

## **Letter to the Editor (Connections NZ Psychological Society) from EPOCH:**

I would like to support Jack Austin's comments (in Connections April 09) regarding making societal changes and in particular his support of 'non violent parenting and a more collaborative or nurturing society'. In my view these comments are congruent with the Child Discipline law passed in May 2007. As a member of EPOCH (End Physical Punishment of Children) I would like to make some points in relation to the postal referendum due to be held in July/August 2009, which may well threaten this legislation.

Many of us were elated with the passing of the new legislation which effectively meant that parents could no longer use 'reasonable force' as a justification of hitting children if they were prosecuted in Court for assaulting a child as well as providing greater protection to children from physical force in other ways.

However, certain sectors of the community were outraged that the new law would interfere with their right to use physical discipline if they wished. So much so they managed to collect enough signatures for the government to be forced to hold a citizens initiated referendum on the topic.

While a formal review of the new legislation is planned for 2009/10, reports from the Police indicate the new legislation is working well. The Police continue to use discretion in cases of assaults on children as they always have, and do not appear to be prosecuting for inconsequential incidents of smacking as alleged by those supporting the referendum.

The question on the referendum states '*Should a smack as part of good parental correction be a criminal offence in New Zealand?*' This question is a nonsense and very ambiguous and there is really no 'right' answer to it. Child focused agencies including EPOCH have been meeting to discuss concerns surrounding the referendum and possible repercussions. The main concern being that if there is an overwhelming "No" result this may put a good law at risk and lead to a reintroduction of a statutory defence that defines how children can be hit. In my view this would be would be hugely detrimental to children.

We need to look past the ambiguously worded referendum question and understand that a **Yes Vote** is a vote that supports non violent parenting and the current law (which is working well); a **No Vote** may well lead to the new law being overturned.

For more information and to register your support visit [www.yesvote.org.nz](http://www.yesvote.org.nz)

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