

A study into the views of parents  
on the physical punishment of children  
for the Department for Children, Schools  
and Families (DCSF)

October 2007



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# Introduction

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This report presents the findings of a survey among parents conducted by Ipsos MORI on behalf of the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). This study will form one of two strands of the Government Review of Section 58 of the Children Act 2004, which currently allows parents to resort to “mild smacking” (physical chastisement which does not cause bruises, reddening of the skin or swelling, does not leave a mark and does not cause mental harm) by allowing the use of a “reasonable punishment” defence in cases involving alleged assaults by parents on their children.

The primary objective of the research described here has been to provide an up-to-date, robust and neutral ‘baseline’ measurement of the views of parents on the physical punishment of children, against which any subsequent shift in opinion over time may be safely measured.

Key areas covered in this study include;

- The range of methods used by parents to manage their children’s behaviour;
- The circumstances in which parents have used or might use ‘smacking’ as a method of discipline;
- The incidence of smacking;
- Parents’ views on the effectiveness of smacking children and its acceptability;
- Parents’ views on whether or not the law should allow parents to smack their children.

**Methodology:** Questions were placed on two full waves of the Ipsos MORI Omnibus and, to ensure a particularly robust sample size of at least 1,000 parents with a child under 18 years old, ‘topped-up’ with a quarter of the sample on a third wave of the Omnibus, the regular Ipsos MORI survey among the general public. In total, a representative quota sample of 4,203 adults (aged 15 and over) was interviewed throughout England and Wales by Ipsos MORI. Of these, 1,822 are parents and therefore eligible to take part in this study.

In this report, we have used the following key definitions:

- **‘Current parents’** is the label we have applied to those who, at the time of interview, have at least one child under the age of 18 (whether living with the respondent or not living with the respondent);
- **‘Ever parents’** is the label we have applied to those who have children, but whose children are all 18+ years old;
- **‘All parents’** refers to anyone who has at least one child (i.e. those who have children aged under 18 and/or over 18).

Altogether, 1,204 **current parents** took part in this study, plus 618 **ever parents**, giving an **all parents** total of 1,822.

Interviews were conducted face-to-face, in respondents’ homes, using CAPI (Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing) between 27th July and 16th August 2007.

**Reporting:** In all graphs and tables, the figures quoted are percentages. The size of the sample base from which the percentage is derived is indicated. Note that the base may vary – the percentage is not always based on the total sample. Caution is advised when comparing responses between small sample sizes.

As a rough guide, please note that the percentage figures for the various sub-samples or groups generally need to differ by a certain number of percentage points for the difference to be statistically significant. This number will depend on the size of the sub-group sample and the % finding itself - as noted in the appendix.

Where an asterisk (\*) appears, it indicates a percentage of less than one, but greater than zero. Where percentages do not add up to 100% this can be due to a variety of factors – such as the exclusion of ‘Don’t know’ or ‘Other’ responses, multiple responses or computer rounding.

**Publication of Data:** Our standard Terms and Conditions apply to this, as to all studies we carry out. Compliance with the MRS Code of Conduct and our clearing of any copy or data for publication, web-siting or press release which contains any data derived from Ipsos MORI research is necessary. This is to protect our client’s reputation and integrity as much as our own. We recognise that it is in no one’s best interests to have survey findings published which could be misinterpreted, or could appear to be inaccurately, or misleadingly, presented.

# Summary of findings

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This study shows that smacking is *not* one of the most common methods used by parents for managing their children's behaviour and, in general, most parents believe there are more effective methods for managing children's behaviour than smacking.

There is also evidence that parents' attitudes towards smacking have shifted over time as smacking is less likely to be used/have been used by current parents than by ever parents, and there is often a correlation between parents' opinions on smacking and their age (with younger parents tending to hold more negative opinions about smacking than older parents).

However, around half of all parents think *it is sometimes necessary to smack a naughty child*, many say they have smacked at least one of their children and, at the current time, the majority of parents (both current and ever) think that *the law should allow parents to smack their children*.

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*Checked & Approved:*

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# The physical punishment of children: parents' behaviour

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## Methods used to manage children's behaviour

Most parents use a variety of techniques to manage their child(ren)'s behaviour. The method used by the largest proportion of all parents is praising good behaviour; the vast majority (70%) have used this method (see chart on Page 6). Around six in ten have used reasoning with their child (59%), approaching half (46%) have used rewarding good behaviour and the same proportion have stopped their child from doing something they like to help manage their behaviour.

In response to this question (*From this list, which of the following methods of improving or managing your child's behaviour have you used/do you use, if any?*), relatively few parents, around a quarter (24%), mention using/having used smacking. However, it is worth noting that, here, parents were not specifically asked if they have smacked their child, rather they were asked which of a range of methods form part of their behaviour *management* 'tool-kit'; it may be, therefore, that they regard smacking as a *sanction* rather than as a proactive management method (after the fact, rather than before the fact). When asked directly, further on in the survey, if they have smacked their child, a higher proportion say they have done so (discussed later in this report). It should also be noted that the behaviour of parents discussed throughout this document is self-reported so a degree of under-reporting is likely in relation to behaviours that respondents may think are less socially acceptable.

There is no significant difference between parents in different social grades for many of the methods used to manage children's behaviour, including smacking, shouting, stopping pocket money, making them do extra chores and not talking to them/paying them any attention. Those in social grade DE, though, are more likely to have used grounding (40% compared to 35% average) and less likely to report using a number of the other methods, for example, praising good behaviour – 57% compared to 80% (ABs) and 70% (C1C2s).

Mothers are more likely than fathers to mention using various techniques including: creating a diversion (38% v. 27%), 'counting to three' (32% vs. 26%), and smacking (26% vs. 21%). White parents are more likely than those in black and minority ethnic groups (BME) to say they use all of the methods in this study, apart from not talking to children/not paying them any attention, where there is no difference between the two groups (both 20%).

In terms of regional differences, parents in London are less likely than average to mention a number of methods, for example, grounding children (23% vs. 35%), reasoning with them (52% vs. 59%), shouting at them (32% vs. 45%) and smacking them (16% vs. 24%).

Parents in England are more likely than those in Wales to mention creating a diversion when children do something wrong (34% vs. 25%), rewarding good behaviour (47% vs. 35%), and using their own behaviour to set a good example (39% vs. 25%). There is no significant difference between the proportion of parents in England and Wales who mention smacking here.

The usage of many of the methods for managing children’s behaviour varies by the age of the parent. For example, praising good behaviour and stopping children doing something they like are less likely to be mentioned by parents aged 65+ (62% and 29% respectively) and 15-24 (54% and 22% respectively) than average (70% and 46% respectively). In particular, there is a clear correlation between smacking and parents’ age. As the table below shows, younger parents are much less likely to smack their child than older parents. The inverse relationship exists between parents’ age and use of making children take time-out. This suggests that opinions on parenting techniques have modified over time.

**Q. Please think about your child who lives with you/does not live with you and who is ... years old/when your child(ren) aged 18 and over was(were) younger. From this list, which of the following methods of improving or managing your child’s behaviour have you used/do you use, if any?**

	Total	15-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
<i>Base: All parents answering<sup>1</sup></i>	<i>(1,775)</i> %	<i>(95)</i> %	<i>(325)</i> %	<i>(497)</i> %	<i>(327)</i> %	<i>(227)</i> %	<i>(304)</i> %
Smacking them	<b>24%</b>	7%	14%	17%	28%	34%	44%
Making them take time out/go to the naughty step or naughty matt	<b>26%</b>	38%	38%	34%	24%	14%	5%

*Source: Ipsos MORI*

The chart overleaf also shows, as might be expected, that the top three methods used by parents to manage their child’s behaviour are also judged to be the most effective. For example, more than half as many parents say they find praising their child’s behaviour one of the most effective methods as say they use it (38% and 70% respectively). However, for other types of discipline this relationship is not as clear. For example, the number of parents who say they think setting a good example is effective is less than one third of the number who say they have used this method (11% and 38% respectively).

