

A STUDY INTO CHILDREN'S VIEWS ON PHYSICAL DISCIPLINE AND PUNISHMENT

Prepared for: DCSF and COI
Prepared by: Sherbert Research

Job number 282531

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1. Background, objectives and sample

1.1 Background

The Department for Children, Schools and Families is currently undertaking a review to examine the effects of Section 58 and its administration and operation.

The following information is taken from the review paper on Section 58 of the Children Act (June 2007):

The Government's priority is to ensure that all children are kept safe from physical and mental harm. It legislated through the Children Act 2004 to protect children from violence and abuse.

The issue of the defence of "reasonable chastisement" came to prominence in 1998 as a result of the judgment of the European Court in the case of A v. UK. The Government accepted that the law needed to be changed in order to ensure compliance with the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). Subsequently, the Human Rights Act was brought into force in October 2000. The case of A v. UK highlighted a widespread feeling that public opinion about what constituted "reasonable" punishment had changed and the law as it was at the time had not kept pace with this.

During the passage of the Children Bill, concerns were raised about the currency of the law in this area and the belief, expressed by some, that the defence of reasonable punishment was being used to evade the law by parents who were harming their children.

Parliament passed the amendment to the Bill, now in section 58, thereby maintaining that it was essential to strengthen the system for safeguarding and protecting children but that it would be unacceptable to criminalise all physical punishment of a child by a parent.

Section 58 of the Children Act 2004 seeks to protect children and provide greater legal certainty by clarifying the legal framework protecting children from parental violence and abuse. The section removes the defence of reasonable punishment for acts of actual bodily harm, grievous bodily harm and cruelty.

The Department for Children, Schools and Families commissioned Sherbert Research to consult children and young people to establish their views on physical punishment.

This report details the findings of this research, which was conducted across England and Wales in July and August 2007.

1.2 Research objectives

The primary objective of this research was to understand what children and young people thought about discipline and punishment in family life, including physical punishment.

In addition to the primary objective, a number of supporting objectives were identified and explored; these ensured that more contextual issues were understood. Some of these objectives related directly to the primary objective above, while others supported more general questioning about children's and teenagers' lifestyles and interests.

Supporting objectives:

- To determine what influences children and teenagers in relation to their opinions and behaviour, both in their immediate world and beyond (family, community, TV, computer games etc)
- To establish what things and people in young people's lives make them happy and sad, and what coping strategies they have for dealing with pressure
- To understand the experience of conflict and the strategies children have for dealing with conflict
- To understand how children and young people maintain order within their peer sets and what role physical punishment/violence plays
- To explore the dynamics of child to adult relationships, specifically to understand how children experience discipline and what they think about the various ways their parents (and other adults in their lives) discipline them

Please note that this was a qualitative study and that the findings are not statistically representative.

1.3 Rationale for research methodologies chosen

Three distinct methodologies were used in this research. The rationale and effectiveness of each is detailed below.

Sibling interviews

Younger children aged between 4 and 7 years were identified as an important subject group to take part in this research. Sibling interviews were chosen as a methodology as they provided a very supportive research environment in which to talk to younger respondents. The methodology involved two children from the same family, one younger and one older. Children in this age bracket (4 to 7 years), often find it difficult to talk to a moderator on their own, especially when the topic of conversation deals with sensitive issues. This proved a useful way to talk to them. The older sibling provided the younger child with a sense of security and gave them support and encouragement when they needed it.

The moderator explained to the older siblings that they had two roles, one to support their younger sibling and two to answer the questions in their own right. The focus of the first half of the interview was to gather as many unprompted responses from the younger child as possible, without too much influence from the older sibling. Towards the end of the interview, when the younger child often became distracted and 'fidgety,' researchers tended to ask the older children questions more directly.

Overall, this methodology gave the research team a rich insight into individual families and the way discipline and punishment was experienced by children. Most importantly, it provided the team with the views of very young children who can be difficult to engage in meaningful and constructive conversations in more formal research environments.

Paired friendship depths

This methodology involved two respondents. In the case of this study it consisted of two close friends of the same age, who socialised with each other regularly and often classed each other as 'best friends.'

The choice to recruit close friends was deliberate, as the research team wanted to create an intimate research environment where children and teenagers could feel

comfortable to talk about their personal experiences and feelings. The research team felt that an atmosphere of trust and confidentiality was created in all these sessions, and children appeared to be frank in the information they revealed.

Friendship quads

Quads bring together four respondents and in the case of this study, each group of four recruited were good friends. Quads were chosen to complement the paired friendship depths. It was envisaged that they would offer a more creative and dynamic research environment where the topic of physical discipline and punishment could be debated in a broader perspective, although also possibly a setting where respondents would not give so much intimate detail of their own experiences. However, the research team felt that a strong sense of trust was created in these sessions and many children were very willing to share their own experiences, including those examples which were more personal.

1.4 Safeguards that were put in place

This research focused on a sensitive topic, which meant that the research needed to balance the needs of the children (and their parents) with the objectives. The following approaches were developed to ensure that this was achieved:

❑ Creating safe research environments

The choice of methodologies and research settings was crucial to make certain that the research team could explain complex 'adult' issues in easy to digest ways, to get to the heart of the issues with children without causing unneeded anxiety or worry for respondents.

❑ Trust and confidentiality

The research team had procedures in place to handle properly children who reported issues of violence or abuse against them; however, none were reported in this research.

There were also occasions when the research touched on issues that children and young people felt embarrassed or shy to talk about in front of the moderator or their peers. The research team assured all children and young

people that the research was totally confidential and they could reveal as much or as little as they liked.

Informing parents

All parents signed consent forms when they agreed to their child taking part in the research session. All parents were provided with a brief summary of the research process and the topics that their child would be discussing.

Possible impacts after the research session

After attending the sessions with their peers (paired friendship depths and quads), children were encouraged not to discuss confidential issues with anyone after the session had ended.

1.5 Overview of sample

- Eight, one and a half hour sibling interviews with 4 to 8 year olds and one of their older siblings aged 11 to 16 (2 children per session)
- Eight, one and a half hour friendship pairs with 8 to 16 year olds (2 children per session)
- Eight, two hour friendship quads with children 8 to 16 year olds (4 children per session)

A full breakdown of the sample can be found in Appendix 9.1

1.6 Research locations

The aim of this research required the research team to engage children from a range of different geographical locations, ethnic groups and social economic grades. The choice of locations supported the achievement of these recruitment criteria.

Full recruitment criteria can be found in Appendix 9.2

Research was carried out in the following locations across England and Wales:

England

- Manchester, Northern England
- Newcastle, Northern England
- Birmingham, Midlands
- Tottenham, North London
- Croydon, South London
- Newton Abbot, Devon, Southwest England
- Edenbridge Kent, Southern England
- Colden Common near Winchester, Southern England

Wales

- Colwyn Bay, North Wales
- Cardiff, South Wales
- Swansea, South Wales

1.7 Age definitions

Throughout this report the following terms are used and are defined as follows:

- Children** - refers to all respondents in the sample (4 to 16 year olds) unless otherwise specified
- Younger children** – refers to children aged 4 to 7 years (Reception to school year 3)
- Older children** – refers to children aged 8 to 16 years (school year 4 to year 11)
- Tweens** – refers to 10 to 12 year olds
- Teenagers** – refers to 13 to 16 year olds

2. Executive summary

Children and teenagers in this research regularly experienced conflict in a variety of different situations across their lives. Researchers found that older children were generally better able to deal with conflict both emotionally and practically, through the coping strategies they employed.

Children of all ages accepted that discipline and punishment, when explained and administered fairly, played an important role in a child's healthy development.

The need for dialogue and effective communication emerged as a crucial part of discipline and punishment. Children of all ages claimed that they were much more able to accept a punishment if they could understand what they had done wrong and why their parents felt that the chosen punishment was justified. Children who were regularly punished without clear accompanying dialogue stated that they tended to feel angry with and isolated from their parents after a punishment had been administered, and were much less likely to reflect on their behaviour.

A range of disciplines and punishments were experienced by children and teenagers. The following groupings and themes emerged:

- ❑ **Verbal punishment:** Ranging from calm discussions, through stern 'tellings off' to shouting and yelling. Verbal punishments occurred as stand alone punishments, but also regularly accompanied other methods of punishment. Children whose parents frequently shouted at them often reported that they had become 'immune' to it as a form of punishment.
- ❑ **Denial of things they value:** This consisted of a range of different methods, including:
 - Taking away privileges such as TV and the Internet
 - Minor deprivations such as no pudding or going out to play
 - Exclusion such as the naughty step or being sent to their room

This style of punishment appeared to have the scope to encourage reflection and learning amongst children from around the age of 8. Children themselves said this was probably the most effective style of punishment for them.

- ❑ **Extra work or chores:** This involved children having to complete a task as a result of doing something wrong. This type of punishment seemed to work particularly well with tweens and teenagers, who felt that it was a more mature method of punishment and gave them a degree of responsibility.
- ❑ **Physical punishment:** Smacking emerged as a regularly administered form of physical punishment across the sample; very few other forms of physical punishment were experienced.

Children defined smacking as a slap or a tap, mostly to the hand or bottom.

The majority of children in the sample had been smacked at some point in their lives:

- ❑ Most smacking occurred when children were under the age of 9 or 10 years.
- ❑ Those who were being or had been smacked included both boys and girls and all social economic grades (ABC1C2DE).
- ❑ The most regularly smacked children tended to be from C2DE families and those more occasionally or rarely smacked tended to be from ABC1 families.
- ❑ The children who stated that they had never been smacked were a minority in this sample. Predominantly they were from ABC1 families, though some children who were never smacked were from C2DE families.

Smacking was generally considered to be the most 'severe' type of discipline, because it was physical in nature and was from a parent to a child.

The emotional impact of smacking appeared to be more powerful and enduring than the physical impact, which according to children was quickly forgotten.

Some children associated smacking with feelings of fear, shame and anger. These children were often not only dealing with parental disapproval and disappointment, but with parents losing control and their temper. Smacking for them occurred regularly, sometimes for no reason and with no clear or considered dialogue. Children who experienced smacking in this way appeared to be more emotionally distant from their parents.

Many children thought that smacking was only really appropriate to teach younger children about physical safety or when a child had been really naughty or involved in anti-social behaviour.

A plethora of complex and interlocking factors emerged as influences on children's and teenagers' views on smacking. In general terms, some appeared to have more of a significant influence than others, although it did differ between children. For the purpose of this research, the factors were summarised into the following groups:

□ **Principal:**

The principal factor in determining a child's attitudes to smacking was whether the child had been smacked and how he/she had experienced it. In this study, this factor appeared to have the greatest influence on children's opinions of the issue, as clear differences emerged between those who had been smacked and those who had not. All children who had not been smacked rejected it as an acceptable form of punishment, while many who had been smacked felt that smacking a child was acceptable.

□ **Primary**

- **Age** – As children got older, smacking became much less acceptable as a form of punishment
- **Social economic grade** – In this sample, children from higher social grade homes were less likely to be smacked regularly and to reject it as a form of discipline compared to children from lower social grade homes, who were smacked more regularly and were often more accepting of it as a form of discipline
- **Family composition and dynamics** – Children from larger families tended to be more accepting of smacking as a way to administer control. Children in the sample whose parents were themselves unhappy were more likely to experience smacking and also to say they felt smacking was unfair
- **School and sports clubs** – Schools appeared to be a key influence on some children's attitudes towards smacking, especially if a children's charity had given a talk on child cruelty or safety. Children who learnt about good sporting behaviour and respect also claimed to be less tolerant of smacking

- **Peers** – As children entered the teenage years and were spending more time at their friends' homes, witnessing different styles of parenting, they often came to reject their own parents' approach to discipline, which sometimes included smacking
 - **Ethnicity and religion** – These factors only affected a small number of children in the sample, but were significant when they did
- **Secondary**
- **Gender** – Smacking was felt to be more acceptable when done to a boy
 - **Geography** – Children living in urban areas were less tolerant of smacking than children who lived in more isolated rural areas, who were more influenced by traditional community values
 - **Personality** – Children with higher self-esteem and emotional intelligence were more likely to question smacking as an acceptable form of discipline

Age was the other factor that seemed to interlock most closely with the principal factor in determining a child's views on smacking.

