly.

Unfortunately, parents don't always use their attention to encourage 'good' behaviour and discourage 'naughtiness'. Quite often parents reward the behaviour they most dislike. A child who is not doing anything particularly bothersome may get ignored on a 'let sleeping dogs lie' basis. Their parents don't volunteer companionship, or even join in with any enthusiasm if the child tries to share a game or a joke with them. Eventually the child gets lonely and tries to attract attention, to interrupt, to recite rude words or show off, and then parents do pay attention. It's cross attention, but the child would much rather have that than have none at all.

Practical ways to avoid smacking older children

Everybody gets angry or fed up with children sometimes. Not hitting them doesn't mean bottling up your feelings.

- ❑ If a child is driving you crazy, try clapping your hands together as loudly as you can. The noise will interrupt whatever is going on.
- ❑ If you find you've started to say 'stop that this minute or I'll ...' substitute 'scream' for 'smack you'. Do it, as loudly as you can.
- ❑ If your child is provoking you, going too far and refusing to listen to you, don't waste energy on a crescendo of unheeded shouts that end in a smack. Crouch down so your two faces are on the same level; grasp the child firmly by the upper arms so s/he cannot avoid looking at you and then talk.
- ❑ If you feel irritation building inside you but your child hasn't really done anything, try removing yourself for five minutes' peace. Turn on the radio, gaze out of the window ... It doesn't matter what you do as long as it enables you to simmer down. Removing yourself means your child loses your presence and therefore your attention, which can be a kind of punishment.

Who gets not just attention but sweets in the supermarket? The child who is whining and bullying or the child who is 'helping with the shopping'? It's usually the tiresome child who is bribed to co-operate, but if there are sweets on offer at all they should really go to the one who is co-operating already.

Some parents are afraid to offer too much attention or too many treats because they are afraid they will spoil their children. No amount of attention, play, hugs, fun or even presents can spoil a child if they are given willingly. Only when a child discovers the power to force those things from their parents against their better judgment do they risk becoming spoiled. Your child makes good use of all the time you can possibly give because as well as enjoying your company,

s/he learns from being with you. However busy you are, try not to take shortcuts all the time.

It's quicker to suggest TV to a bored nine year-old than to play a game. It's quicker to close a five year-old's mouth with sweets than to listen to their story. It's quicker to give them smacks than explanations, but these shortcuts will not advance your child's development.

Learning self-discipline will take your child years (most of us go on learning it all our lives). You are not just trying to get through each day ensuring that your child obeys you; you are trying to build up your child's self-discipline and conscience which will keep them doing what they should even when there's nobody to tell them what to do or see if they do wrong. Children need time and attention so that they can learn from every tiny incident, every instruction. By keeping children safe, and protecting others from them, you are teaching them to keep themselves safe and to care for other people. While you control them, you are helping them to control themselves. And while you explain the reasons behind your orders – like honesty, justice or respect for others – you are offering those values to your children.

In the long run, your child will do as you do rather than as you say, so your example will have more effect than your orders. When your child is being tiresome, you ignore him or her. When you can't ignore the behaviour it makes you cross and you say so. Children want your approval so honest disapproval is usually effective, especially if you follow it with a chance for the child to wipe the slate clean and start again.

If you decide your child needs a punishment, make sure it follows from the 'crime' so that s/he has a chance to learn the lesson you mean to teach. If you've forbidden a child to ride a bike onto a road and they do, it's logical to take the bike away for a while. You're teaching that bikes can be dangerous; that you're concerned for the child's safety and that you'll enforce safety rules for as long as they are needed. A different punishment, such as 'no TV' has nothing to do with safety or bikes. Hours later when the programmes begin and the row is forgotten, the punishment will teach nothing. As for a spanking: nothing will make your child believe that you do it for his or her sake: 'I hurt you because I don't want you hurt' is too complicated a message for any child or adult.

Above all, talk. People who say children prefer quick smacks to boring lectures don't realise that they

Do as you would be done by:

Unless you are polite, considerate, co-operative and honest, your child will never learn to be.

Be honest: Your child needs to know when you are angry and why; when you are over-worked and distracted, and when you are happy too. When you are wrong, you need to admit it. If you say 'I'm sorry I was cross, it wasn't really your fault', you'll gain respect and your child will be more likely to apologise when it's his or her fault.

Always explain: It is an insult to a child's intelligence to expect them to follow unexplained orders.

Would you? It is only your explanations that will make trivial incidents part of learning. The only exception is in emergencies when explanations may have to wait.

Be positive – Do's work better than don'ts, just as rewards work better than punishments. Ration 'don'ts' or your child will simply stop hearing them.

Keep 'don't' for critical rules: Use it carefully or it will lose its effect. 'Don't climb that tree – it's not safe' will forbid the tree once and for all, but 'don't interrupt while I am talking' will muddle because it sounds like a rule but isn't – there are occasions when you would want to be interrupted.