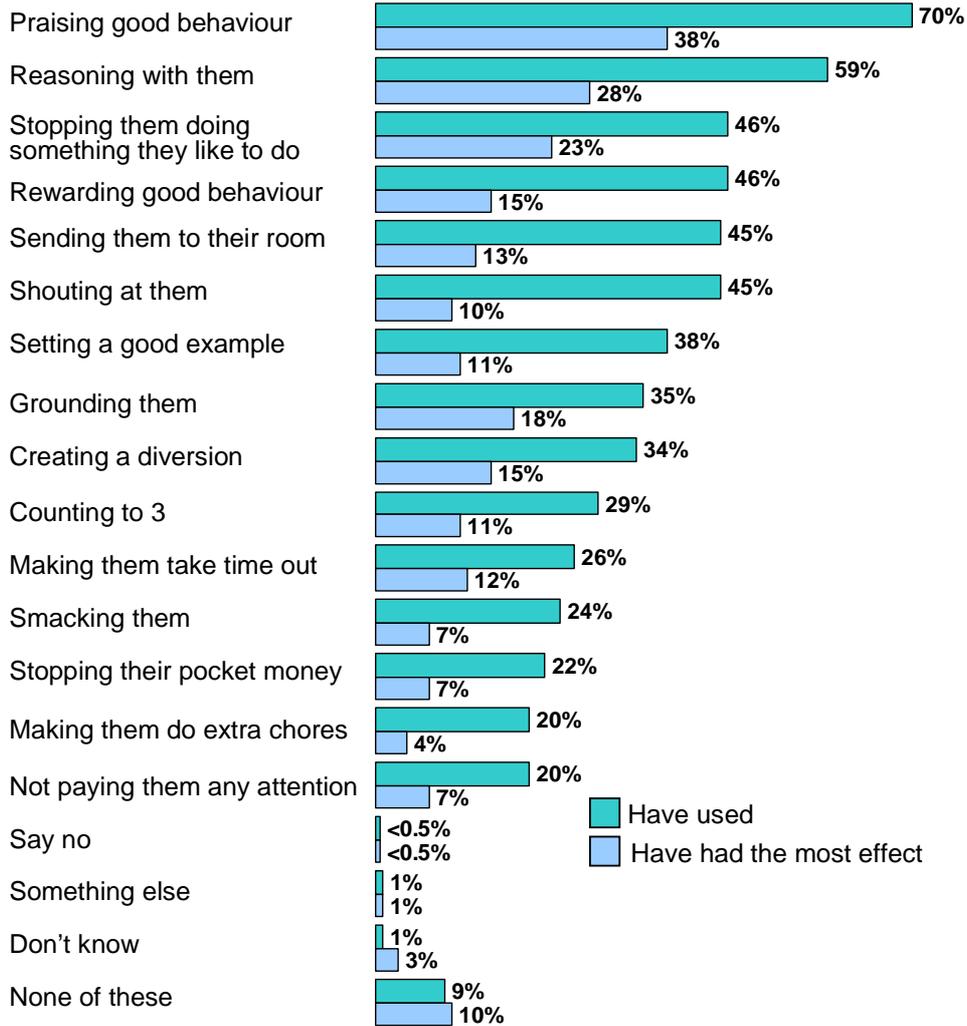
Similarly, although a quarter (24%) of parents say they have used smacking, only seven per cent think this is one of the most effective methods (i.e. less than one third of the number who have used smacking).

<sup>1</sup> This base does not include all parents as some current parents refused to give their child(ren)’s age(s) and so were not asked the question.

**Praising good behaviour is the most commonly used method for managing children's behaviour and it is also seen as the most effective**

Q Please think about your child who is ... years old/when your child aged 18+ was younger. From this list which of the following methods of managing your child's behaviour have you used/do you use if any?

Q And still thinking about your child who is... years old/aged 18 and over, which two or three have had the most effect on your child's behaviour generally speaking?



Base: 1,775 parents answering\*, 27 July-16 August 2007

\* This base does not include all parents as some current parents refused to give their child(ren)'s age(s) and so were not asked the question.

However, as the table below shows, among those parents who *do* mention that they have smacked their child, around three in ten believe it to be one of the most effective methods of managing their child's behaviour (28%): broadly on a par with praising good behaviour (29%) and stopping them doing something they like to do (26%).

**Q. And still thinking about your child who lives with you/does not live with you and who is ... years old/when your child(ren) aged 18 and over was(were) younger. Which two or three of these have/have had the most effect on your child's behaviour, generally speaking?**

	<b>Top 5 most effective methods</b>
<i>Base: All parents who use/have used smacking</i>	(429) %
Praising good behaviour	29
Smacking them	28
Stopping them from doing something they like to do	26
Reasoning with them	22
Sending them to their room	16

*Source: Ipsos MORI*

The chart overleaf shows how methods for managing behaviour vary depending on the current age of the child. Praising good behaviour is the only method that is one of the three most widely used methods across all age groups.

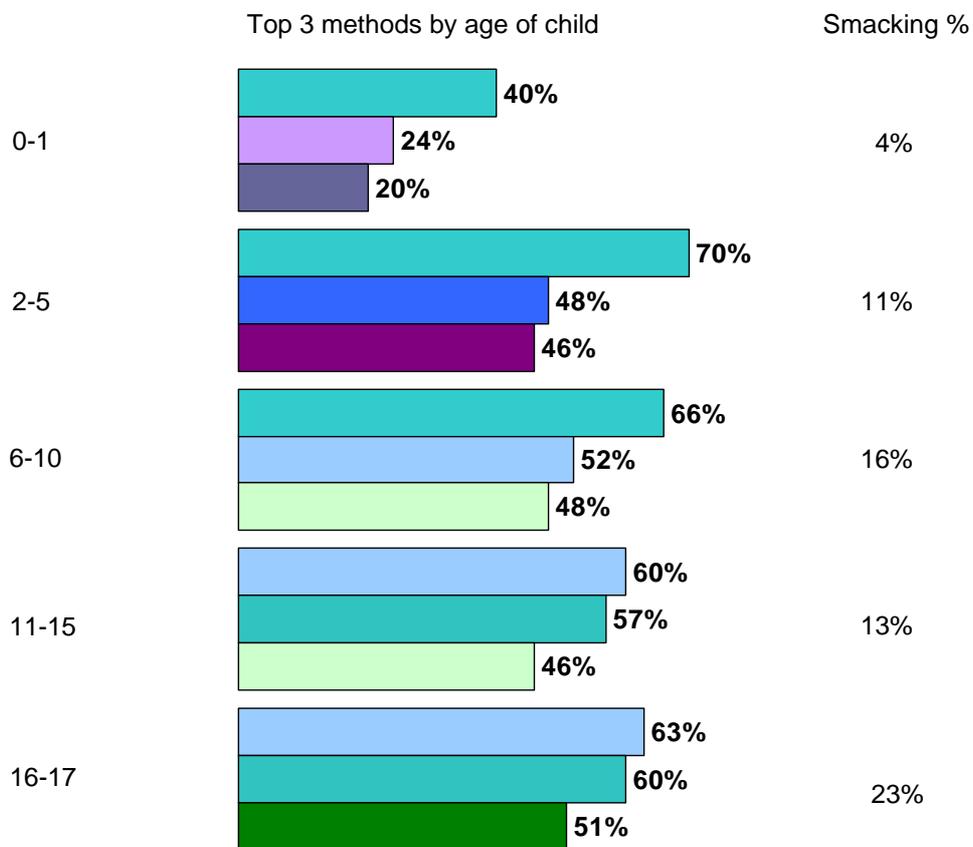
For children aged 0 to 1, the other top behaviour management methods used are creating a diversion (24%) and setting a good example (20%). Only four per cent of parents mention having smacked a child who is currently this age. Making a child take time out is one of the most commonly cited behaviour management tools for children who are currently aged 2 to 5 (48%), as is rewarding good behaviour (46%). Around one in ten (11%) mention that they have smacked their child who is currently in this age group.

The three methods that are most likely to have been used for managing the behaviour both of children currently aged 6 to 10 and 11 to 15 are praising good behaviour (66% and 57%), reasoning with them (52% and 60%) and stopping them doing something like to do (48% and 46%). One in six parents (16%) mention having smacked their child who is currently aged between 6 and 10, and around one in eight (13%) their child aged between 11 and 15. For the oldest group of children, aged 16 to 17, reasoning (63%) and praising good behaviour (60%) have again been widely used, but shouting at them also appears in the top three methods (51%). Almost one quarter (23%) mention having smacked their child who is currently in this age group.

It is important to remember that this question asks about methods that are used *or have been used* for the respondents' children; therefore it is likely that parents recall methods they used when that child was younger, as well as those they currently use. As parents are less likely to have recently smacked older children than younger children (discussed later in this report), the finding that parents are more likely to mention having smacked older children than younger children is another sign that methods of discipline used by parents have changed over time and that parents are now less likely to use smacking.

Q Please think about your child who is ... years old. From this list, which of the following methods of managing your child's behaviour have you used/do you use if any?

- Praising good behaviour
- Rewarding good behaviour
- Reasoning with them
- Stop them doing something they like to do
- Creating a diversion
- Shouting at them
- Making them take time out
- Setting a good example



Base: Current parents answering for children aged 0-1 (222), 2-5 (451), 6-10 (500), 11-15 (486) 16-17 (166), 27 July-16 August 2007

The chart below shows that although all the current parents' top methods for managing their children's behaviour are also included in the ever parents' top methods, there are some notable differences. In particular, smacking is included in the top mentions for ever parents (used by 40%), but not current parents (used by 16%). Again, this suggests that public attitudes towards smacking have shifted.

Other significant differences between current and ever parents in the behaviour management techniques they say they use include: current parents are *less* likely

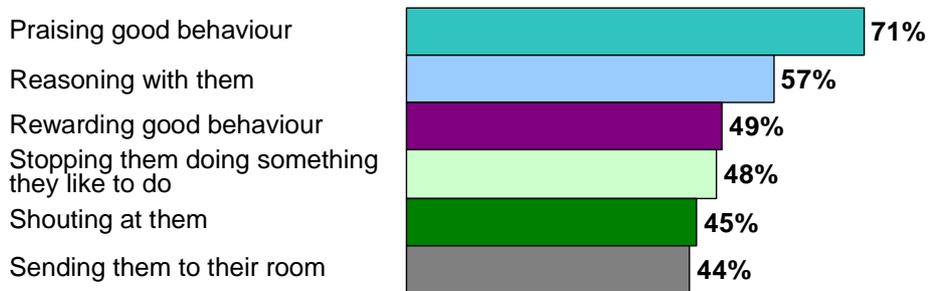
to use/have used reasoning with their children (57%) than ever parents (64%), while current parents are *more* likely to have used rewarding good behaviour (49%) than ever parents (40%).