Younger children in the sample (4 to 8 years) were less intellectually equipped to make a moral judgment relating to smacking and tended simply to accept it.

From the age of 8 or 9 years of age children tended to fall into distinct groups regarding their views on smacking. These can be summarised as follows:

- **Rejecters** – This included a range of children, from those who had been smacked regularly to those who had never been smacked. They believed that smacking was wrong and other forms of discipline were more effective. They stated that they supported more open communication between parents and children, which they felt were more in sync with what they regularly heard from adults about how to treat people with tolerance and respect.
- **Pragmatists** – Whilst these children weren't completely comfortable with the idea of smacking, they claimed that it was acceptable when used occasionally and when a child had been really naughty.

- ❑ **Perpetuators** – These children had often experienced smacking regularly and into the teenage years. They said that often smacks had been administered with little or no explanation and for minor infringements. Aggressive behaviour in general seemed to be a learnt behaviour, part of these children’s identities. They frequently got into fights at school and imagined that they would use smacking as a form of punishment if they were to have children.

Overall, most children in this sample struggled to endorse smacking as an effective form of punishment

3. Conflict, discipline and punishment

3.1 Children's experience of conflict

Children and teenagers in this study reported experiencing conflict within a variety of different relationships and situations across their lives. Conflict happened both formally with adults at home and at school and more informally with peers. It ranged from small insignificant 'tiffs' with friends and siblings to significant rows with parents and physical fights with rival gangs at school and in the community.

The factors which children believed prompted them to get involved in conflict are explored in more depth in Appendix 8.1.

3.2 How age affected children's experience of conflict

Age emerged as a key variable relating to how conflict was experienced and dealt with. There were notable differences between younger children (4 years up to 7 to 8 years) vs. older children and teenagers (8 years to 16 years).

3.2.1 Younger children and conflict

Younger children reported frequently falling out with peers of their own age at school and with their siblings at home. They were also regularly experiencing conflict with parents and teachers.

Some key themes emerged in relation to younger children and conflict and how they dealt with it; these are summarised below and are expanded on in Appendix 8.2.

- Conflict for children of this age appeared to play an important role in their development as they learnt to follow rules, to share and to negotiate.
- Younger children were still developing their coping strategies to deal with conflict and largely relied on their parents and other adults in their lives for guidance.

- ❑ Both boys and girls of this age stated that if they were not able to get their opinion across with words, they used physical actions to communicate their feelings.
- ❑ The most significant conflict for younger children was with their parents, on whom they were emotionally dependent.

"I don't like it when I fall out with my mum, it makes me cry." Girl 4 to 5, Croydon

"It makes me feel like they don't want me anymore." Boy 7 to 8, Newcastle

3.2.2 Older children and conflict

As children in the sample got older, the dynamics of conflict changed. Respondents aged 8 years and older felt they were better able to deal with conflict and to resolve conflict they had with their peers and siblings without adult intervention.

"If it is only little things [my peers do to upset me] then I will just ignore it, but if I think that they have been out of order I will try and talk about it." Girl 8 to 9, Birmingham

Some key themes emerged in relation to older children and conflict and how they dealt with it; these are summarised below and are expanded on in Appendix 8.3.

- ❑ Older children claimed they looked beyond their parents to learn coping strategies for conflict, including lessons at school and sports coaches.
- ❑ Older children who were less well equipped to deal with conflict were more likely to use physical aggression to express their emotions and to be labelled as 'trouble makers' at school.
- ❑ Falling out with friends took on greater significance for older children.
- ❑ Conflict in general reportedly happened less often for many children as they got older, as they learnt to conform to rules at home and in school.

"You just know the rules and get on with it." Boy 10 to 11, Devon

However, it also appeared that conflict could escalate in the teenage years if boundaries were particularly strict.

“My parents are really strict and have the most pathetic and childish rules, I just tend to ignore them if I don’t agree with them.” Girl 15 to 16, Winchester

- ❑ The one source of conflict that seemed to remain constant for children and teenagers as they grew up was conflict with their siblings.

3.3 Attitudes to discipline and punishment

Children of all ages in the sample understood that there were consequences for inappropriate and bad behaviour and for breaking the rules, and whilst it was not something they relished, it was a necessary part of life and learning. Most children agreed that ‘getting away with’ inappropriate behaviour was not a good thing, as it only perpetuated bad behaviour and ultimately everyone would suffer in the long run.

“If there weren’t rules then people would do lots of nasty stuff and it would be scary.” Girl 11 to 12, Newcastle

Discipline and punishment were accepted as part of this learning process, when they were delivered in fair and appropriate ways. Learning about the world and the need for rules appeared to help children understand how they could get the most out of life as they grew up, how to get along with people and how to feel happy and content.

“It helps you learn how to behave so you can be part of the place where you live and get on with other people.” Boy 7 to 8 Newcastle

“I mean you know what is expected of you when you are an adult.” Girl 8 to 9, Cardiff

3.3.1 The differences between discipline and punishment

The terms 'discipline' and 'punishment' were introduced by the moderator as part of all discussions with children and teenagers and some clear distinctions in their understanding emerged:

- **'Discipline'** did not seem to be a word that featured regularly in children's vocabularies, but it was a term that most of them understood. It was often used as an umbrella term by children to describe the formal framework their parents and other adults in their lives used to guide their upbringing. For respondents, discipline included more proactive and positive approaches to encouraging good behaviour, such as positive feedback and constructive dialogue.

"Discipline doesn't always have to be when you have done something wrong, it is how your parents guide you every day." Boy 13 to 14, Croydon

- **'Punishment'** fell under the umbrella of 'discipline' for respondents, as the negative aspect or manifestation of the phrase. It carried more negative associations for all children in the sample and referred to what happened to them when they had behaved inappropriately or broke the rules. Many associated this term with specific types of punishments such as being smacked or grounded from doing things that they enjoyed. Punishment was not a word that children used readily and was often associated with their parents' generation and harsh physical punishment.

"My dad told me that they used to smack his bottom with a cane at school and that my granddad used a slipper on him; that must have hurt." Boy 10 to 11, Devon

Further details on discipline and punishment are given in Appendices 8.4 and 8.5.

3.4 The importance of dialogue and fairness in relation to punishment

The need for dialogue and effective communication emerged as a crucial part of punishment; children across the sample expressed a strong need to understand why adults were sometimes disappointed with their behaviour as well as a need to feel that the punishment they were getting was fair and justified.

The types of information children had a desire for included:

- What did they do/ say that resulted in the punishment?
- Why was their behaviour wrong/ inappropriate/ dangerous?
- What was the negative impact of their behaviour on themselves and/ or others?

A commitment of their parents' time seemed to help to communicate parents' interest in both good and bad behaviour, and older children particularly felt respected when communication was done in a mature way that avoided shouting and physical punishments. Older children also acknowledged that only receiving negative feedback would create a struggle to develop as healthy and rounded individuals.

"It is good when your parents talk to you and tell you about things to avoid; that is much better than just smacking you. It will make sure that you have a good life in the end." Boy 12 to 13, Cheadle Hume

3.5 The consequences of bad behaviour

Children in this sample shared a range of different disciplines and punishments they had received for their bad behaviour and rule breaking. These can be summarised into the following categories:

- Denial of things they value
 - Taking away privileges
 - Minor deprivations
 - Exclusion
- Extra work/chores
- Verbal admonishment
- Physical punishment

Each of these categories will now be explained in brief; further detail can be found in Appendix 8.6

- ❑ **Taking away privileges** such as TV, going out and pocket money. Children of all ages agreed that this was an effective form of punishment and although they felt a sense of loss, they stated that it often gave them time to reflect on what they had done and was less likely to lead to resentment towards parents.

“You don’t like it, right, but it makes you realise how much you miss it and it gives you time to think about what you have done.” Boy 11 to 12, Swansea

- ❑ **Minor deprivations** such as sending a friend home, no pudding or not getting sweets. This emerged as a form of discipline with the potential to encourage children of *all* ages to reflect on their behaviour as they were missing out on something that they valued. Deprivations appeared to be particularly effective with younger children since they could be administered quickly and children were able to make the connection with their misbehaviour.

“I swore at my sister and my mum heard me. I didn’t get any pudding that evening and it was my favourite ice cream. It made me sad and I wish I hadn’t said that word.” Girl 7 to 8, North Wales

- ❑ **Exclusion:** In addition to minor deprivations, children also experienced a range of exclusions such as being sent to their room, time out on the naughty step and being ignored by their parents. If administered in a fair way, these sorts of punishments were felt to bring about reflection amongst children of all ages. However, in some cases exclusion was not always effective, particularly when:

- Children were sent to their room and had access to various forms of technology which kept them entertained
- Their parents ignored them and gave them little or no explanation concerning their misbehaviour and why it deserved this type of treatment. For some children this was one of the worst types of punishments they could receive, as it made them feel insecure and unloved

“It is really scary if your mum ignores you for any length of time.” Girl 10 to 11, Newcastle

❑ **Extra work**

Some children in the sample were required to perform specific tasks as a form of discipline, such as doing chores or babysitting younger siblings. It was a punishment that older children said respected their growing maturity and gave them responsibility. A minority of children were encouraged to write apology letters as a way to get them to think about their misbehaviour and the feelings of other people involved (this tended to be children from higher social grades).

"I write apology letters and leave them on my mum's pillow telling her why I am sorry." Girl 15 to 16, Winchester

❑ **Verbal admonishment**

Verbal discipline was the most frequently reported form of discipline for children across the sample, amongst all ages and social grades and both genders. Children's experience of verbal 'tellings off' varied greatly from gentle reminders, through stern announcements to shouting and yelling.

Respondents stated that verbal admonishments occurred either as a standalone punishment or were a precursor to another form. When parents were more measured in their 'tellings off' and did not raise their voices, it appeared more likely that children would be accepting of a subsequent punishment. In these instances, children said they more often received a punishment that encouraged reflection rather than a physical punishment. Conversely, if parents became angry, out of control and shouted at their child, children reported that they would then likely quickly experience a physical form of punishment such as a smack.

Children felt that the effectiveness of verbal discipline varied depending on the circumstances. In their view, verbal discipline worked well when:

- It referred to something specific
- The adult conveyed the seriousness of the behaviour by their choice of words, tone of voice and facial expression
- It was delivered in a calm and measured fashion
- The adult engaged the child: for younger children this meant physically coming down to their level so they could see the parent's face

When verbal discipline was delivered in this manner, children claimed they were better able to appreciate their wrongdoing and at the same time learn from the situation, as the adult was seen to be guiding and directing them as well as chastising them.

"If they tell you off well, you can feel supported." Girl 11 to 12, Tottenham

"I prefer it when Mummy is calm when she tells me off, as it is less scary and I understand more." Boy 4 to 5, Cardiff

Verbal discipline was less effective for children when:

- It was generalised and children were not sure why they were being punished
- The adult was not felt to explain themselves effectively, which meant that the child found it difficult to understand what they had done wrong and how they might behave differently in the future. This was a particular issue for younger children who were less able to cope with a parent's anger and could be left feeling confused and upset after they had been disciplined
- The discipline took place in a public place, which induced shame and humiliation for many children. This was a concern for children of all ages, but became a real issue for older children (over the age of 8 years) as they became more self-conscious

"I can't think of anything worse than when you get told off when you are at the shops and everyone stares at you." Girl 11 to 12, Tottenham

- The adult talked 'at' the child rather than to them, which was particularly antagonising for tweens and teenagers who felt it was patronising and potentially embarrassing if they were admonished in front of siblings or friends
- The parent became angry and was unable to control their emotions. In these circumstances children could fear that a harsher physical punishment was on the way, such as smacking

"My dad looks really mad and you know that he is going to really explode and probably then smack you too." Boy 11, Devon

Respondents who experienced more regular and negative verbal discipline as outlined above appeared more likely to become 'immune' to it and view it to be more of their parents' issue than theirs. In these circumstances, children said they were much less likely to reflect on their behaviour or even listen to what their parents had to say.

