

# POSITIVE DISCIPLINE

## Negative punishment and its effects

### NEGATIVE (DESTRUCTIVE) PUNISHMENT IN SCHOOLS

Negative discipline in schools can take the form of corporal (physical) or emotional punishment, carried out by teachers and other school staff, in the belief that these are the correct means of disciplining, correcting, controlling, educating, or modifying the behaviour of, a child.

It also includes acts carried out by another child who has been given (or assumed) authority or responsibility to inflict punishment on other children.

Negative discipline causes physical and psychological pain to the child on the receiving end, as well as other children who witness it. They can be inflicted as:

- Direct assaults (beating, hitting, slapping or whipping any part of a child's body), with or without an implement like a cane, stick or belt.
- Indirect assaults (pinching, twisting ears and joints, pulling hair, cutting and shaving hair, cutting or piercing skin, or dragging a child against his or her will).
- Forced acts that are physically painful or damaging (holding a weight for a long time, kneeling on stones, standing or sitting in a contorted position).
- Deliberate neglect of a child's physical needs, such as the need to use the bathroom.
- External substances (burning or freezing materials, water, smoke, excrement or urine) to inflict pain, fear, harm, disgust or loss of dignity.
- Hazardous tasks that are dangerous or beyond a child's strength (sweeping or digging in the hot sun, using bleach or insecticides, unprotected cleaning of toilets).
- Confinement, being tied up or being forced to remain in one place for an extended period of time.
- Threats of physical punishment.
- Verbal assaults, humiliation, ridicule and assaults on dignity, intended to reduce a child's confidence, self-esteem or dignity.

#### Real examples from Vietnam of brutal punishment at school by teachers:

- Confined under a bed (subsequently stung by ants);
- Forced to stand in front of the class while being denounced by classmates;
- Hit on the forehead by a ruler thrown by the teacher;
- Hit on the head by a box of chalks weighing about half a kilo;
- Not being allowed to eat while other children do so (punishment administered by the teacher because parents did not pay the school fees on time);
- Stripped naked and beaten on the back;
- Two children forced to slap each other on their cheeks.

Negative discipline goes beyond just the actual forms of punishment – it also describes a system where children are not allowed to participate in their own discipline. Children have to be able to understand what their mistakes are and how they can make amends.

However, few countries have provisions in schools where children can be involved in such disciplinary processes. Even in countries where these exist, children are seldom involved in procedures for complaints and reform.

## CANED TODAY, SHAMED FOR LIFE

Corporal and all forms of destructive punishment have far-reaching negative effects on children:

- **Aggression:** Although corporal punishment is seen as a way to subdue children's misbehaviour, it can actually have the opposite effect of creating more aggression. The more children are punished for aggressive behaviours, the more aggressive they tend to become.

This cycle of violence may lead to other acts of violence, such as vandalising school property and bullying.

- **Mental health issues:** A child who is exposed to corporal punishment and humiliation may resort to withdrawal, depression or other "avoidance behaviours", because he or she is struggling to comprehend the meaning of the physical or emotional attack and his/her defencelessness against it.

Some studies have shown that corporal punishment in childhood may increase the probability of depression and alcoholism in adulthood, regardless of socioeconomic status or family history.

- **Physical injuries and abuse:** Corporal punishment can cause injuries but more alarmingly, it can lead to abuse of the child.

A teacher tends to be emotionally charged when carrying out the act of punishment, and may underestimate his/her own strength and lose control.

## VIOLENCE FOSTERS VIOLENCE

Hitting a child teaches that violence is a solution to problems.

**Do not hit.**

Shouting at a child teaches that it is acceptable to be rude.

**Do not shout.**

Humiliating a child teaches that might is right.

**Do not humiliate.**

### Hitting, shouting at and humiliating children:

- Hurts them
- Damages their self-esteem
- Reduces their ability to learn
- Teaches them the wrong values