**Ipsos MORI** **Ever parents are more likely than current parents to have smacked their child**

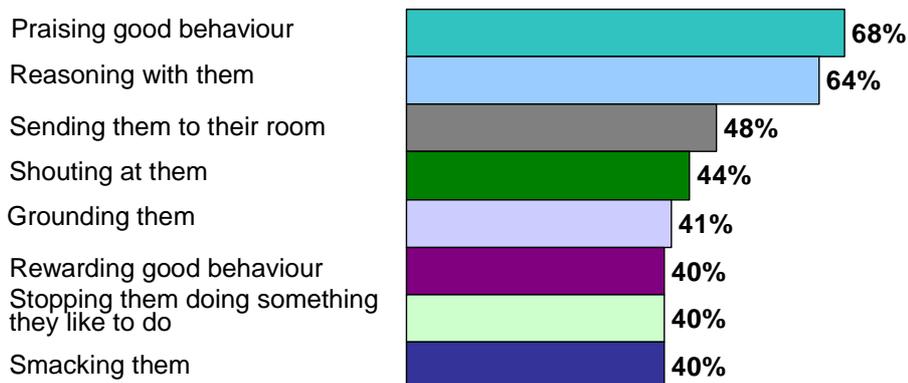
Q Please think about your child who is ... years old/when your child aged 18+ was younger. From this list which of the following methods of managing your child's behaviour have you used/do you use if any?

**Top mentions (40% or above)**

**Current Parents**



**Ever Parents**



Base: 1,775 parents answering\* (1,157 current parents, 618 ever parents), 27 July-16 August 2007

\*This base does not include all parents as some current parents refused to give their child(ren)'s age(s) and so were not asked the question.

## Incidence of smacking

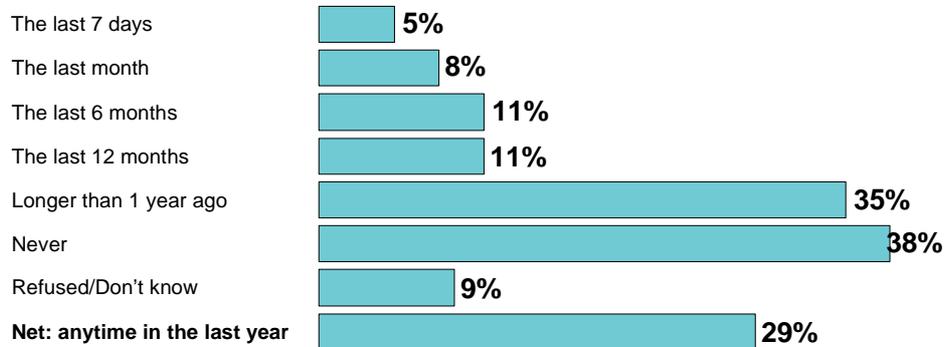
When current parents were asked *directly* how recently, if at all, they have smacked each of their children, almost two in five (38%) say they have never smacked any of their children. However, around three in ten (29%) say they have smacked at least one of their children at some time in the past 12 months and this rises to approaching six in ten (57%) who say they have smacked at least one of their children at some stage.

Ipsos MORI

### Around three in ten current parents have smacked their child in the past year

Q Please think about your child who does/does not live with you and is ... years old. Which of the options on this card applies to you?

I have smacked my child in ...



Base: 1,156 current parents answering\*, 27 July-16 August 2007

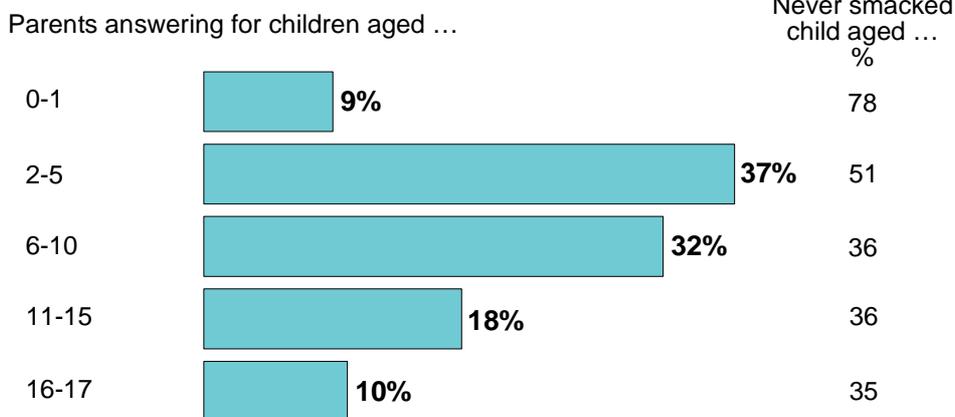
\* This base does not include all current parents as some refused to give their child(ren)'s age(s) and so were not asked the question.

As we might expect, the prevalence of (recent) smacking varies depending on the age of the child. Less than one in ten parents (9%) with a child aged 0 to 1 have smacked their child of that age within the past 12 months. Over the past year, parents are most likely to have smacked their child aged between 2 and 5 years old: 37% have done so, while just under one third (32%) have smacked their child aged 6 to 10 during this time period. Parents are less likely to have recently smacked older children, with around two in five parents (18%) of children aged 11 to 15 and one in ten parents (10%) of children aged 16 to 17 saying they have smacked their child within the last year.

## Almost four in ten parents with a child aged 2-5 have smacked their child of that age in the last year

Q Please think about your child who does/does not live with you and is ... years old. Which of the options on this card applies to you?

I have smacked my child in the last 12 months



Base: Current parents answering for children aged 0-1 (222), 2-5 (451), 6-10 (500), 11-15 (486) 16-17 (166), 27 July-16 August 2007

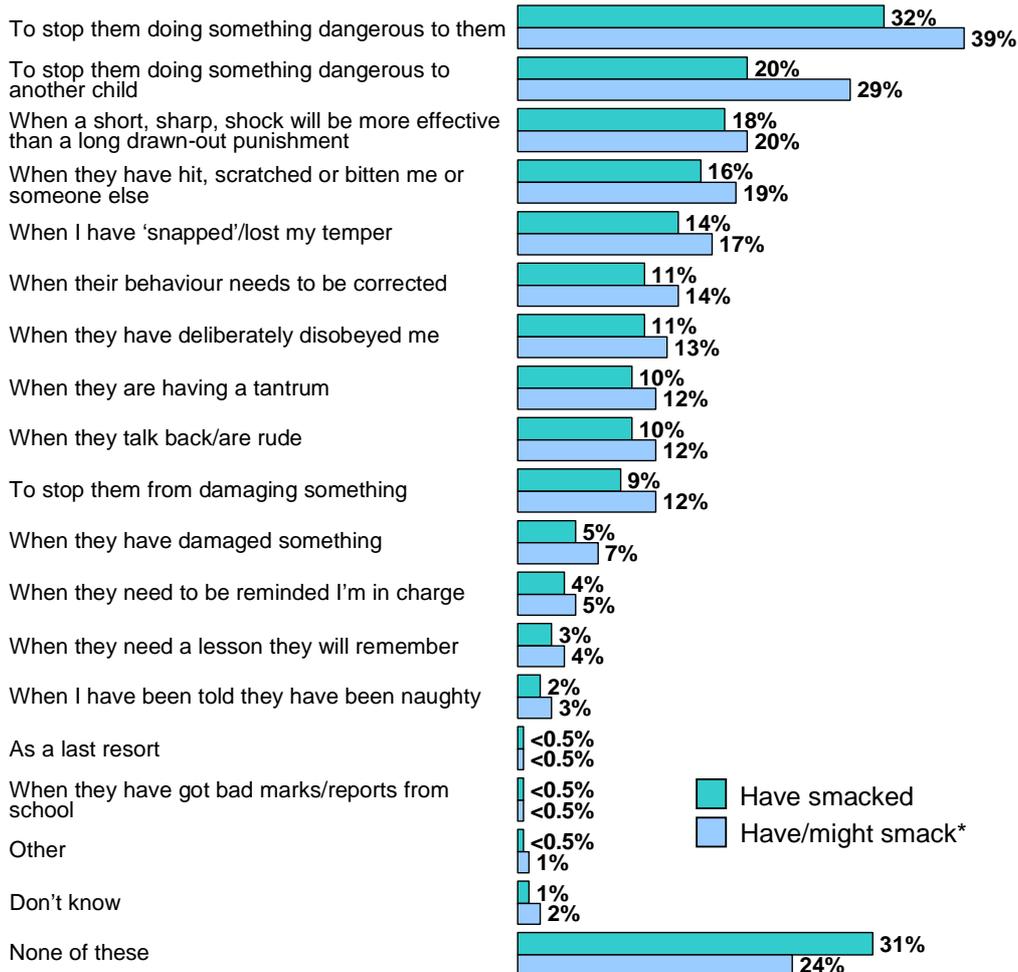
Women are more likely than men to have smacked one of their children in the past year (32% vs. 25%). Those parents who are aged 25-34 are also more likely than average to have done this (40% compared to 29% of all current parents). This may be related to the age of children that parents in this age group are likely to have (62% of parents this age have children aged 2-5 and 45% children aged 6-10). There are no significant differences by social grade, region, or ethnicity in this respect.