"It's like water off a duck's back when they shout at you all the time, and you just stop listening." Boy 15 to 16, Manchester

Physical punishment

Children referred to a range of physical punishments that they had experienced, smacking being the most common and most frequently mentioned. Approximately two-thirds of the children in the sample had been smacked at some point in their lives.

Other physical punishments were mentioned by one or two children in the sample and were either 'one offs' or occasional forms of punishment. (See footnote 1) They are listed below:

- Licking soap
- Carrying heavy books
- Being thrown on the bed
- Ear pulled

Smacking will be explored in further depth in the next three chapters.

Footnote 1: None of these experiences that the children reported to the moderators were any cause for concern and it was not necessary to report any cases on as outlined in the processes on page 7 under Trust and confidentiality

4. Experience of smacking

4.1 Children's definition of smacking

'Smacking' was a word that children used regularly within their vocabulary and was raised spontaneously by many of them when talking about discipline and punishment. It was explained to mean 'being slapped or tapped with an open hand'.

Most children talked about smacks to the bottom, top of the leg/ arm or a tap on the hand; smacks to the head were not deemed at all acceptable by any children in this sample and none of them had experienced this.

Children made a clear distinction between a tap and a slap or a smack. The former tended to be lighter, less significant and often on the arm or hand; the latter was stronger and more likely to be on the bottom.

*"I'll get a slap for nicking the TV remote but a smack for back chatting to my mum."
Girl 13 to 14, Cardiff*

*"Smacking is the worst [kind of punishment] because it hurts your bottom." Girl 4 to 5,
Croydon*

"I was smacked when I was little and the memory of how it made me feel inside was so much stronger than how it felt on my skin, that was over in a few seconds." Boy 15 to 16, Cheadle Hume

4.2 Children's experience of smacking

The following findings are based on an extensive analysis of children's feedback across all the interviews in the sample. Statistics are not included as this research was qualitative in nature and the sample too small to necessarily be statistically representative.

The majority of children in the sample had been smacked at some point in their lives.

- ❑ Most smacking occurred when children were under the age of 9 or 10 years.
- ❑ Those who were being or had been smacked included both boys and girls and all social economic grades (ABC1C2DE).
- ❑ Of those children who were being smacked currently, the frequency split into:
 - 'Rarely' – a few times in their childhood so far
 - 'Occasionally' – less than once a month and perhaps only a few times year
 - 'Regularly' – sometimes more than once a day and at the least a few times a week
- ❑ The most regularly smacked children tended to be from C2DE families and those more occasionally and rarely smacked tended to be from ABC1 families.
- ❑ There were some over 11s who were being smacked (occasionally or regularly). This included both boys and girls but tended to be more dominant amongst children from C2DE families.

These older children stated that they resented being smacked as a form of discipline, as they felt that it was no longer appropriate and felt 'babyish.' They said that this resentment could cause them to feel emotionally distant from their parents when it was happening regularly. This concurred with all tweens' and teenagers' views on smacking, that when children reach the age of around 10, they have 'grown out of smacking' and that it is more appropriate for parents to employ other forms of discipline where necessary.

"Smacking on its own is not enough for older children as it is over too quickly...it is too babyish too." Girl 11 to 12, Croydon

"I would go mental if I was smacked now. It is like treating you like a kid when you are an adult." Boy 15 to 16, Stockport

- ❑ The children who stated that they had never been smacked were a minority in this sample. This was not significantly split by gender, as both boys and girls were among those never smacked. More significantly, those who had never

been smacked were split by social economic grade. Predominantly they were ABC1, though some children who were never smacked were from C2DE families.

4.3 The physical and emotional impact of smacking

Feedback from children suggested that the emotional impact of smacking was more powerful and enduring than the physical impact that a child felt. Younger children did talk about the 'sting' that they might feel when they were smacked on the bottom and that this did hurt a bit, but said they were relieved that it only lasted a few seconds. In comparison, the emotional pain associated with smacking appeared to last for longer, especially if the child was smacked regularly and there was no accompanying dialogue or explanation about why the smack was justified.

4.4 An overview of children's views on smacking

Smacking was generally considered the most 'severe' type of discipline, because it was of a physical nature and was from an adult to a child. Since in most cases adults are physically much bigger than children, some children questioned smacking's appropriateness under any circumstances.

"If I got smacked I'd say, 'What are you doing that for?' as I don't think they are being a good influence." Boy 8 to 9, Cardiff

"Adults are bigger than kids and smacking can feel very intimidating." Girl 10 to 11, Newcastle

Discussions with children suggested that the term 'smacking' was emotionally charged for many and that it was often associated with feelings of fear, shame and anger. In some instances it was not only associated with parental disapproval and disappointment, but also with parents losing control and their temper. No other punishment discussed with children in this study appeared to carry such strong negative emotions.

"My dad gets really angry. He smacks me and sends me to my room. He hit me with a flip flop a couple of weeks ago." Boy 11 to 12, Swansea

"I've been smacked once when I was little for being a madam. I got a shock and don't ever want it again." Girl 9 to 10, Birmingham

"My mum just doesn't think sometimes and just smacks, it means that sometimes you get smacked when you haven't done it, or it is not your fault." Girl 11 to 12, Croydon

Many children felt physical punishment should be reserved for severe misbehaviour only, while others felt that it was never acceptable as a form of discipline and believed that it was actually a form of violence.

"A smack is okay if you have done something really bad." Girl 7 to 8, North Wales

"You shouldn't smack a child for something small like eating the last biscuit." Girl 15 to 16, Winchester

"I think it is never acceptable to smack a child and that is what the NSPCC think too." Girl 10 to 11, Newcastle

Children considered the best use of smacking was when it taught younger children about personal safety, e.g. that traffic is dangerous or that the cooker is hot.

"My mum smacked me when I was about to run into the road when I was 3; otherwise I could have been hurt." Girl 4 to 5, Croydon

Many older children also thought smacking was suited to severely anti-social and criminal actions, e.g. wanton destruction, smoking, taking drugs, shoplifting, bullying and so forth. However, this jars with a belief that it becomes more unsuitable as form of punishment as a child gets older and starts secondary school.

"I would say [smacking] is more acceptable when you are being really bad and out of order, like stealing or smoking, but then it gets a bit awkward when you get older and you can hit back and it feels like something that should only happen to younger kids." Boy 15 to 16, Cheadle Hume

Many children also claimed that parents were using smacking for less severe infringements such as petty fights with siblings, accidentally knocking over something, back chatting and forgetting to tidy their bedroom. Children who experienced this type of discipline on a regular basis occasionally expressed

resentment of their parents and sometimes also seemed to be experiencing problems with their behaviour outside of the home.

“I accidentally knocked over a bottle of Coke and my dad smacked me for that; it felt really unfair.” Girl 11 to 12, Croydon

These and other issues relating to smacking will be explored in greater depth in the next chapters.

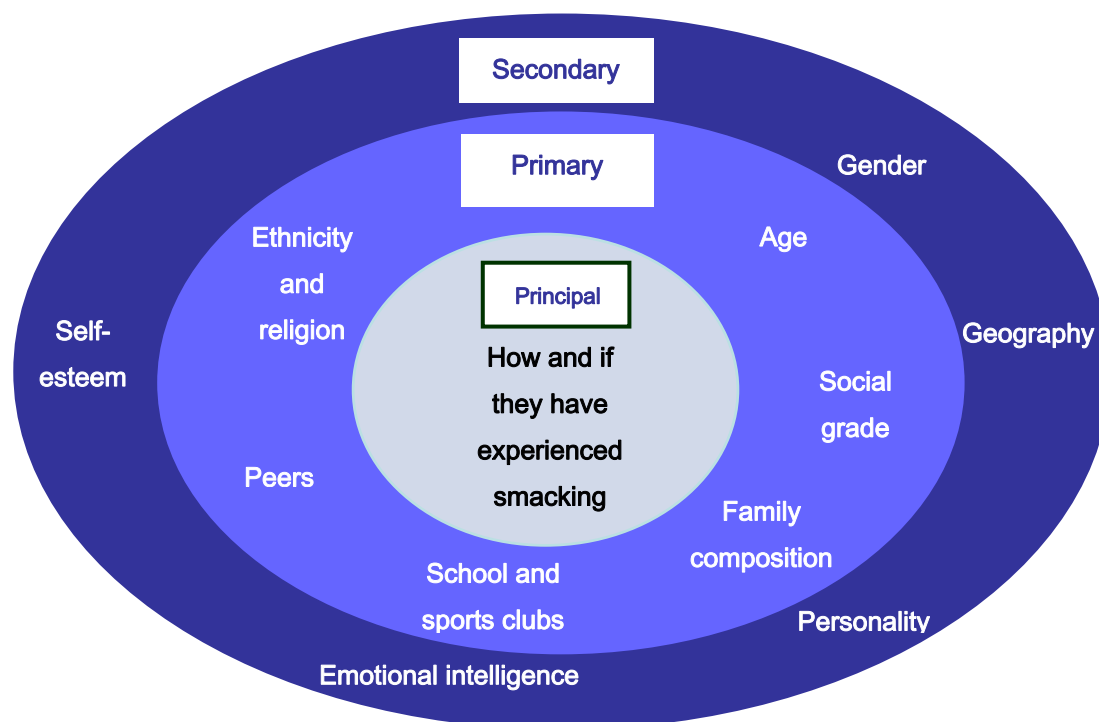
5. Factors affecting children's views on smacking

5.1 Overview of factors

A plethora of complex and interlocking factors emerged as influences on children's and teenagers' views on smacking. The research team has distilled these factors down into several common themes. However, it should be noted that the complexity of the smacking issue makes it difficult if not impossible to predict a *specific* child's attitudes toward smacking, as the impact of cultural and psychological factors such as these differs from child to child.

In addition, for the benefit of this document the researchers have teased out the factors that were more significant overall in impacting views on smacking, but for each child the intensity of the factors varied—with some of the below diagram's 'secondary' factors weighing more heavily than 'primary' ones and vice versa.

The diagram below summarises the factors that affected a child's view of smacking.



Each of these factors are now described, starting with the secondary ones, then the primary and finishing with the principal factor, which was whether or not a child had experienced smacking. This principal factor emerged as having the most significant

impact on a child's attitudes to smacking. For example, all those children who had not been smacked rejected it as a form of acceptable punishment.

5.2 Secondary factors

This set of factors (gender, geography, personality, emotional intelligence, and self-esteem) appeared to play a relatively less significant role for most children in influencing views on smacking, but still seemed to have an impact nonetheless. Analysis showed that this group of factors consisted largely of internal qualities which seemed to help determine how well a child was able to cope with being smacked, the support they were willing to seek and their subsequent opinions on the efficacy of smacking as a form of discipline.

5.2.1 Gender

Discussion with children and teenagers suggested that adults treated boys and girls differently across many aspects of their lives, with smacking in particular being perceived as a form of punishment more suited to boys.

Boys said they were often labelled as trouble makers because they were less able to express and communicate their views and needs with words, so often resorted to physical acts and received physical acts back as a form of punishment. Children believed it was more socially acceptable to smack a boy than a girl. Common reasons included:

- Boys are tough and can take it
- Smacking is a type of punishment boys are more able to relate to
- It prepares them for being a man

Girls were perceived to mature more quickly than boys, being more able to express themselves confidently and competently with words vs. physical acts. Children believed it was less socially acceptable to smack a girl than a boy. Common reasons included:

- Girls are delicate and fragile
- They are more likely to get physically and emotionally hurt
- A male parent hitting a girl is socially unacceptable

Overall, children believed that it was more socially acceptable to smack a boy than a girl, saying that boys were 'tougher' and more able to relate to physical interaction than girls, to whom they believed parents tended to give verbal punishments to. However, in this study there were not notable gender differences in who was actually smacked – it was split evenly between boys and girls.

