

CORPORAL DISCIPLINE



Between 1996 and 2022, fourteen bills have been introduced in Parliament to ban physical discipline of children in Canada.

Advocates of these bills have called for the repeal of section 43 of the Criminal Code, which permits parents to use reasonable disciplinary force in correcting their children. But Canada already has strict limitations on the use of corporal discipline as determined by the Supreme Court of Canada, such as defining what constitutes reasonable force and what age a child must be for parents to use force.

Whether or not parents should use corporal discipline is an ongoing debate among the general public as well as Canadian politicians. Arguments often revolve around whether corporal discipline is effective and whether international jurisdictions which have banned corporal discipline are examples worth following.

Evidence for criminalizing corporal discipline often confuses the cause-and-effect relationship between physical discipline and outcomes and fails to suggest adequate alternative forms of discipline. Research that properly studies the effects of appropriate spanking shows it to be as good as, or better than, other forms of discipline in its positive long-term effects. Controlled, or conditional, spanking is associated with reductions in anti-social behaviour and noncompliance.

Some countries, like Sweden, have criminally banned all forms of physical discipline. However, the measurable outcomes for children have been worse, indicating that permitting mild corporal discipline (as Canada does) may prevent other negative consequences.

The family, not the civil government, is in the best position to raise children. Parents make informed decisions on how to raise their own children, including how to discipline them, in the context of a deep biological, emotional, and relational connection. The State should respect the institution of the family and the role of parents and should not interfere except in cases of criminal abuse and neglect. ARPA Canada recommends upholding section 43 of the Criminal Code, permitting parents to use conditional physical discipline if they choose to do so in raising their children.

For more information about this topic, please refer to our related foundation document. This report can be found on our website at [ARPACanada.ca/publication/corporal-discipline/](https://arpacanada.ca/publication/corporal-discipline/).