Those aged 15-24 are more likely than average to say they have *never* smacked any of their children (61% compared to 38% of all current parents); again this may be linked to the likely age of their children (57% have children aged 0-1). Those who are single are also more likely than average to say this (46%), as are BME parents (49%). There are no significant differences by gender, social grade or region.

The two most common reasons why all parents have smacked their children is to stop them doing something dangerous to themselves (32%), or another child (20%). This is followed by when parents have felt that a “short, sharp, shock” will be more effective than a long, drawn-out punishment (18%) or when the child has hit, scratched or bitten them or someone else (16%), and around one in seven (14%) say they have smacked their child simply because they have ‘snapped’/lost their temper. In contrast, less than one per cent say they have smacked their child due to bad school marks/reports.

## The most common reason for smacking a child is to stop them doing something dangerous

- Q From this list, please can you tell me in which of the following circumstances, if any, you have smacked your child(ren)?
- Q And in which of the following circumstances, if any, do you think you might smack your child(ren)?



\*Figures show the circumstances in which parents say they either have smacked or might smack their children combined

Base: 1,822 parents, 27 July-16 August 2007

The circumstances in which parents have smacked their children vary between current and ever parents. While both sets of parents are most likely to have smacked a child in order to stop them doing something which is dangerous to them (32% of current parents and 30% of ever parents), approaching twice as many ever parents than current parents (26% compared to 14%) say they have smacked when a short, sharp, shock will be more effective than a long drawn-out punishment. More than twice as many ever parents also say they have smacked when their child's behaviour needed to be corrected (18% compared to 8%).

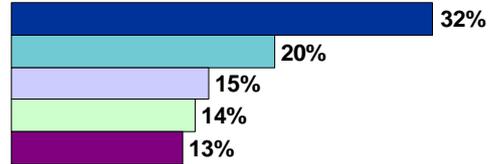
## Smacking circumstances vary between current and ever parents

Q From this list, please can you tell me in which of the following circumstances, if any, you have smacked your child(ren)?

### Current parents

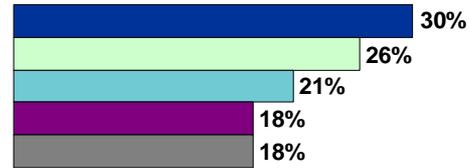
- To stop them doing something dangerous to them
- To stop them doing something dangerous to another child
- When they have hit, scratched or bitten me or someone else
- When a short, sharp, shock will be more effective than a long drawn-out punishment
- When I have 'snapped'/lost my temper

### Top 5 mentions



### Ever parents

- To stop them doing something dangerous to them
- When a short, sharp, shock will be more effective than a long drawn-out punishment
- To stop them doing something dangerous to another child
- When I have 'snapped'/lost my temper
- When their behaviour needs to be corrected



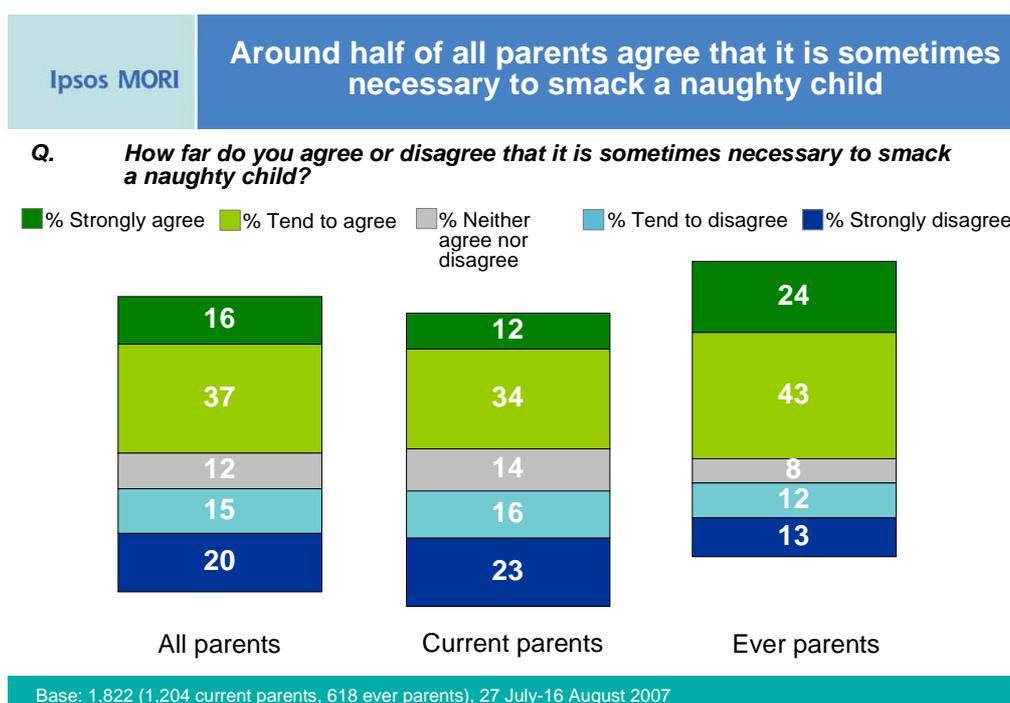
Base: 1,822 parents (1,204 current parents, 618 ever parents), 27 July-16 August 2007

# The physical punishment of children: parents' attitudes

As mentioned, almost six in ten current parents (57%) say that they have smacked their child at some point, but fewer than this, around half (52%) of all parents, agree that *'it is sometimes necessary to smack a naughty child'*. This compares to around a third (35%) who disagree, including one in five (20%) overall who disagree strongly.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) conducted a study in 1998 which asked respondents whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement *'it is sometimes necessary to smack naughty children'*. Around nine in ten (88%) agreed with this statement and around one in ten (8%) disagreed. The results are not directly comparable with the current study, as the ONS sample consisted of all adults (not exclusively parents), the question wording was slightly different and the methodology was also not identical. However, comparing the two does *indicate* that public opinion has shifted since 1998.

In addition, ever parents are more likely than current parents to agree that smacking is sometimes necessary (66% compared to 46%), as are older parents (bearing in mind, though, the considerable degree of overlap between these sub-groups): those aged 55-64 and 65+ are more likely than all parents to agree with this (60% and 72% respectively compared to 52%). There are no significant differences by gender or social grade in terms of those who agree, but parents in Wales are more likely to agree (64%) than those in England (52%), and parents in social grade AB are more likely than average to disagree (40% compared to 35%).



A higher proportion of parents, just under three in ten (27%), think it is always wrong to smack a child and say that they won't do it than say they are comfortable with the idea of smacking a child and will do it when they think it's necessary (20%). Around half (51%) fall between these two opinions and say they don't like the idea of smacking a child, but will do it if nothing else works.

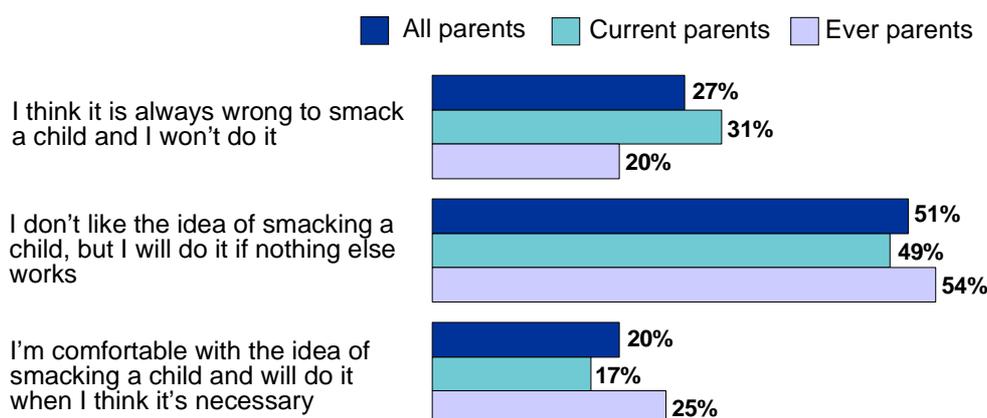
The majority of current parents who have smacked any of their children at some stage say they don't like the idea but will do it if nothing else works (64%). Around a quarter (24%) of this group say they are comfortable with the idea of smacking when necessary. Perhaps surprisingly, around one in ten (11%) of current parents who *have* smacked their child at some stage also later say they think smacking is wrong and they won't do it, as do five per cent of those who have smacked their child in the last year.

In line with the findings throughout this report, current parents are much more likely than ever parents to say that smacking a child is always wrong and they won't do it (31% compared to 20%), and much less likely to be comfortable with the idea of smacking and doing it when necessary (17% compared to 25%). Those aged 65+ are also much less likely than average to say they think smacking is always wrong (15% vs. 27%) and more likely than average to say they are comfortable with the idea (29% vs. 20%).

Parents in Wales are more likely than those in England to say they are comfortable with the idea of smacking and will do it when they think it's necessary (27% compared to 19%).