"Boys are always being rough and physical with their friends, even if they don't mean it. It just seems a bit more OK for a boy to be smacked than a girl." Girl 14 to 15, Newton Abbott, Devon

5.2.2 Geography

Where children and teenagers lived also had some bearing on their opinions about smacking. Three different types of locations emerged in this study: urban, rural and 'in between.' Some differences did emerge between these different locations, the most significant being between the urban and rural locations. Children living in urban locations were more likely to exhibit more liberal attitudes to smacking and not accept it as a form of punishment, whereas those living in more isolated, rural locations tended to have more traditional attitudes towards discipline and punishment.

As always, it is important to remember that these findings are based on a small sample and therefore should not be considered definitive, but they do indicate that there is a potential divide in smacking behaviours and resulting attitudes based on where children live.

Each of the types of locations in the sample is described below.

- **Urban** – including London, Stockport, Birmingham, Cardiff and Newcastle. Children from these locations spoke of being exposed to a variety of different people, institutions and opinions across their lives and appeared more likely to adopt shifting societal opinions faster than those living in more isolated locations. Children in these locations were more likely to believe that other forms of discipline were more effective than smacking to support and nurture good behaviour, and many rejected smacking all together. On average, children from these larger cities were reportedly smacked less often over the

age of 11. For under 11s, smacking occurred more for specific things only and more infrequently overall.

- ❑ **Rural** – including Colden Common, Winchester, Newton Abbott and Colwyn Bay. Children from smaller towns more often said that they accepted smacking as a form of punishment without question. These communities were more insulated from the influence of big conurbations and traditional attitudes and community bonds seemed appeared to have a significant influence on the next generation's views. Children living in these areas were more likely to live nearer extended family, say they felt like they belonged to a community and share similar views with that community. Often, an acceptance of smacking as a traditional form of punishment was included in these views. These children also tended to be smacked more frequently and to an older age.

- ❑ In those **'in between'** locations in the sample including Kent, Swansea and Croydon, children were more likely to express a mixture of the above attitudes, as the areas they lived in were often close to larger conurbations, but also influenced by local traditions and community held values.

5.2.4 Personality, self-esteem and emotional intelligence

These three internal factors, uniquely combined within each individual child, could also affect how they felt about discipline and specifically smacking. They are each defined below and further details can be found in Appendix 8.7.3.

Personality

Children with introverted personality types reported inward-looking coping strategies for being smacked, and also tended to say that they blamed themselves if they were smacked, thinking it was a negative judgement about them.

"I just go into myself when I have a problem and that is just what I do." Boy 13 to 14, Croydon

"I don't like being smacked and it makes me worry when I am on my own afterwards." Girl 6 to 7, Swansea

Children who could be classified as more extroverted said they enjoyed being surrounded by people and being sociable and gregarious. They said they felt able to cope with physical punishment, as they could seek support from the people around them and were able to express their views more easily if they felt something was unfair.

"If I have a row with my mum I just call my mate and we talk about it, then I feel better." Girl 12 to 13, Birmingham

Self-esteem

Children who appeared to have higher self-esteem tended to be actively engaged in a range of activities, usually sport and music, and often described themselves as being academically comfortable. This meant that their sources of confidence were drawn from a wide range of influences. Children who appeared to have higher self-esteem said they were more confident, questioning discipline and negotiating with adults. In contrast, those who seemed to have lower self-esteem said they were less likely to critique or openly question the behaviour of adults, tending to accept smacking as 'something that adults do'.

Emotional intelligence

Respondents who appeared more 'emotionally intelligent' (able to talk about and understand their feelings and the feelings of others) felt better able to articulate their concerns about discipline and punishment and also better able to understand the reasons for being smacked, giving them greater insight into the nuances of the issue.

"If you are able to understand why your parent has smacked you it might help you to accept it more." Boy 9 to 10, Kent

5.3 Primary factors

This set of influences (age, social grade, family composition, school/sports/other groups, peers, ethnicity and religion) were often relatively set factors which children had little influence over, but which exerted significant influence over their opinions and behaviour on the issue of smacking.

5.3.1 Age

Of all the primary factors, age emerged as the most important. Respondents in this study seemed to move through three stages – younger (4 to 8), tweens (9 to 12) and teenagers (13 to 16) and as they got older, children tended to believe less and less in the social acceptability of smacking. Below is a breakdown of what researchers found for each age group in the sample in relation to their stage of development and views on smacking.

These were typical traits of young children in the sample age range (4 to 7 years):

- They live in the 'here and now' and have short attention span
- They can become easily frustrated and are frequently 'naughty'
- They often physically express needs and moods
- They are emotionally dependent on parents

For younger children (4 to 8 years), discipline and boundaries were an accepted part of life and these children did not question it if they were smacked.

"Sitting down and trying to talk to a six year old is impossible and that is why some people might say that smacking is OK." Boy 15 to 16, Stockport

These were typical characteristics of tweens in the sample age range (8 to 12 years):

- Dealing with change and relishing extra maturity/ trust
- Experiencing insecurity from changing schools and letting go of some aspects of childhood
- Beginning to deal with conflict in more mature way and know the rules
- Still close to parents but peer influence increasing

For tweens (8 to 12 years), who were reportedly still close to their parents but felt the increasing influence of their peers, smacking felt at odds with their growing maturity and was often said to undermine the trust they had in their parents.

"I prefer it now when my parents are firm with me, rather than smacking me." Girl 8 to 9, Birmingham

These were typical characteristics of teenagers in the sample age range (13 to 16 years):

- A rapid time of change and increased responsibilities
- Enjoying physical and emotional freedom from family
- Dealing with increasing demands of peers and the need to conform
- Self-esteem can be fragile
- Becoming independent young adults, grown out of childhood ways

Teenagers in the study (13 to 16 years), said it would be unacceptable for them to be smacked, as they were closer to adulthood and smacking was for younger children. This group felt closer to their parents and respected them more when they used more 'mature' forms of discipline such as doing chores and taking away privileges.

"When you're eight, that's like the age of reason so you're not really smacked after that because you can understand what you did wrong." Boy 13 to 14, Croydon

5.3.2 Social economic grade

Social economic grade emerged as an important factor influencing many children's and teenagers' attitudes toward smacking. Feedback is split below between higher social economic grade (ABC1) and lower social economic grade (C2DE).

Higher social grade (ABC1)

These children may have been smacked when they were younger (under 8), but their parents tended towards more reflective types of discipline, giving children space for communication and negotiation. Children and teens in the higher social economic grades also gave their parents credit for explaining how to deal with issues such as bullying without violence. The value of this sort of dialogue seemed to encourage similar, anti-physical expression beliefs among these children.

"My mum told me that she doesn't smack me so I shouldn't smack my brother, especially because he's littler than me." Girl 8 to 9, Birmingham (ABC1)

"My mum has taught me to try and show the best of myself and give a good example, and not to fight back as it's not respectful." Boy 11 to 12, Swansea (ABC1)

Lower social grade (C2DE)

In contrast, children of C2DE parents claimed they were smacked more frequently. Some of them did not question it as a form of discipline, but many, however, did not feel smacking was the most effective way to be disciplined and expressed a desire for greater opportunities to engage constructively with their parents.

Some children from this social grade described their parents as being stressed and tired from working long hours, or having mums who were 'home-based' with little external stimuli. In these types of homes, children reported that there was little space for dialogue and communication about issues; instead these children's parents appeared to use tried-and-tested authoritative discipline styles.

However, there also appeared to be a significant blurring between the attitudes of many ABC1 and C2DE families. Many children recalled family viewing of factual entertainment TV programmes such as *Supernanny* and *House of Tiny Tearaways*, which introduced practical ways to parent, showing alternative communication styles and ways of setting boundaries. Children from C2DE families claimed they felt they benefited from these new ideas and could see their parents trying to change their attitudes and parenting style.

5.3.3 Family composition and dynamics

Children's views on smacking were influenced by multiple factors regarding their family makeup. Some key themes which emerged were as follows:

- Children from families with three or more children or more than one boy more often said they were accepting of smacking, as they felt it was needed to control unruly and boisterous behaviour. 'Only' children for the most part said they did not experience smacking, attributing it to more time with their parents and fewer fights at home.

"I'm an only child so my mum and dad don't get too stressed as there's no one for me to fight with. My auntie is always shouting at my cousins though and smacks them when they are naughty" Boy 8 to 9, Cardiff

- ❑ Children with two working parents said they were smacked less, usually because their primary carer was often someone outside the family and employed other forms of discipline and punishment.
- ❑ Most children were against smacking from a stepparent but accepted smacking when coming from a grandparent or other blood relative.

“My stepdad always has a go and my mum ends up shouting at him and saying he should leave me alone and not smack me.” Girl 12 to 13, Birmingham

- ❑ Children who were regularly parented by their grandparents said they had absorbed more traditional, lenient views towards discipline (and corporal punishment).
- ❑ Finally and significantly, those children who said their parents were ‘unhappy together’ seemed to be smacked more often. According to these children, when parents were dealing with their own issues and less focused on their child’s needs, smacking was often utilised as a quick way to administer discipline and control. Children said they resented smacking in these circumstances, as it felt unwarranted and they were given little or no explanation regarding their behaviour and why smacking was justified. More emotionally intelligent children seemed able to understand that a smack was often more about their parents’ emotional state than their behaviour; whereas some children who appeared less emotionally intelligent believed that they were to blame.

“My dad used to shout and smack me loads more when my mum was around, but now he’s a bit better as she lives somewhere else.” Boy 11 to 12, Swansea

“When my mum comes home stressed from work she’ll have a go at me for being rude or something but it’s only ‘cos she’s stressed.” Girl 12 to 13, Cardiff

5.3.4 School and sports clubs

School and sport clubs could also strongly influence children's views and behaviour including physical forms of discipline such as smacking. This research found that:

- ❑ A school's attitude towards physical violence and respect (e.g. rules regarding fighting in the playground and conduct in the classroom) appeared to have a vital influence on children's and teenagers' views on smacking. In addition, children whose schools had invited children's charities such as the NSPCC or the Police in for safety-based talks said they felt much less tolerant of smacking as disciplinary procedures. Although this only included a minority of children in the sample, the impact it had on their views was quite marked.

"The NSPCC came in and gave us a talk about child cruelty and that has made me think that smacking is not okay." Boy 9 to 10, Kent

- ❑ PSHE lessons (Personal, Social and Health Education) were also sources of information regarding respect and socially acceptable behaviour, which children felt suggested that smacking was inappropriate.

"We learnt about sharing and being nice to each other in PSHE in Year 3." Girl 11 to 12, Croydon

- ❑ Children who attended sports clubs said they learned about team work, good sporting behaviour and fair discipline, which all seemed to spill over into their conduct at school and at home. Sports frequently mentioned included football, rugby and martial arts.

"In football, you learn about why it is wrong to physically and verbally abuse other players on the pitch." Boy 11 to 12, Manchester

"Martial arts teaches you about respect and how not to lash out." Boy 13 to 14, Croydon

5.3.5 Peers

As children grew older, they explained that their peers' lifestyles affected their own aspirational attitudes. Spending time at each other's houses gave them the opportunity to measure their own parent's behaviour against their friends', making them feel either fortunate or unfortunate regarding smacking in their own family.

"I don't like going to sleep at Holly's house, her mum is really moody." Girl 12 to 13, Cardiff

"You see how other people's parents deal with their children and that gives you an idea if what your parents do is acceptable or not." Boy 14 to 15, Tottenham

5.3.6 Ethnicity and religion

This was another primary factor affecting attitudes toward smacking, although it is important to note that only a small number of children who fitted these criteria were spoken to in this sample, and therefore these findings should be considered merely indicative and not necessarily definitive.

