

NO HIT ZONE

PRACTICE GUIDELINE®

DOCUMENT SUMMARY/KEY POINTS

- The Sydney Children's Hospitals Network (SCHN) is committed to ensuring the safety and wellbeing of every child and young person that we provide care for.
- SCHN is a "No Hit Zone", an environment where no adult shall hit a child or another adult, and no child shall hit another child or an adult.
- Corporal punishment of children to correct misbehaviour is a widespread practice, however there is no evidence to suggest that it improves behaviour in the long term.
- Corporal punishment of children has been linked with a range of negative outcomes.
- No Hit Zone is an intervention that aims to prevent physical punishment in children.
- SCHN takes a position that any kind of hitting is not allowed in the hospital setting.
- When observing a child being hit or threatened, it is everyone's responsibility to interrupt the behaviour as well as communicate hospital policy to those present in a non-judgemental and caring way.

CHANGE SUMMARY

- N/A – New document

This document reflects what is currently regarded as safe practice. However, as in any clinical situation, there may be factors which cannot be covered by a single set of guidelines. This document does not replace the need for the application of clinical judgement to each individual presentation.

Approved by:	SCHN Policy, Procedure and Guideline Committee	
Date Effective:	1 st March 2022	Review Period: 3 years
Team Leader:	Staff Specialist	Area/Dept: CPU

READ ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

- All SCHN staff should read and acknowledge this practice guideline.
- All SCHN staff are encouraged to access the online training and supporting material to implement the No Hit Zone (NHZ).

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1 Background

- Corporal punishment of children to correct misbehaviour is a widespread practice. Over 60% of 2-4 year old children around the world are physically punished by their parents¹. A survey across the US showed that half of children were smacked in the previous year².
- There is no evidence that corporal punishment improves behaviour in the long term.
- Australian survey of parents caring for over 3,000 children found that one in four parents feel stressed every day by their child's behaviour and a significant proportion of Australian children have been physically disciplined. Almost half of the parents reported becoming impatient too quickly, while one in three parents felt either overwhelmed by managing their child's behaviour or they lost their temper and later felt guilty³.
- Corporal punishment of children has been linked with a range of negative outcomes for children including higher rates of childhood aggression/fighting, anxiety, poor impulse control, lower self - esteem as well as more negative relationship with parents^{4,5}. Research has shown that physical punishment also affects brain development and brain functioning^{6,7,8}.
- Around the world there are now 58 countries that have banned physical punishment of children including New Zealand which passed the law in 2007. Thirty additional countries are committed to ban corporal punishment⁹. In Australia it remains lawful for parents to use 'reasonable' physical corporal punishment to discipline their children¹⁰.
- Abolishment of all forms of corporal punishment has been recommended by many health professionals in Australia including the RACP in the 2018 statement.¹¹
- In a study in the US of nearly 3,000 hospital staff, 50% of physicians, 25% of nurses and 27% of other direct care staff reported witnessing parent-to child- hitting. Among staff who did not intervene there was a significant proportion of staff who were not sure what to do or they thought it was not their place to intervene¹².
- No Hit Zone is an intervention that aims to prevent physical punishment in children.
- SCHN takes a position that any kind of hitting is not allowed in the hospital setting.

2 Purpose of No Hit Zone (NHZ) at SCHN

- To create and reinforce an environment of comfort and safety for children, families, staff and visitors in hospital.
- To de-escalate situations in which caregivers raise their voice, or show other signs of stress and inappropriate behaviour that occur prior to physical discipline. To respond in a non-judgmental and empathetic way.
- To prevent incidents of a parent hitting a child in the hospital.
- To disrupt parents' reliance on physical punishment and to encourage them to try alternative forms of discipline. Also to provide parents with information that enables them to understand the facts and the science behind hitting.

- To give staff support and empowerment to intervene
- To spread the seed of no violence

3 Response Procedure

SCHN is a “No Hit Zone”, an environment where no adult shall hit a child or another adult and no child shall hit another child or an adult. When observing a child being hit or threatened, it is the responsibility of all SCHN staff to interrupt the behaviour as well as communicate hospital policy to those present in a non-judgmental and caring way.