**Ipsos MORI** **Around half of parents will smack their child, even though they don't like the idea, if nothing else works**

**Q. From this list, which of the following statements comes closest to your personal opinion on smacking your child(ren)?**



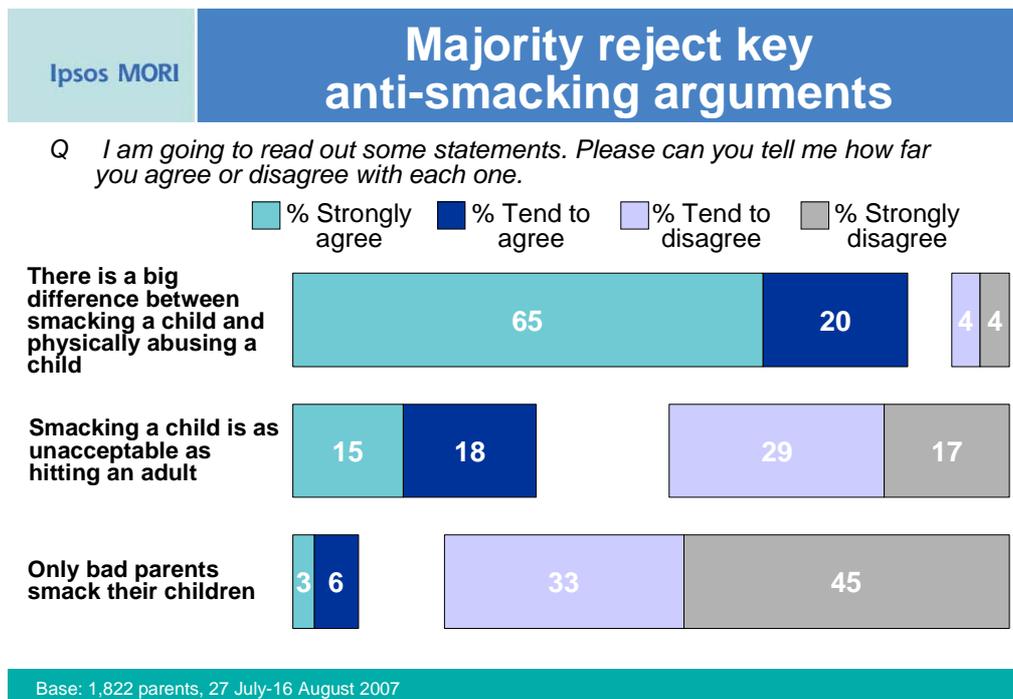
Base: 1,822 parents (1,204 current parents; 618 ever parents), 27 July-16 August 2007

Around two-thirds of all parents (65%) **strongly agree** that *there is a big difference between smacking a child and physically abusing a child*, and 85% **agree** overall. Ever parents are again more likely to agree with this than current parents (92% compared to 82%). Groups who are significantly *less* likely than average to agree with this include: parents aged 15-24 (72%), women (83%), parents in London (77%) and BME parents (76%).

A higher proportion of parents **disagree** than agree that *smacking a child is as unacceptable as hitting an adult* (46% compared to 33%). Following the pattern we have seen throughout this report, ever parents are more likely to disagree with this statement than current parents (50% compared to 44%), although there is no significant difference in the proportion who agree with it (32% and 34% respectively).

Women are more likely than men to agree that *smacking a child is as unacceptable as hitting an adult* (36% compared to 29%), but in terms of agreement, there are no significant differences by age, region, social grade or ethnicity. However, there are some differences in terms of those who disagree, including: those aged 65+ are more likely than average to disagree (52% compared to 46%), while white parents are more likely to disagree than BME parents (47% compared to 38%).

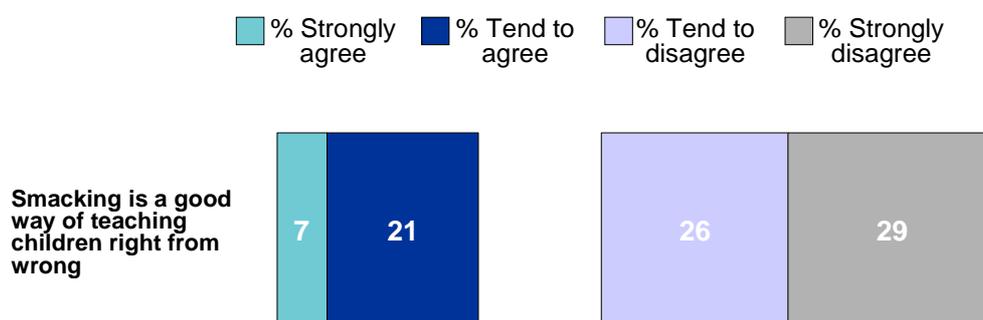
The majority (78%) of all parents also **disagree** that *only bad parents smack their children*, which includes 45% who strongly disagree. On this issue, however, ever and current parents' opinions are *not* significantly different (81% and 77% disagree respectively). Parents in social grade DE are more likely than average to agree (12% vs. 9%), as are those living in London (15%) and Wales (16%), but in terms of the proportion in agreement with this statement there is no significant difference by age or gender.



It would seem, however, that many would doubt that smacking has *positive* instructional efficacy: parents are more likely to **disagree** than agree that *smacking is a good way to teach children right from wrong* (55% disagree compared to 28% agree). In line with their greater acceptance of smacking generally, ever parents are more likely to agree with this statement (38%, compared to 23% of current parents), as are those aged 65+ (41%), those in social grade DE (35%) and BME parents (36%).

Ipsos MORI **Most question**  
**the positive efficacy of smacking**

Q I am going to read out some statements. Please can you tell me how far you agree or disagree with each one.



Base: 1,822 parents, 27 July-16 August 2007

## The law

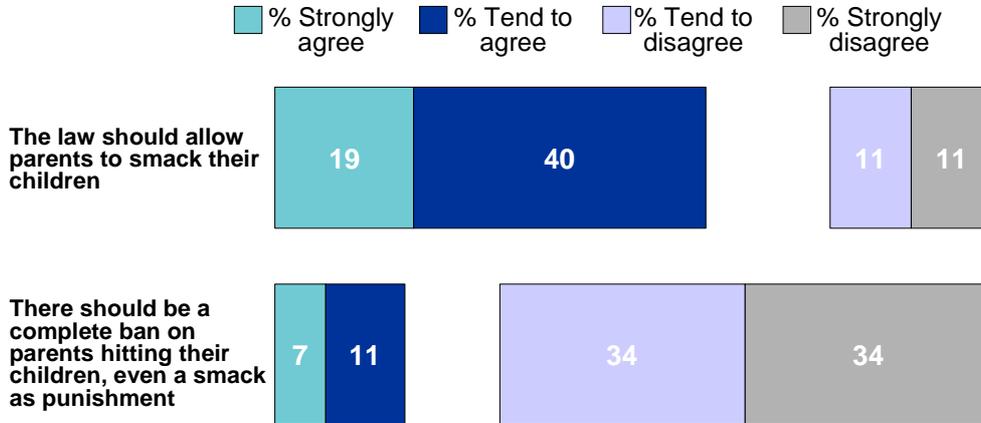
The majority of all parents (59%) **agree** that *the law should allow parents to smack their children*, although a significant minority (22%) disagree and around one in ten parents overall disagree strongly (11%). Only around one in five (18%) **agree** that *there should be a complete ban on parents hitting their children, even a smack as a punishment* – around two-thirds (67%) disagree.

Men are more likely than women to agree that the law should allow parents to smack their children (65% vs. 55%), but there are no significant differences in terms of levels of agreement by social grade, region, or ethnicity.

No more than around one quarter of any of the main sub-groups covered in this report agree that there should be a complete ban on parents hitting their children, even a smack as a punishment, but the following groups are more likely than average (18%) to agree: parents in social grade DE (23%), single parents (24%), and those living in London (24%).

## As they stand, laws on smacking remain acceptable to the majority

Q I am going to read out some statements. Please can you tell me how far you agree or disagree with each one.

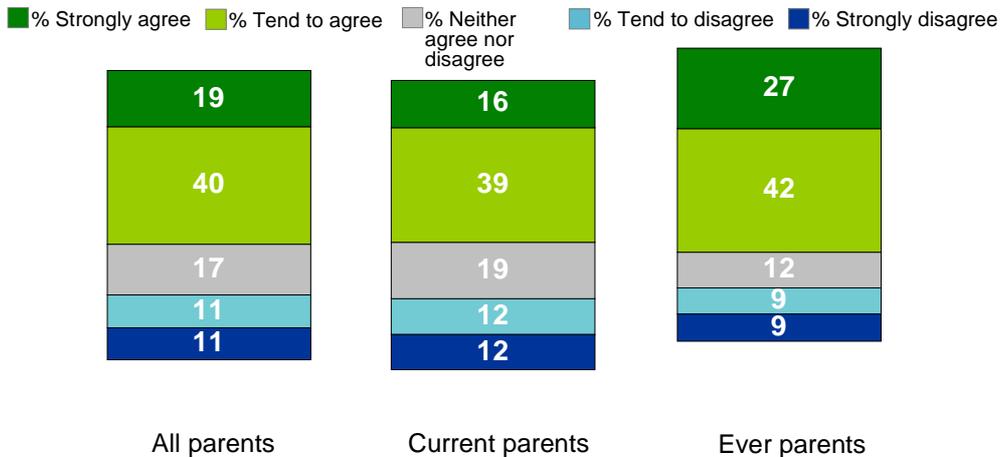


Base: 1,822 parents, 27 July-16 August 2007

The findings of this study show that current parents' views on smacking are often less favourable than ever parents' views – suggesting that there has been a shift over time in society's attitude towards smacking. However, although current parents are indeed less likely than ever parents to agree that the law should allow parents to smack their children (55% compared to 69%) they are still more than twice as likely at the current time to agree with this than to disagree (55% compared to 24%).

