

In general, laws about children are a good thing. One hundred years ago in industrial countries, children worked eighteen hours a day in a factory at age seven. The factory owner could **beat** a child who fell asleep or was not fast enough. Both parents and teachers could do whatever they liked to children because children had no protection under the law.

Today, there are many laws to protect children all over the world. Some people think that children must obey rules or be punished. Other people do not agree. In the United States, parents can spank their children at home. Similarly, schools can punish children by spanking or hitting as long as it is “reasonable.” There are rules about what is reasonable. Many school districts have their own laws and rules that forbid hitting students. These laws can change from state to state. In contrast, in Sweden, it’s against the law for anyone—parent or teacher—to hit a child.

In the United States, all children must go to school until the age of sixteen. However, in some states, like Hawaii, Utah, and Washington, children must attend school until the age of eighteen! A child cannot miss school without an acceptable **excuse**. There are laws about this. Illness, a death in the family, or an emergency is an acceptable excuse for missing a class or a whole day. Schools are very serious about school attendance. There are laws that make the parents accountable if their children miss school. Parents can go to jail or **pay a fine**. In Colorado, a fifteen-year-old girl went to jail for a month because she missed forty-three days of school and was late nineteen times. Her parents also went to jail for ten days and paid a fine of \$300.

The law says children are adults at age eighteen. In the United States, they can work or live away from home and be **independent**. However, if they want to work before the age of eighteen and are still students, they must not work during school hours. They can work only three hours a day when there is school and not more than forty hours a week when there is no school.