

Cities Enact Penalties for Violence In Front of Children

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Burleson, Tx., is among cities pioneering a way to protect children. A new city ordinance makes it unlawful to physically attack anyone in front of a child, meaning abusers can be punished for a child's anguish as well as for injuries, [the Fort Worth Star-Telegram reports](http://www.star-telegram.com/opinion/opn-columns-blogs/bud-kennedy/article172328832.html). (<http://www.star-telegram.com/opinion/opn-columns-blogs/bud-kennedy/article172328832.html>) "These children live in constant fear and terror," said Casey Gwinn, a former San Diego city attorney now leading a national campaign speaking up for children in abusive homes. "This puts police and the public on notice about the danger to the child."

Burleson's new law makes the offense a Class C misdemeanor. The punishment is up to a \$500 fine, the most a city can impose. The point isn't the fine. It's to establish that an attack on a parent or family member is also an indirect attack on a child. That becomes evidence in a custody case. "We see women every day who've been abused, but then they turn around and have to share joint custody," said Kathryn Jacob of SafeHaven of Tarrant County, a family violence agency. Family courts are filled with men who beat women but claim to be a "good dad." Mayor Ken Shetter is also president of Fort Worth-based One Safe Place, a crime prevention agency that operates a family counseling and service center for assault victims, both adults and child witnesses. The ordinance passed the council unanimously, although one council member asked if it applied to spanking, or when "redneck [family members] come over and get into a brawl in your home." The law only punishes "unjustified" violence, not legal spanking, Shetter said.