Rules are especially useful in keeping small children safe, but do remember that once you have made a rule it has to be kept. 'Don't ever cross the road without a grown-up' is an excellent rule until the day that you bend it by asking your child to 'pop over for the paper'...

are not bored when parents tell them what they think, feel and want. They want adults to treat them the way other people treat each other – and they don't want to be hurt any more than adults do. Much is made of the fact that other animals control their young with nips and blows. But are you rearing a lion cub or a person? Human beings have the unique

'Corporal punishment of children by their parents should be strongly discouraged'.

Some

countries do

legal, and others

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use violence

cannot be done

in other countries

Recommendation by the Council of Europe meeting on violence in the family, 1977

advantage of being able to talk. Why waste it?

THE LAW AND HITTING CHILDREN IN THE UK

The law takes a very clear stand against all forms of deliberate physical assault – except hitting children. Parents and other carers have long-established rights in 'Common Law' to use 'moderate and reasonable' physical punishment. Excessive punishment may become a criminal offence – but the courts have tended over the years to be very slow to defend children even from harsh beating.

The law which forbids cruelty to children – the Children and Young Persons Act 1933 – includes a specific exemption allowing physical punishment. Section 1(7) of the Act states: 'Nothing in this section shall be construed as affecting the right of any parent, teacher or other person having lawful control or charge of a child or young person to administer punishment to him'.

An early aim for the organisation EPOCH (see page 8) is to get this legal acceptance of physical punishment repealed. It was added to our law a century ago, in 1889. The first attempt to change was made in the House of Lords early in 1989, during debates on a new Children Bill. Peers from all parties agreed with the aim, but nothing was changed.

To indicate that physical punishment is no longer acceptable, and to give children equal protection from violence, parents will have to lose their Common Law rights to hit their children; new laws will be needed to remove these, similar to those in Scandinavia and Austria.

Hitting people as a punishment in prisons and the armed forces has long been dropped, and in August 1987 the UK became the last European country to end school corporal punishment (but pupils in independent schools whose fees are being paid by their parents can still be beaten). Abolition in all child care institutions has also been promised. Now is the time to move on and provide children with equal protection in their homes as well.

BANNING PHYSICAL PUNISHMENT – IT DOES WORK

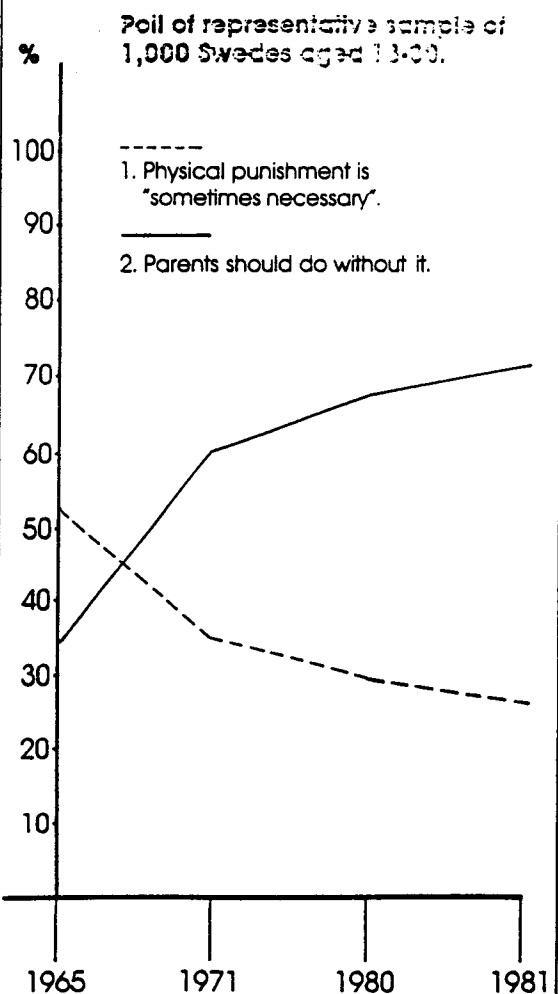
More than five million children in Europe are already protected from all forms of physical punishment – by parents and everyone else. Five European countries – Sweden (1979), Finland (1984), Denmark

(1986), Norway (1987) and Austria (1989) have adopted laws which prohibit parents hitting their children. The purpose in each case has been educational: to change attitudes, not to punish parents. There are no criminal penalties attached to the bans, and the reforms have not led to a rush of children taking their parents to court.

In Sweden, school corporal punishment was outlawed in the fifties; in 1966 the legal provision confirming parents' right to use physical punishment was dropped, and in 1979 a new law was passed stating: 'A child may not be subjected to physical punishment or other injurious or humiliating treatment'.

Opinion polls have shown a dramatic change in the attitudes of Swedish parents: between 1965 and 1981 the proportion believing that 'physical punishment is sometimes necessary' reduced from 53 per cent to 26 per cent, and those believing that children should be raised without physical punishment increased from 35 per cent to 70 per cent.

The point of changing the law is to make sure everyone – including children – know that physical punishment is no longer acceptable.



'Children are entitled to care, security and a good upbringing.

Children are to be treated with respect for their person and individuality and may not be subjected to corporal punishment or any other humiliating treatment' Swedish Parenthood and Guardianship Code

SOURCES OF HELP AND ADVICE FOR PARENTS AND CHILDREN

Advice and Counselling in emergency

For parents:

Parentline-Opus

Aims: to prevent child abuse and maltreatment of infants and young children. Maintain a network of 30 locally based parentline groups.

