

HOME IS NO PLACE FOR A RAISED HAND

USE your words. It's something we tell our children from as soon as they're old enough to understand. If you have a problem, we tell them they should talk about it and to never lay their hands on anyone in a violent way.

Our courts are full of people who use violence instead of words – people facing fines and even stints in jail for hitting others.

The past decade in Australia has seen a wholesale rejection of the idea that physical fights are an inevitable part of life, with state governments across the nation bringing in legislation and licensing changes to fight the scourge of coward punches and late-night street fights.

And while there is still a long way to go, we are making inroads into reducing the levels of domestic violence in this country.

All of which begs the question: Why do some people still think it's acceptable to hit their children?

People who would never dream of hitting someone over a traffic incident or similar slight are still raising a hand against the people they are supposed to love more than anyone in the world?

South Australia still has laws on its books that allow parents and guardians to physically punish their children if the contact is “generally regarded as acceptable within the community”.

There is also a common-law defence of chastisement that looks at the child's age, their behaviour, the severity of the response, and the reason for the punishment.

This puts SA out of step with many other jurisdictions around the world that have banned physical punishment of children.

It's also something that we no longer accept in schools, and most parents would find the idea of a teacher hitting their child quite confronting.

Smacking children is an issue that the Commissioner for Children and Young People, Helen Connolly, thinks needs addressing.

In a recently released report into SA's progress on recommendations made by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, the commission states

that Australia should explicitly prohibit corporal punishment in law in all settings, including the home.

The fact that the home is the last place where it's still legal to hit another person is a situation that needs to be rectified. It would bring us into line with countries such as New Zealand and Spain and, importantly, make children feel safer in their own homes.