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Smacking of children

It is always a giveaway when a controversialist find it necessary to misuse the English language to achieve their end. Claire Rayner talks of “hitting” a child when what she actually means is smacking. The two words do not have the same meaning.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary (2nd edn) to smack means: “To strike (a person, part of the body, etc.) with the open hand or with something having a flat surface; to slap. Also specifically to chastise (a child) in this manner.” [An example is given of Dickens writing “Mrs. A. smacks Mrs. B.'s child for making faces”.]

To hit on the other hand means: “To give a blow or blows; to strike with something”. [An example given is “There were lads hitting at stones with hammers.”]

This misuse of language is common among controversialists. For example animal rights extremists talk of animals being “murdered”, while pro-life campaigners say that in abortion the foetus is “murdered”. In fact the term “murder” applies only to humans who have passed the birth process. That is the meaning of the word in the English language. It simply doesn't apply to an animal or a foetus.¹

¹ *The Times Register* (Debate), 8 July 2004 (words in square brackets omitted).