



Media Release

Taking a stand against physical punishment of children

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Paediatric experts from the Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP) are urging Australian paediatricians to take a stand against the physical punishment children.

Today at RACP Congress 2015 Professor Kim Oates said it was up to Australian paediatricians and other health professionals to work with families to show there are far more effective ways of disciplining children than hitting them.

“Hitting children as a form of discipline should become unacceptable,” Professor Oates said.

“All children need discipline, but physical punishment is one of the least effective forms of discipline and can have adverse consequences for some children, such as aggressive behavior and sometimes poor mental health.”

Unlike 45 countries including New Zealand, Sweden, Austria, The Netherlands, Germany and Spain where children are protected from all forms of physical punishment, in Australia smacking is often used by parents as their main form of discipline.

“Parents often use smacking because their own parents used this form of discipline on them and they have not been taught more effective, less harmful forms of discipline,” Professor Oates said.

Paediatricians and other health professionals can play an important role in developing families’ understanding of the impacts of physical punishment.

“Parents often do see immediate compliance following physical punishment but this is a short-lived solution that mainly teaches children to avoid particular behaviours in their parents’ presence, rather than to cease doing it.” Professor Oates said.

“Even more worryingly, it teaches the child that hitting is a way of imposing their will on others.”

Professor Oates said parents should avoid falling into the smacking trap.

“Despite the temporary effects, there is the risk that a parent may hit harder the next time and the next,” Professor Oates said.

Paediatric and Child Health Division President Nicki Murdock said for some people these outcomes can continue into adult life, where physical punishment leads to aggressive adult behaviour including violence to their partners as well as to their own children.

“We realise that parenting can sometimes be difficult and frustrating. We want Australian parents to learn more effective, less harmful ways of disciplining children,” Dr Murdock said.

“Australia must gain the maturity that comes with realising that children are too precious to hit. This is why we should take a stand.”

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