## Around three in five parents want the law to allow them to smack

Q. I am going to read out some statements. Please can you tell me how far you agree or disagree with each one.  
The law should allow parents to smack their children.



Base: 1,822 (1,204 current parents, 618 ever parents), 27 July-16 August 2007

Again reflecting our findings throughout this report, opinion on whether or not the law should allow parents to smack their children is also correlated with age. For example, one in seven parents (15%) aged 65+ disagree that *the law should allow parents to smack their children* compared to around a third of parents (36%) aged 15-24. It is only among this youngest age group that opinion on this issue is approximately evenly split – for all the others, the balance tips in favour of the law allowing smacking.

**Q. I am going to read out some statements. Please can you tell me how far you agree or disagree with each one.**

**The law should allow parents to smack their children.**

	Total	15-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
<i>Base: All parents</i>	(1,822)	(95)	(334)	(508)	(335)	(238)	(312)
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Agree	<b>59%</b>	39	51	57	63	65	71
Disagree	<b>22%</b>	36	28	24	19	17	15

*Source: Ipsos MORI*

There are no significant differences between the age groups in terms of the proportion who agree that *there should be a complete ban on parents hitting their children, even a smack as a punishment*, but disagreement does increase with age and those aged 55-64 and 65+ are significantly more likely to disagree with such as ban (71% and 75% respectively) than those aged 15-24 (52%) or 25-34 (61%).

Interestingly, among those who **disagree** that *it is sometimes necessary to smack a naughty child*, three in ten (30%) still agree that the law should allow parents to smack their children (48% disagree) and a higher proportion - 45% - disagree that there should be a complete ban (36% agree). Even among those who say they think it is always wrong to smack a child and that they won't do it, around a quarter (24%) agree that the law should allow parents to smack their children (53% disagree) and one third (34%) disagree that there should be a complete ban on parents hitting their children, even a smack as a punishment (46% agree).

# Key drivers of attitudes towards smacking

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So far, we have reviewed parents' reported behaviour in terms of the methods they have used to manage their children's behaviour, as well as their attitudes towards smacking children as a form of punishment. Using a statistical technique called Key Drivers Analysis (KDA) enables us to gain a deeper understanding of the factors underpinning parents' attitudes and which of the many different contributors has the strongest effect on this.

KDA determines which survey items or categories most strongly influence or predict an outcome of interest. We used it to look at which key issues/respondent characteristics covered in the survey most influence the answers given by parents to two key questions: *'How far do you agree or disagree that it is sometimes necessary to smack a naughty child?'* and *'How far do you agree or disagree that the law should allow parents to smack their children?'* The key variables (i.e. issues/respondent characteristics) were chosen to be used in the analysis for a number of reasons, for example, because they divide opinion/are differentiating. Please see the technical details section in the appendices for the variables used.

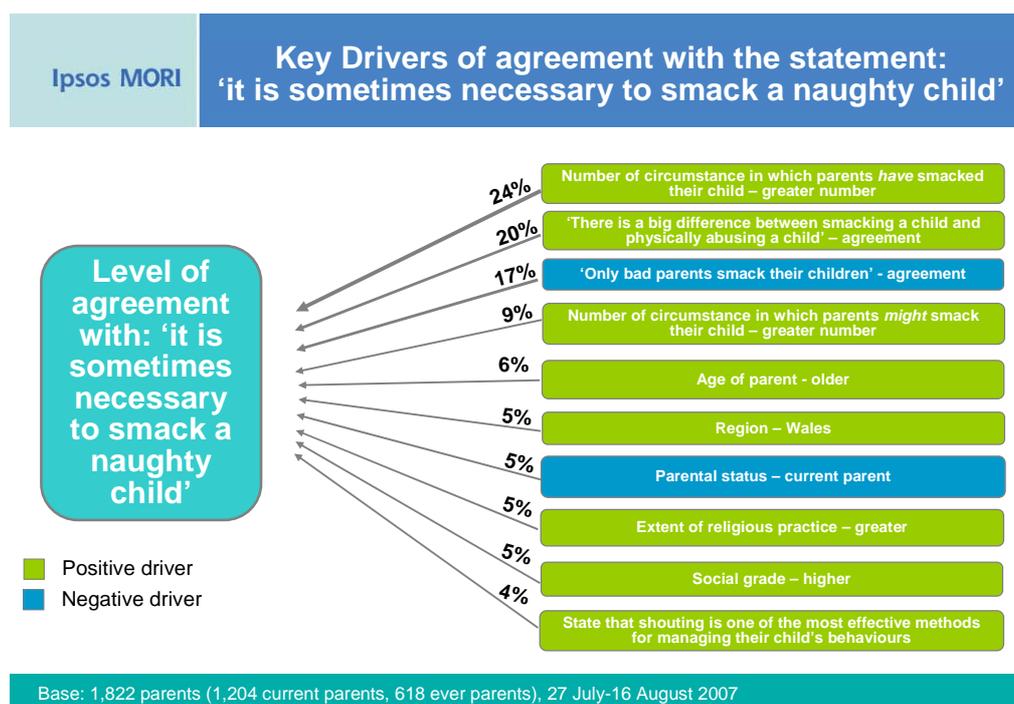
It is important to remember that drivers or predictors do not imply **causal** relationships – rather, KDA is a measure of how much the values of the drivers/variables vary systematically with the outcome of interest.

The percentage values included in the analysis of levels of agreement with the two statements – shown in the charts below – are called 'Relative Strengths'. They are the strength of each key driver in the model compared with all other key drivers in explaining the variation in responses to the question. A positive driver (shown in green on the two charts in this section of the report) means that parents who give a high score/high level of agreement with the attitude/characteristic are more likely to agree with the statement shown. A negative driver (shown in blue) means that they are more likely to disagree.

The chart overleaf shows the key factors that drive the level of agreement with the statement *'it is sometimes necessary to smack a naughty child'*. From this, we can see that many factors influence the level of agreement with this and that the factor with the strongest relationship is the number of circumstances in which parents *have* smacked their child. Those who indicate a greater number are more likely to agree/agree more strongly. Those who agree that *'there is a big difference between smacking a child and physically abusing a child'* are also more likely to agree that *'it is sometimes necessary to smack a naughty child'*, although this driver is marginally less influential than the strongest driver. Another strong, but this time negative, driver is agreement with the statement that *'only bad parents smack their children'*. As this is a negative driver, those who agree with this are less likely to agree that *'it is sometimes necessary to smack a naughty child'*. This is followed by the number of circumstances in which parents think they *might* smack their child.

Reflecting the findings throughout this report, the analysis shows that there is a relationship between the level of agreement that *'it is sometimes necessary to smack a naughty child'* and parents' age (i.e. parents who are older are more likely to agree), although this is not as strong a relationship as those discussed above. Other demographic variables that are also positive drivers of levels of agreement are region, the extent to which religion is practiced and social grade, while being a current parent is a negative driver (i.e. current parents are less likely than ever parents to agree that *'it is sometimes necessary to smack a naughty child'*).

The R-Sq. statistic tells us how much of the variation in the outcome variable is accounted for by the independent variables (where 'variation' is the strength with which we can predict what respondents are likely to say in response to one question, based on what we know are their responses to other questions within the model). An R-Sq of 51+% would be a very accurate statistic, while an R-Sq of 30-50% is fairly accurate. For this model, the R-Sq. statistic is 33.5%, meaning a considerable amount of variation is accounted for by this selection of ten drivers. The remaining variability is known as 'random variation' and can (theoretically) be accounted for by variables that were not/could not be measured, as well as respondent inconsistency/ incompleteness of surveys.