In this sample, South Asian children, more often than those in other ethnic groups, said that smacking was acceptable. However, as these children grew up and identified beyond the family, they also said they felt a rising tension between two worlds with differing expectations (the more traditional home environment where smacking was accepted and the outside world where it often was not).

"I want to respect my parent's views, but I am not sure that I agree with them." Girl 11 to 12, Tottenham

Church, though again a minority in this sample attended, was said by some to provide a huge moral backdrop and compass, a higher authority to parents when it came to behaviour. Children who attended church tended to oppose smacking, as it was not viewed as a kind or thoughtful way for an adult to behave towards a child.

"Church teaches you to treat other people in the way that you would like to be treated." Boy 14 to 15, Tottenham

5.4 Principal factor

At the centre of the diagram of influences is the principal factor, which is how a child has experienced smacking in their life (if at all). In this study, this factor appeared to have the greatest influence on children's opinions of the issue, as clear differences emerged between those who had been smacked and those who had not. While all of the preceding influences combined to contribute to children's attitudes to smacking, none emerged as more influential than the respondent's own personal experience of being smacked or not smacked.

The next chapter will explore this in more depth.

6. Mapping children's views on smacking

6.1 Younger children and their attitudes towards smacking

Younger children (those aged 4 to 7 years) in the sample were less intellectually equipped to deal with complex moral issues such as smacking. If children in this age range were smacked, it seemed to them this was 'just what happened'; it felt normal for them.

It appeared that most of these children were too young to question the behaviour of their parents, as their ability to critically analyse in this way had not yet matured. Children this young appeared to accept smacking as part of their lives, albeit one they did not like.

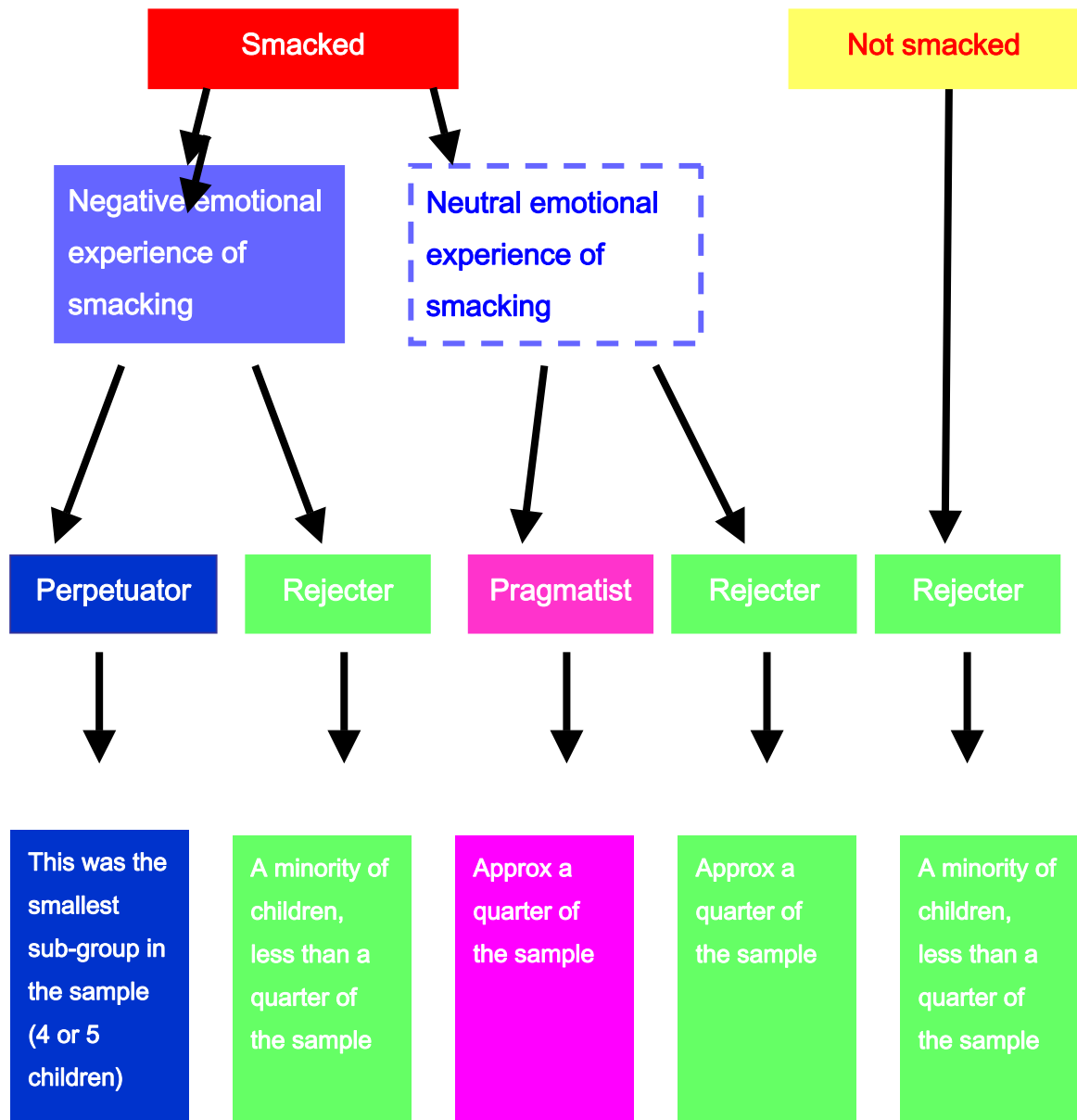
"My mummy is older than me and a grown up and so she smacks me when I am naughty." Girl 4 to 5, Croydon

"...because they are just allowed to smack you." Boy 6 to 7, Cheadle Hume

6.2 Older children and attitudinal outcomes

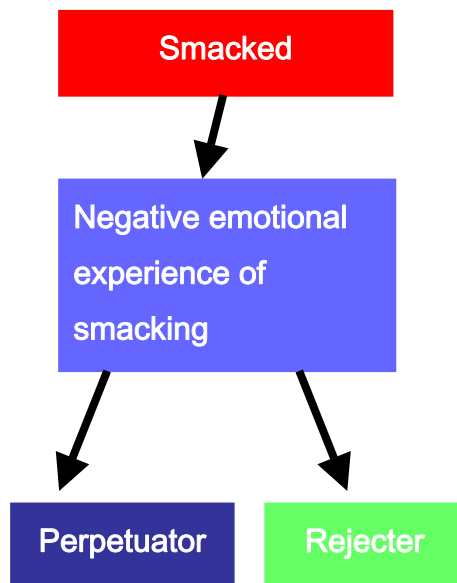
As they grew up, children in the sample began to fall into distinct groups regarding their views on smacking. As illustrated in the diagram below, the research team found that children's attitudinal outcomes appeared to follow several different paths. Which path a child's attitudes took depended on whether they had been smacked and how they had experienced it. Children could have either experienced smacking in a neutral emotional way or a negative emotional way. A neutral emotional experience of smacking refers to smacking that was delivered with consideration and explanation on the part of a parent and the child understood why it was happening and tended to feel safe. For the later group, who experienced smacking in a negative emotional way, smacking felt like a random act to them, often unjustified, given with no verbal explanation and sometimes felt like an abuse of parents' power. For each of these two categories, children appeared to fall into a number of subsequent categories relating to their views on smacking (perpetuator, pragmatist and rejecter). These groups are depicted in the diagram overleaf and explained on the following pages.

Older children and attitudinal outcomes



6.3 Children who had a negative emotional experience of smacking

Children in this group were either currently being smacked or had been smacked by their parents.



What was smacking like for this group?

This group of children stated that for them, smacking happened quite regularly by one or both parents and there were no clear boundaries set around smacking. They could be smacked for very small to more serious actions and the rationale for punishment was often inconsistent and determined by their parents' mood. Children who fell into this group also felt that smacking was often a reflex action with no accompanying dialogue, and for them smacking often continued into the teenage years.

"Sometimes I get smacked for not clearing my room and other times they say nothing, it is confusing." Boy 11 to 12, Swansea

"I might happen because they are in a bad mood and you haven't really done anything to deserve it." Girl 8 to 9, Cardiff

"It becomes a bit of a habit for some parents." Boy 15 to 16, North Wales

Why was it a negative emotional experience?

These children said they were often left feeling scarred, stressed, harassed and on edge. Smacking felt like a random act to them, unjustified and sometimes an abuse of parents' power. Children also claimed that they often felt distant from their parents and resentful of them as a result, which seemed to have the potential to lead to feelings of low self worth and isolation. This was particularly the case when smacking continued on a regular basis in the later tween (10 to 12) and teenage years.

"You end up hating your parents for doing it when they could just spend a bit more time telling you why they are upset and how they would like you to behave. They become sort of the enemy." Boy 10 to 11, Winchester

"Everyone just really gets really angry and annoyed." Girl 11 to 12, Tottenham

The impact of experiencing smacking in this way appeared to impact children in one of two ways:

- They could either accept it and become 'perpetuators' of this type of physical behaviour through their existing relationships with siblings and peers
- OR they became 'rejecters' of smacking and claimed that they would not discipline their children in the same way in the future

These two groups are now explained in further detail.

6.3.1 Perpetuators

It appeared to the research team that for this subgroup, who were the smallest minority in this sample, that smacking and aggressive behaviour had become a learnt behaviour and part of their identity.

"My parents still hit me and I am always fighting at school, it is what you have to do to survive in my school." Boy 14 to 15, Tottenham

These children often appeared to have poorer communication skills and reported that they expressed themselves through aggressive behaviour and fighting (both inside and outside of the home). All the children who fell into this category were male. There was some evidence that some older teenage boys who fell within this sub-group were also getting involved in more anti-social behaviour.

"I do get up to some dodgy stuff that parents don't know about, like a bit of stealing and fighting, nothing really terrible though." Boy 15 to 16, Cheadle Hume

Other children in the sample who fell into other sub-groups held strong views on children who fell into the 'perpetuator' sub-group. In particular they felt that their behaviour could spiral out of control and lead to delinquent and anti-social behaviour, and there was also a perception that smacking gets passed on to the next generation and that these children were repeating learnt behaviour.

"Kids lash out at school because that is what happens at home." Boy 11 to 12, Cheadle Hume

"It is what they learn and it carries on to the next generation." Girl 11 to 12, Newcastle

6.3.2 Rejecters

Some children who experienced smacking in a negative emotional way claimed they rejected it as a form of acceptable punishment. Children stated that they would try to develop coping strategies to avoid being smacked, and as teenagers (which many of them were), they were able to accept the emotional damage done to them and develop a values system different to their parents', influenced by peers, sports coaches, teachers and so forth.

These children tended to have better communication skills, be emotionally intelligent and have built up their self-esteem outside of the immediate family. They were also more likely to be female and want to discipline their children differently than they had been disciplined.

