



He Mana tō ia Tamaiti
Every Child Counts

26 July 2006

Parents will not be persecuted for smacking

Non Government Organisations associated with families and parents are demanding that the police and CYF speak up and make it clear that parents would not be persecuted for smacking their children if Section 59 was repealed.

Speaking from the Every Child Counts Conference in Wellington, the heads of Barnardos, Plunket, Unicef and Save the Children say fear of criminalisation is preventing parents from seriously examining the arguments for ending the practice of smacking children.

“Police today do not arrest parents, and social workers do not remove children from their homes simply because their parents have smacked them. There is no reason for this to change. In fact, our organisations would be outraged if Police and CYF did change their current behaviour. The police do not prosecute trivial offences and CYF do not remove children from their homes except as a last resort. We want assurances that this will not change if Section 59 is repealed.

However we must address New Zealand’s culture of violence and in particular our horrific rates of family violence. This is something that all political parties, CYF, the Police, national leaders and most New Zealanders agree on.

Clear messages are needed to support this social change and this includes reforming the law that allows parents who have been charged with assault from claiming they were reasonably and justifiably disciplining their child.

Assault is assault and an assault on a child should be measured and judged in the same way that an assault on an adult is measured and judged. Politicians, CYF and the Police must all step up and agree on this so that parents do not reject an important social reform because they fear being persecuted if they lightly smack their child. The police must offer an assurance to the public that they will not prosecute trivial offences.

At the same time, it is important that parents learn to discipline their children without using physical punishment – no healthy relationship involves people smacking and hitting each other.

A Press Conference is to be held today (Wednesday 26 July) at 1pm in the Mckenzie Room at St Johns Presbyterian Church Conference Centre, corner of Dixon and Willis streets, Wellington.

ENDS

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