Should this scenario occur, clinician should take every step to do the following:

- Respond in a non-judgmental way.
- Empathise with the frustrations and stress the involved parent/carer may be experiencing. Remind them that the Sydney Children’s Hospital Network is a “No Hit Zone”; that is no physical violence is allowed.
- Try to have conversations with the involved carer out of earshot of other families so the parent does not feel embarrassed.
- Avoid making threats.
- Thank the parent/carer for respecting our policies and offer written educational material as appropriate.
- For hospital patients, the behaviour and any interventions/action should be documented in the eMR.
- If concerned contact the general social worker on call or Child Protection intake worker on call.

If indicated by the situation, make a Risk of Significant Harm (ROSH) report to the Helpline, Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ)

Example Scenario:

You work in a paediatric ward and observe caregiver yelling at a 2-3 year old while waiting for the treating team. What would you do?

- Respond immediately
- Calmly ask if the parent needs any assistance “what can I do to help you or your family?”
- Acknowledge how frustrating it is to wait for a long time
- Offer to see how long until the patient will be seen
- Offer something for the child to keep them busy
- Always consider stresses the family may be under
- Communicate to the treating team that family is stressed and starting to get disrupti

4 Communications

The NHZ initiative will be disseminated by placing posters in prominent places around the hospital wards, Outpatients Department (OPD) and other locations. This is an important mechanism for reaching parents/carers and staff. Pamphlets about the No Hit Zone will also be placed around the hospital wards, OPD or handed over by the hospital staff to provide alternatives to discipline children.

5 Training and Reporting Procedures

1. Hospital staff will be provided with online or group training that is research-based on smacking. Staff will be made clear the hospital's position that no violence of any kind is allowed and about ways they can intervene if they see a parent hitting a child. Staff will be encouraged to complete a short online survey prior to commencing the NHZ initiative to identify how familiar they are with the consequences of the use of physical discipline, their readiness to identify parental escalating behaviour and to offer them alternative discipline techniques. [Pre NHZ survey](#).
2. Training material will be available to all hospital staff and during orientation for new staff.
3. Materials provided during training will include: brochures (*to add hyperlink*), posters, educational video¹³ (see [NHZ video for Health Staff](#)) and other resources on the intranet (*to add hyperlink to ppp*)¹⁴.

Staff will not be expected to place themselves in a dangerous situation by confronting violent behaviour; security or police should be notified through established procedures whenever staff have concerns for their physical safety or the safety of patients, visitors or other staff. In this situation staff may follow the Network policy: 'Violence in the workplace-preventing and managing - a zero tolerance approach'. If necessary, a report of Risk of Significant Harm (ROSH) to the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) Helpline should be made through established procedures.

4. Staff will be encouraged to complete a survey after a period of 10-12 months to evaluate the effectiveness of NHZ. [Post NHZ survey](#)

6 References

- ¹ UNICEF. (2017). A familiar face: Violence in the lives of children and adolescents. <https://data.unicef.org/resources/a-familiar-face/>
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- ³ Rhodes, A, “ Child behaviour: How are Australian parents responding?”, 2018 <https://www.rchpoll.org.au/polls/child-behaviour-how-are-australian-parents-responding/>
- ⁴ Heilmann, A, “Physical punishment and child outcomes: a narrative review of prospective studies”, *The Lancet*, 2021 (398), 355-64.
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- ⁶ Tomoda, A, # Reduced prefrontal cortical grey matter volume in young adults exposed to harsh corporal punishment”, *Neuroimage*, 2009 (T66-T71)
- ⁷ Cuartas, J, “ Corporal punishment and elevated neural response to threat in children”, *Child Development*, 2021 (92),3, 821-832.4533874
- ⁸ Straus, M, “Corporal punishment by mothers and development of children’s cognitive ability: a longitudinal study of two nationally representative age cohorts”, *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma*, 2009 (18), 459-483.
- ⁹ Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, “Global report 2019, progress towards ending corporal punishment of children” London UK. February 2020.
- ¹⁰ Australian Institute of Family Studies Corporal punishment Key issues Child Family Community Australia, March 2017.
- ¹¹ RACP, “RACP submission to National Children’s Commissioner report: Australia’s progress in implementing the United Nations Convention of the right of children”, May 2018
- ¹² Font, S et al, “Staff response when parents hit children in a hospital setting”, *Journal of Developmental and Behavioural Pediatrics*, 2016, (37), 730-736.
- ¹³ New Orleans Children’s Advocacy Centre and National Children Alliance, Training Video for medical and hospital personnel.
- ¹⁴ Norton Children’s Hospital Child Abuse Task Force, Louisville, Kentucky, “No Hit Zone, building strong families” in <https://nohitzone.com/2019/08/08/sample-presentation/>

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