"It is worst when there is not talking and the child just gets whacked. I think then [children] feel really confused and hurt inside, it is almost like bullying." Girl 12 to 13, Cheadle Hume

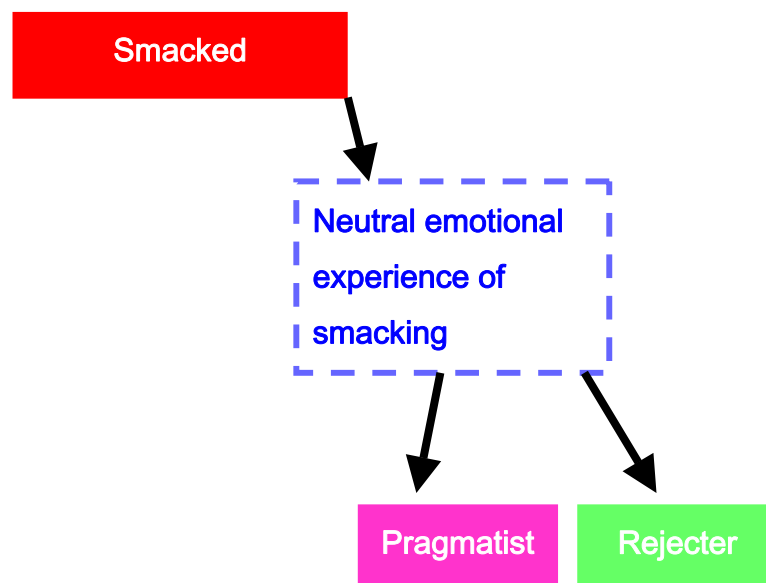
"Adults get satisfaction from smacking because they are in control. They are on top, like being king." Boy 11 to 12, Cheadle Hume

"It could end up that the only reason you're not doing things is that you don't want to get smacked – if a child is constantly smacked, they won't really understand that what they did is wrong." Boy 13 to 14, Croydon

"I didn't like it as a kid, and even though I learnt from it, I still wouldn't do it to my kids." Girl 12 to 13, Cheadle Hume

6.4 Children who had a neutral emotional experience of smacking

Children in this group were either currently being smacked or had been smacked by their parents, and did not express any major concerns with smacking as a form of discipline for themselves. However, some of these children still rejected smacking for themselves in the future (with their own children), while others took a more pragmatic stance toward the issue. These two groups are depicted in the diagram below:



What was smacking like for this group?

Children who fell into this group stated that they were smacked either regularly or more occasionally, but that it was usually for a more serious action. These children's parents, unlike the parents of the negative emotional experience children, appeared to regularly explain why they felt smacking was justified, and for these children, smacking was most likely to stop around 10 years of age.

Why was it a neutral emotional experience?

Children in this group generally reported feeling safe and secure, and respected their parents' stance on discipline. They said they saw smacking as the consequence of their behaviour and therefore it felt more justified. They also claimed that they appreciated that smacking was used as a way to help teach them about right from wrong and that it could help support the 'growing up' process, even though it was not something they relished the idea of.

"I don't like the idea of getting smacked, but I understand why my parents do it and it doesn't happen that often." Boy 7 to 8, Newcastle

"When I have done something wrong it feels right that I might get a smack because I deserve it and I am angry with myself for lying or being bad." Girl 8 to 9, Birmingham

"It's not good to be smacked, of course, you don't look forward to it...but I appreciate why my parents did it because it told me what I'd done was wrong." Boy 15 to 16, Croydon

Children who experienced smacking in this way then appeared to fall into two sub-groups which related to their views on smacking. These were 'pragmatists' and 'rejecters,' described in further detail below.

6.4.1 Pragmatists

These children often said they felt uncomfortable with smacking as a form of punishment, especially when it felt unjustified, but also because it was physical and from an adult to a child. However, they also claimed that smacking did them no harm, and if used occasionally for extreme actions, it could be an effective form of punishment. This sub-group tended to include children from lower social grades and

minority ethnic communities with an expectation/ tradition that they would repeat what their parents did (which often involved smacking). However, some had picked up on broader anti-smacking messages, leading to reflection and a sense that maybe smacking was not really acceptable under any circumstance.

"I'm pleased my parents smacked me because it made me a better person and better behaved now. It didn't happen very often but did have a good impact." Boy 13 to 14, Croydon

"Don't use smacking straightaway but if child has done something REALLY bad, smacking could help a lot to reinforce it so they don't do it again." Boy 12 to 13, Cheadle Hume

6.4.2 Rejecters

Whilst these children said that they accepted smacking as a form of punishment for them, it was not something they agreed with and they claimed they could not see themselves smacking their own children when they became parents in the future. Fundamentally, this subgroup disagreed with the idea of an adult smacking a child and several said they feared it could lead to more serious abuse. The children in this group were likely to be from higher social grades and more secure families. Several also said they were influenced by child charities talks, their peers, martial art philosophy and media stories. They also appeared to be more likely to be emotionally intelligent, have high self-esteem, a strong value system and be aware of shifting social views on the issue of smacking.

"I know it didn't do me any harm, but I just don't think that it should ever be OK." Boy 14 to 15, Tottenham

"We had a talk from the NSPCC and it has made me certain that smacking is not something that should happen." Girl 10 to 11, Newcastle

6.5 Children who were not smacked

6.5.1 Rejecters

Why did they become rejecters?

All children who fell into this group said they were punished using other forms of discipline that they believed were more effective than smacking. This group tended to include children from higher social grades and children who were more aware and interested in social issues and trends. . The children in this sub-group fundamentally disagreed with the idea of an adult smacking a child and feared it could lead to more serious abuse and violence.

*“There’s a thin line between showing a kid what he did wrong, and physical abuse.”
Boy 13 to 14, Croydon*

“If people smack their children then it can lead to abuse and they may be violent and take drugs. The NSPCC have an advert on the TV that says that it is wrong.” Boy 11 to 12, Cheadle Hume

Often children in this subgroup took the ‘moral high ground’ and were quick to pick up on what they felt was hypocrisy in an adult world that espouses non-violence but where parents still smack their children at home. Smacking did not fit in with these respondents’ ideas about tolerance and respect, which they regularly heard adults and other authority figures discussing.

“How would they like it if you hit them [your children]?!” Girl 11 to 12, Croydon

“Some adults think that it is effective, but it not nice to be treated in that way. The adult benefits and the kid doesn’t.” Boy 11 to 12, Cheadle Hume

“It’s not good, it will only breakaway the relationship. If my dad hit me, I’d feel like he was just abusing his authority because he’s older and bigger.” Boy 13 to 14, Croydon

Children in this sub-group also appeared socially aware of issues relating to smacking. Many of them could replay news stories and charity adverts which pointed to the negative and extreme impacts of smacking and many believed that smacking had been banned in England as a form of punishment against a child. This later point regarding the law, was mentioned spontaneously by a number of children and was not prompted by the moderators. In addition, children in this subgroup felt smacking was out of sync with 'modern ideas and ideals' and harked back to a time before they were born.

"It is something that happened when things were different and your parents were children." Boy 10 to 11, Newton Abbott, Devon

"They banned smacking in this country a few years ago." Girl 10 to 11, Newcastle

6.6 Children's views on smacking in the future

The majority of children in the sample, even if they were smacked, did not imagine that they would use smacking as a form of punishment on their children regularly, if at all. Whilst some children were able to legitimise smacking in their minds, nearly all children agreed that other forms of discipline were more effective in bringing about reflection and a change in behaviour.

Most children thought that punishments which deny children privileges and access to things they valued seemed to be more in touch with modern day childhood. This view also seemed to reflect a growing shift in parenting styles involving more open communication and negotiation, compared to a more authoritarian 'do as I say' approach.

"Sitting on the stairs is a better way to get you to think about what you have done, rather than smacking you." Girl 4 to 5, Croydon

"We get screen bans which is just torture; I hate it so much. Other punishment is not being able to play out with your friends." Girl 12 to 13, Cheadle Hume

"I wasn't allowed to go to a party because I had lied to my parents, and that was way worse than getting a smack. I never lied like that again." Girl 11 to 12, Croydon

Many children also felt that smacking felt like a more old fashioned approach to discipline which harked back to an era when punishment was more acceptable throughout society. Children replayed stories their parents and grandparents had told them about corporal punishment at school and getting the slipper at home from dad.

All told, smacking felt out of kilter with many of the messages children were hearing at school, at home and in the media regarding respect and acceptable behaviour.

7. Conclusions

Smacking appears to be the last form of regularly administered physical punishment being used by parents to discipline their children.

Around two thirds of the sample in this study had been smacked, mostly when they were less than 8 years of age. As children became old enough to start developing their own opinions, they started to question the role of smacking.

The key factors which tended to determine children's views on smacking were:

- Their experience of smacking (principal factor)
- Their age, social grade and involvement in sports (primary factors)
- And for some, personality and where they lived could also be important (secondary factors)

Whilst smacking was often the most feared type of punishment, children consistently agreed that it was not the most effective. Children believed that punishments such as taking away privileges, extra work, exclusion or a well executed 'telling off' were more likely to encourage reflection and learning compared to smacking.

Children (from around the age of 8 years) were aware of society's shifting views on smacking. TV programmes like *Super Nanny* and *House of Tiny Tearaways* were introducing new ways to discipline children that do not involve physical punishment. Some children were also aware of the debate about whether or not to ban smacking and some thought it had already been banned in England.

Others felt that smacking did not fit with modern values such as tolerance and respect that they were being taught in school. Many respondents also had a historical perspective, reporting that their parents' generation was punished with the cane at school, which has since died out.

Most children in this research were uncomfortable with smacking as a form of punishment from an adult to a child.

Some children, especially those who had never been smacked or couldn't remember being smacked, rejected smacking and saw it as a form of violence against children whereby parents abuse their power.

Even those children who took a more pragmatic stance to smacking imagined that when they became parents themselves, they would be less reliant on smacking than their own parents, reserving it for serious and dangerous misbehaviour.

Those children who had experienced smacking that they considered 'inappropriate' (often administered regularly, with no consistent or accompanying dialogue) tended to exhibit more traditional views towards physical punishment, often expressed a lack of respect for others, would physically express themselves when they were angry and regularly got into fights. Many of these children imagined that they would smack their own children in the future.

Overall, most children in this sample struggled to endorse smacking as an effective form of punishment

8. Appendix 1: Further details on the findings

This appendix expands further upon several sections of the report, providing further detail and illustration for many of the themes throughout. Under each section, it is noted to which portion of the report the additional findings refer.

8.1 Factors which prompted children to get involved in conflict (expands on 3.1)

Feedback suggested that that conflict was the product of a number of factors, including:

- A child or teenager breaking the rules**, for example fighting, biting other children, being rude, getting involved in anti-social behaviour such as smoking and taking drugs, bullying other children and lying. These types of conflict were felt to be more significant and were more likely to prompt adult intervention and punishment.

“You break the rules and you have to deal with the consequences.” Boy 8 to 9, Newcastle

- A child or teenager disagreeing with another person’s opinion or behaviour**, for example sharing and taking turns and agreeing ownership of a toy (younger children, 4 to 6 years), negotiating the boundaries of a friendship and being uncomfortable/ jealous of their friends’ other friendships. These types of conflict were felt to be less significant and children and teenagers were encouraged by adults to try and resolve these conflicts themselves.

“If it is not something really big and you are just bickering with a friend then adults try and get you to sort it out yourself.” Boy 13 to 14, Croydon

8.2 Younger children and conflict (expands on 3.2.1)

Conflict for children of this age appeared to play an important role in their development as they learnt to follow rules, to share and to negotiate. Adult involvement and guidance was often required to help them avoid conflict with their

peers and siblings or to negotiate themselves through it smoothly and without too much emotional upheaval.

Younger children's regular experience of conflict appeared to be precipitated by their frequent inability to empathise with the feelings and needs of other people and the fact that they were often consumed with their own needs. Older children tend to be less egocentric and in this sample, appeared more able to accommodate other people's opinions.

Younger children in this sample were still developing coping strategies to deal with conflict and largely relied on their parents and other adults in their life for guidance. If they were not supported in dealing with conflict, they claimed they found it difficult to cope with the emotions associated with 'falling out'.

"Parents are constantly shaping you when you're younger and are the ultimate perfect role models telling you what to do, and right from wrong." Boy 13 to 14, Croydon

"You behave well because you want the respect of your parents." Boy 11 to 12, Cheadle Hume

Both boys and girls of this age reported that if they were not able to get their opinion across with words, they used physical actions to communicate their feelings. This included tapping, biting and in a minority of instances punching. As children grew up and their maturity increased, the use of physical actions and outbursts seemed to decrease in frequency, but increase in significance as children and teenagers realised its anti-social significance.