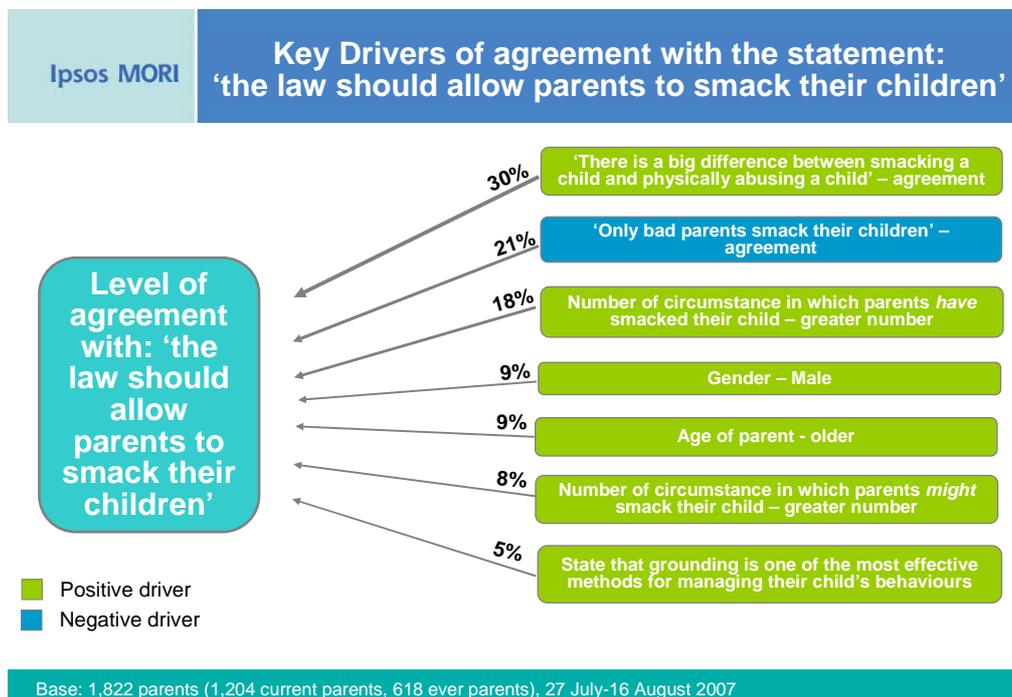
The next chart shows the key factors which drive level of agreement with the statement *'the law should allow parents to smack their children'*. Again, the drivers with the strongest relationship with this are agreement that *'there is a big difference between smacking a child and physically abusing a child'* and the number of circumstances in which parents *have* smacked their child (positive drivers), as well as agreement with the statement *'only bad parents smack their children'* (negative driver).

Again, although it is not as strong as the above, there is also a relationship between the age of the parent and levels of agreement. Gender is another key

driver of opinion on this statement (with men more likely to agree). Other demographic variables do not appear as key drivers for the level of agreement with this statement.

There is also a relationship, although slightly weaker, between the number of circumstances in which parents think they *might* smack their child and the level of agreement that *'the law should allow parents to smack their children'*. The final key driver is a parent's belief that grounding is one of the most effective methods for managing their child's behaviour.

At 33.0%, this model, like the preceding model, yields a fairly substantial R-Sq. statistic.



# Appendices

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# Technical Details

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## Sample Design

The Ipsos MORI Capibus uses a random location sample design which generates a high quality sample representative of the GB adult population. Between 160 and 180 sample points are randomly selected for each wave in order to provide a fully dispersed sample covering the whole of Britain.

The sampling frame itself is the Postal Address File (PAF), a frequently updated record of all addresses in GB recognised by the Royal Mail.

In order to ensure a representative sample, enumeration districts are randomly selected such that the sample profile of ACORN groups within each standard region matches the population profile of the region. This produces a national sample that is balanced in terms of ACORN category/group at a regional level and ACORN type at national level.

Each enumeration district is defined by the list of addresses contained within it. Interviewers are given a randomly selected start address and a list of addresses within the district. Interlocking **quota controls** are set for age, gender and working status, based on the ACORN classification. Thus, quota controls are specifically tailored to each sampling point. The use of ACORN ensures that the sample selected is nationally representative in terms of social grade without the need for setting quotas at the interviewing stage.

## Fieldwork

Interviews were conducted face-to-face, in respondents' homes, using CAPI (Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing) between 27th July and 16th August 2007.

## Weighting

Capibus uses a rim weighting system which weights to NRS defined profiles for age, social grade, region and working status - within sex. As well as providing readership information, the NRS is used to define population profiles and social grade proportions (census studies only happen every 10 years).

## Key Drivers Analysis – variables used

- age of parent (8 age bands);
- gender of parent;
- social grade;
- region (England, Wales);
- employment status (in paid employment/not in paid employment);

- religion (Christian/non-Christian);
- religion (non-Christian religion/Christian or no religion);
- extent to which religion (any) is followed/practiced in everyday life;
- extent to which religion is followed/practiced in everyday life – Christian;
- extent to which religion is followed/practiced in everyday life – Islam;
- ethnicity (white/BME);
- parental status (current parent/ever parent);
- parent of child(ren) not living with respondent;
- number of children under 18;
- number of circumstances in which parents *have* smacked their child;
- number of circumstances in which parents *might* smack their child;
- level of agreement with the statement '*only bad parents smack their children*';
- level of agreement with the statement '*there is a big difference between smacking a child and physically abusing a child*';
- method(s) used for managing their child's behaviour;
- method(s) used for managing their child's behaviour believed to be most effective.

# Statistical Reliability

Because a sample, rather than the entire population, was interviewed the percentage results are subject to sampling tolerances – which vary with the size of the sample and the percentage figure concerned. For example, for a question where 50% of the people in a sample of 618 respond with a particular answer, the chances are 95 in 100 that this result would not vary more than  $\pm 4$  percentage points from the result that would have been obtained from a census of the entire population (using the same procedures). The tolerances that may apply in this report are given in the table below.

<b>Approximate sampling tolerances applicable to percentages at or near these levels (at the 95% confidence level)</b>			
	<b>10% or 90% <math>\pm</math></b>	<b>30% or 70% <math>\pm</math></b>	<b>50% <math>\pm</math></b>
<b>Size of sample or sub-group on which survey result is based</b>			
618 (for example, ever parents)	2	4	4
1,204 (for example, current parents)	2	3	3
1,822 (for example, all parents)	1	2	2
<i>Source: Ipsos MORI</i>			

Tolerances are also involved in the comparison of results between different elements of the sample. A difference must be of at least a certain size to be statistically significant. The following table is a guide to the sampling tolerances applicable to comparisons between sub-groups.

<b>Differences required for significance at the 95% confidence level at or near these percentages</b>			
	<b>10% or 90% <math>\pm</math></b>	<b>30% or 70% <math>\pm</math></b>	<b>50% <math>\pm</math></b>
<b>Size of sample on which survey result is based</b>			
618 and 1,204 (for example, ever vs. current parents)	3	4	5
95 and 312 (for example, parents aged 15-24 v. parents aged 65+)	7	11	12
<i>Source: Ipsos MORI</i>			



# Definition of Social Grades

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The grades detailed below are the social class definitions as used by the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising, and are standard on all surveys carried out by Ipsos MORI.

<b>Social Grades</b>			
	<b>Social Class</b>	<b>Occupation of Chief Income Earner</b>	<b>Percentage of Population</b>
A	Upper Middle Class	Higher managerial, administrative or professional	2.9
B	Middle Class	Intermediate managerial, administrative or professional	18.9
C1	Lower Middle Class	Supervisor or clerical and junior managerial, administrative or professional	27.0
C2	Skilled Working Class	Skilled manual workers	22.6
D	Working Class	Semi and unskilled manual workers	16.9
E	Those at the lowest levels of subsistence	State pensioners, etc, with no other earnings	11.7



# Questionnaire and Topline Results

- Ipsos MORI interviewed a total sample of 1,822 parents aged 15+ across England and Wales
- Results are based on all parents (i.e. currently have children aged under 18 and/or have 'grown-up' children aged 18+) unless otherwise stated
- Interviews were carried out face-to-face, in home, using CAPI, as part of the Ipsos MORI Omnibus
- Fieldwork was conducted between 27 July and 16 August 2007
- The sample design ensures that Ipsos MORI's Omnibus accurately reflects the GB population in terms of region and area types as well as respondent demographics. In order to correct for minor deviations, the data have been weighted to ensure a representative sample
- An asterisk (\*) denotes a finding of less than 0.5%, but greater than zero
- Where results do not add up to 100, this may be due to multiple responses, computer rounding or the exclusion of don't knows/not stated categories

## Q01 Which of the following apply to you?

	%
Parent/legal guardian/carer (including a foster or adoptive parent, or the step-parent) of a child under 18 who lives with you	29
Parent/legal guardian/carer (including a foster or adoptive parent, or the step-parent) of a child under 18 who does not live with you	2
Parent/legal guardian/carer (including a foster or adoptive parent, or the step-parent) of an adult age 18 or older	15
None of these	56

*Base: all respondents aged 15+ in England and Wales (4,203)*

## Q02A How many children under the age of 18 do you have who live with you?

	%
1	38
2	38
3	15
4	4
5	1
6	1
7	*
8	*
9+	*
Refused	2

*Base: all parents with children aged under 18 who live with them (1,147)*

**Q02B And, starting with the youngest, what age(s) are they?**

	%
1 year or younger	19
2 years	13
3 years	10
4 years	10
5 years	10
6 years	9
7 years	9
8 years	11
9 years	10
10 years	10
11 years	10
12 years	9
13 years	11
14 years	9
15 years	10
16 years	7
17 years	7
Refused	5

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*Base: all parents with children aged under 18 who live with them who gave number of children at Q02A (1,122)*

**Q03A How many children under the age of 18 do you have who do not live with you?**

	%
1	37
2	38
3	11
4	1
5	0
6	0
7	2
8	0
9+	0
Refused	12

---

*Base: all parents with children aged under 18 who do not live with them (68)*

**Q03B And, starting with the youngest, what age(s) are they?**

	%
1 year or younger	5
2 years	3
3 years	5
4 years	6
5 years	10
6 years	11
7 years	8
8 years	5
9 years	8
10 years	8
11 years	6
12 years	13
13 years	15
14 years	14
15 years	19
16 years	13
17 years	17
Refused	4

