

## Promotion of Mental Health and well-being of children and young people- Making it happen.

EC Thematic Conference. Stockholm 29th-30th September 2009

Parents, family and the early years - Some consideration about Action 2<sup>1</sup>

*Legislation to protect children from harsh discipline practices and physical punishment (such as hitting/smacking) within the family, in line with the protection afforded to adults by law.*

In most countries (all of them?) the standard legislation about assault and battery, bodily harm... provides a sufficient legal opportunity to sue, if necessary.

Instead of that, many lobbyists want a specific law for this subject. I think it's an error full of negative side effects.

1. Parents feel that such specific laws are against them and in the facts these laws are probably no more applied than the court would do with the standard legislation. This summer, the referendum in New Zealand resulted that 87.6% of the population refused such a law. *We Don't Need No Education*, they said.
2. From a systemic point of view, the way the authorities treat parents has a mirror effect on the way parents treat their children.  
Specific laws on this subject come like a kind of punishment, or at least it is a negative approach. This is in contradiction with the recommendations to invest in positive parenting. As mentioned Pg 8, the literature suggests to provide *programs that aim to support parents as opposed to changing their parenting*. Except rare pathological situations, parents don't like hitting their children; they just don't know how to do another way. Our role is to help them.
3. More important: with this kind of action we are giving the priority to laws focusing on individual changes, which means sometimes "blaming the victims" (the ones who don't have the skills).

I think we should give the priority to subjects we could tackle on a more ecological approach. For example, we know that television has very toxic effects on children under 3. Prohibiting at EU level the specific television channels for these children would be a very different level for legal actions. In parallel, banning TV sets in day-nurseries and creating awareness programs about the dangers of television - or better, the importance of playing with children - would then be coherent.

I am sure we could find many subjects like this where legal action has to be taken on a political and economical level instead of an individual one.

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<sup>1</sup> Framework for action on promotion of mental health and well-being of children and young people -Key messages, statements and actions - Parents, family and the early years – How to make it happen – Compass for action page 3