



# Position Statement

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## CORPORAL PUNISHMENT

The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) opposes the use of corporal punishment in schools and supports removal of legal sanctions for its use. Further, NASP resolves to educate the public about the effects of corporal punishment and to provide alternatives to its use, and will encourage research and the dissemination of information about corporal punishment effects and alternatives.

Corporal punishment of students is the intentional infliction of pain or discomfort and/or the use of physical force upon a student in order to stop or change behavior (Hyman & Perone, 1998). In the United States, the most typical form of school corporal punishment is striking a student's buttocks with a wooden paddle by a school authority because it is believed that the student has disobeyed a rule. Notably, the United States and parts of Canada remain the only developed countries to allow corporal punishment (Robinson, Funk, Beth, & Bush, 2005). Within the United States, corporal punishment is only allowed in schools; it has been banned in prisons and mental health institutions (Andero & Stewart, 2002).

Between the 1980s and the mid-1990s, the use of corporal punishment in schools declined rapidly due to waning public acceptance, increased litigation against school boards and educators regarding its use, and legislative bans. However, the decline appears to have slowed. In recent years, only two additional states have banned the use of corporal punishment in schools although many districts voluntarily ban it in states where it is allowed (Society for Adolescent Medicine, 2003). Still, approximately 1.5 million cases of physical punishment in schools are reported each year. Furthermore, students are more likely to experience corporal punishment if they are poor, male, of ethnic minority status, or live within specific regions (Arcus, 2002; Owen, 2005; Robinson et al., 2005; Society for Adolescent Medicine, 2003). The slow decline in the abolition of corporal punishment is likely to continue because, in those states that permit its use, more than half of citizens report that it is acceptable for a teacher to strike a student (Center for Effective Discipline, 2005).

Corporal punishment is a technique that is easily abused, leads to physical injuries, and can cause serious emotional harm (Hyman & Perone, 1998). Further, there is no clear evidence that corporal punishment will (a) lead to better control in the classroom, (b) enhance moral character development in children, or (c) increase the students' respect for teachers or other authority figures (Society for Adolescent Medicine, 2003). Corporal punishment does not instruct a child in correct behavior. Without the replacement behavior being taught, there will be nothing to take the place of inappropriate behavior. Moreover, the use of corporal punishment in schools communicates that hitting is the correct way to solve problems and violence is acceptable in our society. Corporal punishment does not produce long-lasting changes in behavior; negatively affects the social, psychological, and educational development of students; contributes to the cycle of child abuse; and promotes proviolence attitudes of youth (Andero & Stewart, 2002; Owen, 2005; Society for

Adolescent Medicine, 2003). Discipline is important and schools have a strong role in teaching children to be self-disciplined. When students are self-disciplined, they understand a situation, make proper decisions about their behavior, and behave appropriately when unsupervised by adults. Effective discipline is primarily a matter of instruction rather than punishment. In contrast, punishment encourages students to be sneaky and to lie about their behavior in order to escape harm. Other negative side effects of punishment include running away; being truant; fearing teachers or school; feeling high levels of anxiety, helplessness, and humiliation; and being aggressive or destructive at home and school (Griffin, Robinson & Carpenter, 2000).

## **ALTERNATIVES TO CORPORAL PUNISHMENT**

Effective discipline includes prevention and intervention programs and strategies for changing student behavior, changing school or classroom environments, and educating and supporting teachers and parents. It relies on empirical evidence rather than custom or habit. The following alternatives can be implemented by school psychologists and other educators to promote self-discipline.

## **ALTERNATIVES FOR EDUCATING AND SUPPORTING STUDENTS**

- Help students achieve academic success through identification of academic and behavioral deficiencies and strengths and help students receive appropriate instruction
- Encourage a systems approach for prevention and intervention with incremental consequences for rule violation and compliance to encourage student success and self-esteem
- Establish clear behavioral expectations and guidelines and encourage disciplinary consequences that are meaningful to students and have an instruction and reflection component.
- Encourage consistent, fair, and calm enforcement of rules at the individual, class, and school levels
- Provide individual, family, and group counseling
- Provide social skills training, conflict resolution skills, anger management, and problem-solving training

## **ALTERNATIVES FOR CHANGE IN THE SCHOOL AND CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT**

- Encourage programs that emphasize early diagnosis and intervention for school problems including problems of staff and problems of students
- Encourage programs that emphasize values, school pride, and personal responsibility and that support the mental health needs of children
- Monitor school and classroom environments continuously to facilitate early detection of difficulties and facilitate proactive problem solving to address behavior difficulties
- Encourage development of fair, reasonable, and consistent rules with input from students, parents, school personnel, and community members about the nature of the rules and appropriate consequences for violations
- Promote strong family–school collaboration and parent support

## **ALTERNATIVES FOR EDUCATING AND SUPPORTING TEACHERS (AS PREVENTIVE MEASURES)**

- Provide information on effective discipline programs and resources to parents, other mental health professionals, and school personnel
- Assist with development and monitoring of behavioral intervention programs—school-wide, class-wide, or individual
- Provide inservice programs on communication, classroom management, understanding of behavior and individual differences, and alternative ways for dealing with misbehavior
- Promote National Child Abuse Prevention Month, SpankOut Day, and other organized activities to increase awareness of children’s social issues, and post listings of national organizations who favor abolition of corporal punishment
- Network with community groups and mental health agencies to provide programs and support for school staff

## **ALTERNATIVES FOR EDUCATING AND SUPPORTING PARENTS**

- Provide parenting classes on effective discipline, particularly as it relates to such issues as homework, school grades, peers, learning programs, developmental expectations, and undesirable behavior
- Provide school-based consultation to parents on effectively managing child behavior
- Encourage home visitation programs for parents of babies and toddlers—programs that focus on developmental expectations, resources, and discipline
- When corporal punishment is allowed, inform parents about exemptions to corporal punishment that may exist, such as written notification or amending the Individualized Education Program as well as what actions parents should take if a child is injured (seeing a physician, contacting child protection authorities and the police, taking color photos of the injury, and contacting advocacy organizations)

## **THE ROLE OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS**

School psychologists can take leadership roles to encourage school districts to ban corporal punishment, develop effective discipline programs as alternatives, and correct misperceptions used to support the use of corporal punishment. Their training leaves them well-prepared to identify learning and behavior problems that lead to school discipline problems if undiagnosed and untreated. In addition, their training in problem-solving procedures allows them to develop appropriate programs and interventions for children with learning and behavior problems. They can provide education programs for parents and teachers that focus on appropriate ways to deal with misbehavior and foster self-discipline. School psychologists can disseminate research about the development and evaluation of disciplinary codes, social skills training, and the effectiveness of alternative discipline methods. They can educate educators, the community, and policy makers about the effects of corporal punishment and advocate for its abolition.

## **SUMMARY**

NASP is opposed to the use of corporal punishment in schools because of its harmful physical, educational, psychological, and social effects on students. Corporal punishment contributes to the cycle of child abuse and proviolence attitudes of youth in that children learn that violence is an

acceptable way of controlling the behavior of others. Discipline is important, and effective alternatives are available to help students develop self-discipline. These alternative strategies are instructional rather than punitive. School psychologists provide many direct services to improve discipline of individual children as well as services that improve classroom and school-wide discipline. NASP will continue to work actively with other organizations to educate the public and policy makers about the effects of corporal punishment and empirically valid alternatives to its use, and will seek the prohibition of corporal punishment in all schools.

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