"I bite people when I get really angry with them." Girl 4 to 5, Croydon

The most significant conflict for younger children (4 years and up to the age of 7 to 8) was with their parents. Children in the sample of this age appeared quite emotionally dependent on their parents and conflict with them was therefore upsetting and even distressing.

"I don't like it when I fall out with my mum, it makes me cry." Boy 4 to 5, Winchester

In a minority of instances, falling out with parents could be extremely upsetting for younger children. This tended to be the case when their parents became highly emotional and or aggressive about what they had done and when there were no clear or consistent boundaries set around behaviour.

“When my dad gets really angry with me it feels like he doesn’t like me to be his son anymore.” Boy 6 to 7, Cheadle Hume

“Sometimes I get into trouble for taking a biscuit without asking and then other times my mum is ok with it. I am always a bit scared because I don’t know what she is going to say.” Girl 5 to 6, Kent

8.3 Older children and conflict (expands on 3.2.2)

Older children looked beyond their parents to learn coping strategies for conflict.

Sources they learnt skills from included:

- School- including Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) and their teachers
- Peers
- Clubs they attended outside of school
- Other adults in their lives such as aunts and uncles
- Role models in the media and sport

Significantly, older children who were less well equipped to deal with conflict were more likely to use physical aggression to express their emotions and to be labelled as ‘trouble makers’ at school. Feedback from children and teenagers suggested that this was more likely to be boys than girls.

“When you get to about 8 years old it is much less acceptable to get into fights and to use physical aggression on other people when you are not happy with them.” Boy 14 to 15, Tottenham

However, even though older children were better able to deal with conflict, the growing significance of their peer group meant that falling out with friends took on greater significance than when they were younger. Older children and teenagers said

they worried about losing friends through conflict and found that 'making up' after falling out was not as easy as it had been when they were younger.

"I really really worry about falling out with my friends; it is about the worst thing that could happen to you." Girl 10 to 11, Newcastle

"You just feel very alone and like everyone is talking about you." Boy 9 to 10, Kent

Conversely, older children found it easier to cope with the emotional impact of falling out with their parents. This was both due to their increasing emotional and physical independence they had from their parents and also the frequency in which they experienced conflict with them. It emerged that from around 10 years of age children had tended to grasp the ground rules at home and school and were better able to conform to these rules. This meant that conflict tended to happen less often with parents and teachers.

"Parents still stop you if you're out of line, but friends do too now." Boy 13 to 14, Croydon

However, conflict tended to emerge again for some when they became teenagers as they developed independent opinions and were eager to get independence from their parents and family.

"You want to go out more and your parents are constantly refusing, it is so annoying, I can't wait until I am older." Girl 13 to 14, Manchester

The one source of conflict that seemed to remain constant for children and teenagers as they grew up was conflict with their siblings. Children and teenagers reported that they were often constant 'bickering' with their siblings and whilst it could annoy them, it did not make them feel as unsettled as conflict with their peers and parents could do.

"Me and my brother are always fighting, sometime it is just play and other times it can get more serious." Boy 11 to 12, Swansea

"Falling out with your brothers and sisters is not the same as falling out with friends; it's safer. Your brother will always be your brother, but your friend might not always be your friend." Boy 13 to 14, Croydon

8.4 Discipline in more depth (expands on 3.3)

Discipline was something that most children in the sample felt that their parents administered fairly most of the time. Discussions suggested that children felt that discipline was fair when:

- ❑ **Clear rules and boundaries** had been set and they understood what was and wasn't acceptable behaviour. They acknowledged that this type of structure helped them to learn right from wrong, contributed to making them feeling safe and secure and taught them how to behave appropriately and integrate into the world effectively.

Children's experience of boundaries and discipline did vary greatly and this appeared to have a direct effect on their behaviour. Those children who experienced poor and inconsistent boundaries and discipline at home seemed more prone to getting into trouble because they were creating their own boundaries and were often flouting those which were deemed to be socially acceptable. This was evident amongst all ages of children but became more pronounced as children got older and most of their contemporaries were conforming to the rules. In a minority of cases some teenagers in the sample were being delinquent.

Older children who experienced lax or inconsistent boundaries at home could be appreciative of teachers who set clear boundaries and were able to keep order in their classroom, suggesting that children are not adverse to boundaries and discipline if delivered in a fair and consistent way.

"My form teacher was really strict, but really nice when you got to know him. He didn't let us get away with anything, but I think that was a good thing."
Girl 16, Winchester

- **They were regularly getting feedback on their behaviour**, including both positive and negative information, which allowed them to learn and grow as rounded individuals and ultimately to support the development of healthy self-esteem.

In relation to positive praise and feedback, younger children in the sample talked about the use of sticker charts which plotted their good behaviour and resulted in a prize or gift when they reached a specific target. Tweens and teenagers praised their parents when they spent time with them explaining why they were happy or disappointed in their behaviour.

"I like it when my parents tell me why they are proud of me and not when they tell me off." Girl 11 to 12, Croydon

- **Punishments were fair** and helped to reinforce boundaries and taught children in a positive way. Children appreciated that punishment was a necessary part of discipline and often the result of them doing something wrong and behaving in an unacceptable way. However, issues arose when they felt there was a dissonance between their act or behaviour and the punishment administered. In extreme cases children were receiving punishments when they had not misbehaved but when their parents were angry about something happening in their own personal life and were taking it out on the children.

8.5 Punishment in more depth (expands on 3.3)

Punishment carried with it more negative associations than the broader and more widely used term of discipline. Even younger children (8 years and younger) associated punishment with stern 'telling offs' and smacking.

Whilst the children in the sample didn't like getting into trouble and being punished, they understood that it needed to be unpleasant to encourage reflection and change, but also felt that it always should be fair.

If children thought a punishment was unfair, they indicated that it was more likely to breed resentment, rather than encourage them to learn from the experience. Also, if a punishment was not explained or felt to be too harsh, then children reported that

they could feel angry and insecure and it wouldn't necessarily bring about the reflection and a positive change their parents had hoped for.

8.6 The consequences of bad behaviour (expands on 3.5)

8.6.1 Taking away privileges

Children referred to a range of privileges that were denied to them when they had misbehaved, including the denial of:

- TV, computers and the Internet – sometimes referred to as 'screen time'
- Mobiles phones and games consoles
- General going out
- Attending specific events such as parties or concerts
- Pocket money

All children agreed that this was a highly effective form of punishment and one that many of them had experienced, especially after the age of 8 to 9 years of age.

Children reported that it was particularly unpleasant to be denied the things they most enjoyed because they felt a sense of loss and of missing out. Privilege removal appeared to be particularly effective because children talked about being very reliant on technology to keep them entertained. In the absence of toys and technology, children of all ages reported feeling bored and frustrated and that this gave them time to reflect on what they had done and to think twice about doing it again.

"We have screen bans when we are not allowed to use the computer, internet TV or Playstation; it is really hard because that is what me and my brother and sister spend most of our time doing. Mum and Dad don't use [this punishment] that often, only when we have been really naughty." Girl 13 to 14, Manchester

The way that this punishment was administered did differ between children of different ages. For the younger children in the sample, the punishments were shorter such as switching the TV for half an hour. The immediacy of such a punishment seemed to work well to demonstrate that the child's behaviour was not acceptable. Older children experienced loss of privileges for longer, such as no TV for the rest of

the day or grounded for a week, and claimed that taking away privileges had the greatest impact for them when it was long-lasting because it made them realise the consequences of their actions.

Taking away privileges emerged as the most effective form of punishment, seemingly because it promoted reflection and was less likely to lead to resentment toward parents. In fact, if children felt that their actions deserved punishment, they believed that taking away privileges was probably the most effective way their parents could discipline them, even though they really disliked the denial of things they loved.

“When I become a parent I would take away privileges as it seems fair not to have something you like when you have done wrong. It is sort of justice.” Boy 14 to 15, Tottenham

8.6.2 Minor deprivations

Children in the sample also experienced a range of minor deprivations, which included:

- Sending a friend home
- No supper, dessert or sweets
- No lift to friend’s or school
- No help with their homework

All children in the sample reported experiencing this type of punishment at some point in their childhood. It emerged as a form of discipline that worked particularly well with younger children as it was often administered immediately and encouraged them to make a connection their misbehaviour.

“When I had a fight with my friend Tilly and used a rude word, I didn’t get any sweets after school.” Girl 4 to 5, Croydon

However, minor deprivations appeared to be less effective amongst older children as they often resented the inconvenience caused by the parent, which they felt could preclude them from reflecting on their misbehaviour. Older children also felt that

there was a danger that they could view this type of parental behaviour as childish and undermined the respect they have for their parents.

8.6.2 Exclusion

In addition to minor deprivations, children also experienced a range of exclusions including:

- Being sent to their room
- Time out on the naughty step
- Being ignored by their parents

Most children in the sample had experienced exclusion as a form of punishment, especially when they were under the age of ten.

Time out, the naughty step and being sent to their room seemed to be effective with younger children when explanations were given. This seemed to be the case because exclusion could be administered quickly, give the child time to cool down and get them to reflect on what they had done. If exclusion was not accompanied by a verbal explanation or the exclusion was too long, younger children reported feeling extremely upset and unsettled.

“When Mummy leaves me on the naughty step for more than five minutes then I feel a bit lonely and like she had forgotten me.” Boy 4 to 5, Cardiff

Children up to the early teenage years were often sent to their room as a form of punishment. Whilst many of them felt that this could be an effective way to get them to reflect on their behaviour and to deny them access to other family members and entertainment, it did depend on how much entertainment they had in their bedroom and how much they enjoyed their own company. Some children were quite happy to be sent to their rooms as it removed them from the tension and allowed them to play, watch TV or play on the games console. Some parents, however, had ‘cottoned onto’ this and did not use it as a form of discipline.

“I don’t get sent to my room. I live in my room, my parents never see me.” Boy 9 to 10, Kent

A minority of children in the sample reported being ignored by their parents as a form of discipline. Those who had experienced it did not support it as an effective form of discipline as it left them feeling anxious and alone. Older children also felt that it was a childish way to behave and they said they did not respect their parents for it.

“If they say, ‘I’m not going to help you with your homework,’ that’s not setting a good example.” Boy 9 to 10, Kent

When this issue was explored in more depth it emerged that ignoring a child sends a signal to the child that their needs are not important. This appeared to make the child resent the parent, working against effective communication between child and parent.

8.6.3 Extra work

Some children in the sample were required to perform specific tasks as a form of discipline. Examples they gave included:

- Doing chores around the house such as washing up
- Doing outdoor chores such as weeding the garden
- Babysitting for younger siblings

This form of discipline appeared to work particularly well amongst older children. It worked in a similar way to exclusions since they were unable to do the things they liked whilst they were completing the set task. Additionally, it also appeared to reinforce their increasing maturity, as the chores carried with them a certain degree of responsibility and gave them a sense of satisfaction and pride at the end of the discipline. For this reason many tweens and teenagers supported extra work as a form of discipline.

*“You might have done something wrong, but you end up feeling good about yourself.”
Boy 11 to 12, Swansea*

8.6.4 Writing apology letters

Writing apology letters also seemed to work well at encouraging older children to reflect more deeply on what they had done. Children described that writing urged them to think through the consequences of their behaviour and how it adversely affected others, increasing their sense of personal responsibility and empathy.

Only a minority of children in the sample had experienced this type of discipline and it tended to be children from higher social economic families.