National Office: 106 Godstone Road,
Whyteleafe, Surrey CR3 0EB
(01 645 0469).

Parent Network

Aims: to help improve relationships and communication between parents and children by setting up national network of parent support groups; runs programmes to train parents as leaders to establish local groups.

National Office: 44-46 Caversham Road,
London NW5 2DS (01 485 8535).

Parents Anonymous

Aims: to offer friendship and help to those parents who are tempted to abuse their child and those who have done so; provides information service and meetings, telephone counselling and visiting service for parents, staffed by volunteer parents; nationwide network of groups.

National Office: 6-7 Manor Gardens,
London N7 6LA (01 263 8918).

For children:

ChildLine

Aims: to provide a free national helpline 'for children in trouble or danger': freephone 0800 1111; information about ChildLine from Faraday Building, Queen Victoria Street, London EC4V 4BU (01 236 2380).

Children's Legal Centre

Aims: to promote recognition of children and young people as individuals participating fully in all the decisions which affect their lives; provides a free advice and information service for children and adults by letter and phone (2 to 5pm weekdays), covering all aspects of law and policy affecting children and young people in England and Wales. Publications include leaflets, handbooks, reports and a monthly magazine, *Childright*.

20 Compton Terrace, London N1 2UN
(01 359 6251).

We Welcome Small Children -

National Campaign: aims to improve

and promote good facilities for carers with small children and to encourage public places, shops, restaurants etc. to offer them a warm welcome.

93 Belsize Lane, London NW3 5AY
(01 586 3453 daytime).

Advice on child-rearing

There is lots of written advice on child-rearing for parents and other carers - look in any bookshop. But unfortunately, quite a few popular books still do not discourage the use of physical punishment.

Two books which provide a great deal of encouragement to avoid physical punishment as well as practical advice are:

The Parents' A to Z - a guide to Children's Health, Growth and Happiness by Penelope Leach (Penguin Books 1985).

This substantial handbook has a major section on 'discipline, self-discipline and learning how to behave'. It covers all ages from birth to late adolescence, the various stages in learning how to behave; common issues including obedience, lying, stealing, cheating, and violence; common disciplinary techniques including 'arguing and bargaining' and 'bribes and prizes'. It takes a very critical look at physical punishments including hitting and confining children to their room.

Baby and Child - from Birth to Age Five by Penelope Leach (Penguin Books, new edition 1989) - 'written from your baby or child's point of view because, however fashion in child-rearing may shift and alter, that viewpoint is both the most important and the most neglected'. It is organized in approximate age stages from birth up to five and a comprehensive index guides the reader to a wealth of useful day-to-day advice.

Children are People too: the Case against Physical Punishment, by Peter Newell, will be published by Bedford Square Press in July 1989.

Some of the national child welfare organisations are increasing their involvement in parent education and producing leaflets, booklets, videos etc: National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, 67 Saffron Hill, London EC1N 8RS (01 242 1626).

National Children's Home,
85 Highbury Park, London N5 1UD
(01 226 2033).

Barnardo's, Tanners Lane, Barkingside,
Ilford, Essex IG6 1QG (01 550 8822).

'Whereas in 1931
parents reported
"thinking twice"
before using any
physical
punishment, in 1988
parents simply said
they do not use it'.

Professor Adrienne
Haeuser, recording an
ongoing study of
results of Sweden's ban
on physical punishment.

EPOCH

End Physical Punishment
of Children

EPOCH is a new national organisation which aims to end physical punishment of children by parents and other carers. Launched in April 1989, it hopes to achieve its aim through public education, information, research and legal changes. Co-ordinator of EPOCH is Peter Newell, and Parent Education Co-ordinator is Penelope Leach, psychologist and well-known writer on parents and children.

'How can I help?'

You can become a supporter of EPOCH by making a minimum annual donation of £12 (£5 for students/unwaged); send it with your name and address to: EPOCH, PO Box 962, London N22 4UX.

You will receive a summary of progress, and details of publications at least every six months. (When funds permit EPOCH will start a more frequent newsletter).

You can promote the aims of EPOCH –

- ☐ by becoming a supporter and helping us to run a strong and effective campaign;
- ☐ by helping with our national educational campaign – write for details;
- ☐ by writing to local and national newspapers, and to your MP;
- ☐ by raising the issue in local and national groups of parents, professionals and others;
- ☐ by letting us know of relevant activities or debates in your own area;
- ☐ by persuading others to become supporters – ask us for more of these leaflets.

APPROACH – Association to Protect All Children Ltd – is a registered charity linked to EPOCH which will carry out related research and education 'in all matters concerning the protection of children and young people from physical punishment and all other injurious, humiliating and/or degrading treatment whether inside or outside the home'.

Covenanted donations can be made to APPROACH for a minimum of four years: this enables tax to be claimed back and makes your gift worth approximately a third more. Write for further details to:

APPROACH, PO Box 962, London N22 4UX.

Help start a new EPOCH for children now!