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*Base: all parents with children aged under 18 who do not live with them and who gave number of children at Q03A (58)*

**Q04A Please think about your child who lives with you and who is [INSERT AGE OF CHILD] years old. From this list, which of the following methods of improving or managing your child's behaviour have you used/do you use, if any?**

**Q04B And still thinking about your child who lives with you and is [INSERT AGE OF CHILD] years old, which two or three of these have/have had the most effect on your child's behaviour, generally speaking?**

	<b>Q04A</b>	<b>Q04B</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Creating a diversion when they are doing something wrong	34	18
'Counting to 3'	33	14
'Grounding' them	32	17
Making them do extra tasks/chores around the house	19	5
Making them take 'time out'/go to the 'naughty step' or 'naughty mat'	33	16
Not talking to them/paying them any attention	24	9
Praising good behaviour	71	41
Reasoning with them	56	26
Rewarding good behaviour (e.g. with sweets, stickers, treats)	49	18
Sending them to their room	44	14
Shouting at them	45	12
Smacking them	16	4
Stopping their pocket money	19	6
Stopping them from doing something they like to do (for example, taking away their toys or games, not allowing them to watch TV, use the telephone to talk to their friends, surf the internet etc.)	49	26
Using my own behaviour to set a good example	38	11
Say no	*	*
Something else	1	*
None of these	12	14
Don't know	1	2

*Base: all parents with children in household under 18 and who gave the number of children at Q02A and their age(s) at Q02B (1,112)*

**Q05A Please think about your child who does not live with you and who is [INSERT AGE OF CHILD] years old. From this list, which of the following methods of improving or managing your child's behaviour have you used/do you use, if any?**

**Q05B And still thinking about your child who does not live with you and who is [INSERT AGE OF CHILD] years old, which two or three of these have/have had the most effect on your child's behaviour, generally speaking?**

	Q05A	Q05B
	%	%
Creating a diversion when they are doing something wrong	26	8
'Counting to 3'	24	9
'Grounding' them	27	29
Making them do extra tasks/chores around the house	15	2
Making them take 'time out'/go to the 'naughty step' or 'naughty mat'	19	12
Not talking to them/paying them any attention	16	6
Praising good behaviour	54	27
Reasoning with them	51	25
Rewarding good behaviour (e.g. with sweets, stickers, treats)	32	11
Sending them to their room	27	8
Shouting at them	30	5
Smacking them	11	7
Stopping their pocket money	15	4
Stopping them from doing something they like to do (for example, taking away their toys or games, not allowing them to watch TV, use the telephone to talk to their friends, surf the internet etc.)	29	22
Using my own behaviour to set a good example	38	22
Something else	0	0
None of these	18	14
Don't know	2	10

*Base: all parents with children not in household under 18 and who gave the number of children at Q03A and their age(s) at Q03B (55)*

**Q06A Please think about when your child(ren) aged 18 and over was(were) younger. From this list, which of the following methods of improving or managing your child(ren)'s behaviour have you used, if any?**

**Q06B And still thinking about when your child(ren) aged 18 and over was(were) younger, which two or three of these have had the most effect on your child(ren)'s behaviour, generally speaking?**

	<b>Q06A</b>	<b>Q06B</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Creating a diversion when they are doing something wrong	33	9
'Counting to 3'	22	5
'Grounding' them	42	17
Making them do extra tasks/chores around the house	22	3
Making them take 'time out'/go to the 'naughty step' or 'naughty mat'	12	3
Not talking to them/paying them any attention	12	3
Praising good behaviour	68	33
Reasoning with them	64	31
Rewarding good behaviour (e.g. with sweets, stickers, treats)	41	10
Sending them to their room	49	12
Shouting at them	45	7
Smacking them	40	13
Stopping their pocket money	27	9
Stopping them from doing something they like to do (for example, taking away their toys or games, not allowing them to watch TV, use the telephone to talk to their friends, surf the internet etc.)	40	15
Using my own behaviour to set a good example	39	11
Say no	0	*
Something else	1	1
None of these	2	3
Don't know	1	3

*Base: all parents of children aged 18+ (664)*

**Q07 How far do you agree or disagree that it is sometimes necessary to smack a naughty child?**

	<b>%</b>
Strongly agree	16
Tend to agree	37
Neither agree nor disagree	12
Tend to disagree	15
Strongly disagree	20
Don't know	1

**Q08 From this list, which of the following statements comes closest to your personal opinion on smacking your child(ren)?**

	%
I think it is always wrong to smack a child, and I won't do it	27
I don't like the idea of smacking a child, but I will do it if nothing else works	51
I'm comfortable with the idea of smacking a child and will do it when I think it's necessary	20
Don't know	3

---

**Q09A From this list, please can you tell me in which of the following circumstances, if any, you have smacked your child(ren)?**

**Q09B And in which of the following circumstances, if any, do you think you might smack your child(ren)?**

	<b>Q09A</b>	<b>Q09B</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
To stop them doing something which is dangerous or harmful to them (for example, running into the road or touching something hot)	32	27
To stop them doing something which is dangerous or harmful to another child	20	20
To stop them from damaging something	9	7
When a short, sharp shock will be more effective than a long, drawn-out punishment	18	10
When I have 'snapped'/lost my temper	14	8
When I have been told by another adult that they have been naughty (for example, a teacher or neighbour)	2	2
When their behaviour needs to be corrected	11	8
When they are having a tantrum	10	6
When they have damaged something	5	3
When they have deliberately disobeyed me/not paid any attention to what I am telling them to do	11	7
When they have got bad marks at school/reports from school	*	*
When they have hit, scratched or bitten me or someone else	16	11
When they need a lesson in how to behave that they will remember	3	2
When they need to be reminded of my authority over them/that I am in charge of them	4	3
When they 'talk back' or are rude to me or someone else	10	7
As a last resort	*	*
Would not smack them	0	*
Something else	*	*
None of these	31	36
Don't know	1	3

**Q10A Please think about your child who lives with you and who is [INSERT AGE OF CHILD] years old. Which of the options on this card applies to you?**

**Q10B Please think about your child who does not live with you and who is [INSERT AGE OF CHILD] years old. Which of the options on this card applies to you?**

	Q10A	Q10B
	%	%
A I have smacked my child in the last 7 days	5	1
B I have smacked my child in the last month	8	5
C I have smacked my child in the last six months	11	7
D I have smacked my child in the last 12 months/year	11	4
E I have smacked my child in the past, but not in the last year	35	44
F I have never smacked my child	51	51
Prefer not to say/Refused	5	3
Don't know	4	6

*Q10A base: all parents with children in household under 18 and who gave the number of children at Q02A and their age(s) at Q02B (1,112)*

*Q10B base: all parents with children not in household under 18 and who gave the number of children at Q03A and their age(s) at Q03B (55)*

**Q11 I am going to read out some statements. Please can you tell me how far you agree or disagree with each one.**

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	%
Only bad parents smack their children	3	6	12	33	45	1	%
Smacking a child is as unacceptable as hitting an adult	15	18	18	29	17	2	%
Smacking is a good way of teaching children right from wrong	7	21	17	26	29	1	%
The law should allow parents to smack their children	19	40	17	11	11	2	%
There is a big difference between smacking a child and physically abusing a child	65	20	6	4	4	1	%
There should be a complete ban on parents hitting their children, even a smack as a punishment	7	11	13	33	34	1	%

**DEMOGRAPHICS**

**AD.Q1 Thinking about the children who live with you and are under the age of 18, have any been diagnosed (for example, by a doctor or an educational psychologist) as having any of the following special needs?**

	%
Moderate learning difficulties	5
Severe learning difficulties	2
Profound and multiple learning difficulties	*
Emotional or behavioural difficulties	3
Attention Deficit Disorder/Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder	2
Autistic Spectrum Disorders (for example, Autism, Asperger's)	1
None of these	88
Don't know	2
Not answered	1

*Base: all parents with children in household under 18 (1,147)*

AD.Q2 **Thinking about the children who do not live with you and are under the age of 18, have any been diagnosed (for example, by a doctor or an educational psychologist) as having any of the following special needs?**

	%
Moderate learning difficulties	0
Severe learning difficulties	0
Profound and multiple learning difficulties	1
Emotional or behavioural difficulties	1
Attention Deficit Disorder/Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder	0
Autistic Spectrum Disorders (for example, Autism, Asperger's)	2
None of these	93
Don't know	2
Not answered	0

*Base: all parents with children not in household under 18 (68)*

AD.Q3 **What is your religion?**

	%
Baha'i	*
Buddhist	*
Christian (including Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations)	63
Hindu	1
Jain	*
Jewish	1
Muslim	5
Rastafarian	0
Sikh	*
Zoroastrian	0
Pagan	*
Spiritualist	*
Another religion	*
No religion	27
Prefer not to say/Refused	1
Don't know	*

AD.Q4 **How far, if at all, would you say you try to follow or practise your religion in your everyday life?**

	%
A great deal	15
A fair amount	32
Not very much	30
Not at all	22
Don't know	1
Refused	1

*Base: all parents who say they have a religion (1,331)*



# Computer tables

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