9. Appendix 2

9.1 Sample breakdown

Eight Sibling interviews

Sibling interview	Age	Gender	Social grade	Location
1	4 to 5 (Reception)	Boy	ABC1	Cardiff, Wales
2	4 to 5 (Reception)	Girl	C2DE	Croydon, London
3	5 to 6 (Year 1)	Boy	C2DE	Winchester, Southern England
4	5 to 6 (Year 1)	Girl	ABC1	Kent, Southern England
5	6 to 7 (Year 2)	Boy	ABC1	Sheffield, Northern England
6	6 to 7 (Year 2)	Girl	C2DE	Swansea, Wales
7	7 to 8 (Year 3)	Boy	C2DE	Newcastle, Northern England
8	7 to 8 (Year 3)	Girl	ABC1	North Wales

Eight Friendship pairs

Friendship pair	Age	Gender	Social grade	Location
1	8 to 9 (Year 4)	Boys	ABC1	Leicester, Midlands
2	9 to 10 (Year 5)	Girls	C2DE	Birmingham, Midlands
3	10 to 11 (Year 6)	Boys	C2DE	Devon, South West
4	11 to 12 (Year 7)	Girls	ABC1	Tottenham, London
5	12 to 13 (Year 8)	Boys	ABC1	Birmingham, Midlands
6	13 to 14 (Year 9)	Girls	C2DE	Sheffield, Northern England
7	14 to 15 (Year 10)	Boys	C2DE	Tottenham, London
8	15 to 16 (Year 11)	Girls	ABC1	Winchester, S England

Eight quads

Friendship quad	Age	Gender	Social grade	Location
1	8 to 9 (Year 4)	Girls	C2DE	Cardiff, Wales
2	9 to 10 (Year 5)	Boys	C2DE	Kent, Southern England
3	10 to 11 (Year 6)	Girls	ABC1	Newcastle, Northern England
4	11 to 12 (Year 7)	Boys	ABC1	Swansea, Wales
5	12 to 13 (Year 8)	Girls	C2DE	Leicester, Midlands
6	13 to 14 (Year 9)	Boys	ABC1	Croydon, London
7	14 to 15 (Year 10)	Girls	ABC1	Devon, Southwest
8	15 to 16 (Year 11)	Boys	C2DE	North Wales

9.2 Recruitment criteria

Age of respondents

4 to 16 years

Reception to Year 11

School year

All respondents were recruited by school year and not age alone. Because the sessions took place during the summer, children were recruited based on the school year that they had just finished (not the year they were about to begin).

Sibling interviews

Within each of these sessions there was:

- One child of the target age and school year (refer to quota tables)
- One child who was their sibling and was aged between 11 to 16 years
- A good mix of age and gender of siblings was achieved across the sample

Friendship pair and quad interviews

All respondents within these sessions were good friends

Social grade

The sample was spilt by the ABC1 and C2DE classifications (see specific quota tables)

Personality

Children and teenagers were recruited to be chatty and confident about expressing their opinions to an adult. All the respondents were keen to engage in conversation and contribute to the discussion, and had the ability and confidence to articulate their views clearly and openly.

Ethnic origin and location

A good representation of minority ethnic communities was included across the sample to reflect the research locations visited.

9.3 Discussion guide

1. Introduction/warm up

Introduce self and Sherbert, an independent research agency

Explain that the research is being conducted on behalf of the Government

Explain confidentiality (MRS Code of Conduct). Ask permission to record the session, explaining that the recording will be used for Market Research purposes only (Data Protection Act)

Explain that we will be asking them about their lives and how they cope with certain situations

Ask respondents to introduce themselves, talk about their siblings, pets, what they've been doing while on school holiday, what their hobbies are etc

2. Being a child

This section is a continuation of the warm up, encouraging children to talk about themselves in the research environment and invites self-reflection

What do they love doing?

Who do they love doing it with?

What's the best thing about being a child?

What's the worst thing about being a child?

What do they get up to when they are altogether as a family?

What's the best thing about being with friends?

When friends are together, what do they play?

What do they talk about?

How do they think that being with friends is different to being with brothers, sisters or grown ups?

Is it the same in any way?

3. A brief look at emotions and coping strategies ...

This section gets children 'tuned in' to talking about their feelings and coping mechanisms, gets them used to using stimulus. In addition, it establishes the broad range of experiences that elicit various emotional reactions from all respondents.

What makes them feel happy?

What makes them feel sad?

What makes them feel bored?

What makes them feel angry?

What makes them feel secure?

What makes them feel scared?

Using cards with emotional images on them to help younger people talk around their feelings

Coping strategies

This section will focus on the emotional states that children find most difficult to deal with

When they feel: angry, scared, bored, sad etc...

What is it like?

What colour is it? Why is it that colour?

How do people around them know they are in that mood?

What do they do?

What are the consequences, if any?

Could they imagine doing it differently? (i.e. instead of shouting etc)

What helps them to feel better?

4. Opinion and behavioural influences

This section will establish some key behavioural influences in children lives, which helps to provide context

How do children learn how to act so they don't get into trouble?

Who tells/ shows them how to behave?

Whose opinions do they listen to?

What do they think makes children behave well?

What do they think encourages children to be naughty?

Probe role of the following: TV, books, magazines, celebrities, video games, family, teachers, friends

Who are children's role models?

When children behave badly/ are naughty who tells them off?

What would they say?

5. Understanding conflict with other children and siblings

This section explores how children maintain order in their lives and looks at the role physical punishment/ aggression plays in dealing with conflict. It is an important section as it contextualises how children deal with arguments, creating a rich understanding as to their interpretation of assertive, passive and more aggressive strategies. This will form the bedrock for understanding their response to discipline at home.

Conflict with friends

What do they do when they disagree with a friend/sibling over something? (Tell them and sort it out, forget about it and don't say anything, tell another friend, tell a grown up, get angry about it shout and maybe fight)

Can they give examples of different problems/disagreements they have had with friends/siblings and the ways they deal with them?

What do they do/ say to each other?

How do they get their feelings out? (Talking, shouting, fighting, gossiping/spreading rumours etc)

How do problems tend to be resolved?

How do they make up? What has to happen?

What do they see other children arguing about in the playground and how do they deal with these disagreements? (Are there any differences between boys/girls and between children of different ages?)

What do they do in the playground if they see *other people* arguing or fighting?

Do they ever help them make up? How do they do this?

How do they feel after an argument/disagreement has stopped? Probe: elated, ashamed, sad, guilty etc.

Conflict with siblings

What about when they argue/disagree with their brothers and sisters?

What do they tend to fall out over?

What do they do?

How do they resolve these problems?

Do they approach these issues in the same way as they do with their friends/people at school? (Probe similarities and differences)

Use pictures of emotions, to show the differences: children to choose a card/ image to explain how they feel in argument with friend vs. sibling

Learning about conflict and conflict solutions

What have they been told/taught about falling out with people and conflict? (e.g. in school, circle time, at home, at religious centres, youth clubs, sports clubs etc)

What do they remember about what they were told/taught?

How interesting/useful do they think it was?

Do they think that it has made them think about their behaviour and change it in any way? (Probe examples)

What do they think would be useful for children to learn about falling out/conflict?

Conflict with adults

What about conflict with adults?

What happens there?

Can they give examples of when they have fallen out with an adult, what happened, how did they and the adult express themselves, how did they feel and what happened in the end?

Use pictures of emotions, to show how they feel in an argument with an adult

Who are they likely to have arguments with?

How does it get fixed/ made better?

What are the differences in arguments with adults vs. children?

What is similar?

6. Discipline and punishment

To understand children's perception of punishment and where smacking fits into the overall context

Who are the adults that discipline children? (Probe: parents, teachers, child-minders, grandparents, other relatives, other adults who live with them, coaches, friends' parents)

What are all the different things adults do to discipline children? (If necessary, probe smacking)

Record each answer on a blank piece of card

Do they think adults should punish children and why/ why not?

What do they think it achieves?

When is it OK to punish a child?

When is it not OK to punish a child?

Moderator to present different punishing scenarios on cards e.g. child breaking something, running out into the road, biting another child, lying, stealing etc

Ask children to add to the scenarios and moderator to jot down on other cards (“what children do and then get discipline/punished for”)

Respondents to sort into two piles: ones they think are fair and ones they think are unfair. This helps us interpret kids’ understanding of justice, i.e. when is it OK to be told off and what sort of telling off feels appropriate e.g. is it OK to be grabbed by the arm if a child has crossed the road dangerously? Vs grabbed by the arm when they have spilt a drink by accident.

How does each kind of punishment make them feel? (Probe: scared, sad, angry, confused, embarrassed, worried - *use emotion cards as necessary*)

Using cards discuss:

What are the most and least effective ways that adults discipline children?

Both short term and long term (stop doing it in that moment vs. prevent it in the future)

Which punishment makes them most think about the consequences?

What makes them think about the other person’s feelings?

Which punishments do they feel are OK?

Which punishments do they feel are not OK?

After discussion create a continuum using cards, from most to least effective forms of punishment

7. Discipline/Physical punishment

To establish in more depth children's views on smacking and its ramifications

Moderator to pull out the 'smacking' card from continuum list and shift the groups focus onto smacking only:

What is smacking? How would they describe it? *(Children to come up with their own definition)*

What do you think about smacking in general?

Who does it?

To whom?

When?

How often?

Why do people smack other people?

How does it feel to be smacked?

Do some smacks hurt in different ways to others?

Are some smacks remembered for longer than others?

Using mood tree to support

How do you think it makes the smacker feel? Probe: powerful, ashamed, guilty etc.

8. Smacking scenarios in detail

Do they think parents should be allowed to smack their children?

When is it OK (if ever) for parents to smack their children?

When is it not OK?

What would the child have done? How old would that child be?

Where is it all right? (Location e.g. home vs. a public place)

Is there an age when it might be seen to be more acceptable to smack a child?

Is there an age when it is definitely not acceptable to smack a child?

When they think about families, who do they think smacks most, Mums or Dads?

When they think about families, who is smacked most, boys or girls?

Is there a difference?

What about those adults who aren't parents?

Who (if any) should be allowed to smack children?

When and where (location) would it be OK for these adults to smack children?

Who should never be allowed to smack children?

Now we're going to look at some scenarios and talk about them...

Using images of children misbehaving:

For each visual scenario:

What did this child do?

Was it wrong?

Does he/she deserve to be smacked for doing it?

Will the smacking stop him/her from doing this right now? How about preventing it in the future?

What other ways could parents use to stop them doing things in the future e.g. naughty step, send them to their room, stopping their pocket money, not letting them on the computer for a week etc.

By the end, respondents would have created a spectrum from when it was appropriate to when it was inappropriate to be smacked

9. Summary and close

What is the most important thing they've said today?

What should adults remember when about to discipline/punish a child?

Thanks and close

Examples of Stimulus

Below is a list of the stimulus we believe will help facilitate discussion with children and young people

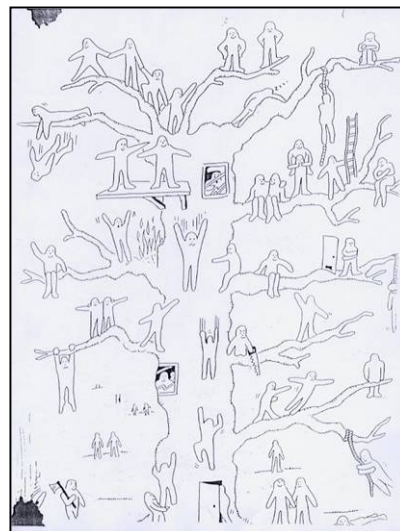
1. **Cards with images of emotions** e.g. smiling face, grumpy face, frowning, crying. These images will be cartoon style and help children to talk about their feelings in depth. For example:



2. **Blank coloured card** will be used when children talk about discipline/punishment. Moderator will record, in the children's words, different types of punishment/discipline. Only one discipline recorded per card, for example: Smacking, No TV etc. These cards will then be used to create the continuum for most to least effective forms of discipline.

3. Mood tree

Respondents will be asked to circle figures which represent how they feel about particular situations. In explaining the reasons for their choice, their inner and sometimes quite complex feelings are revealed in a quick and effective way, which can then stimulate further discussion.



4. Images with children misbehaving

A range of photos will be useful to help understand what children and young people believe is appropriate punishment for different contexts/ behaviour, which will help to determine where and how smacking fits.

For example:

