

AGAINST CHILD ABUSE

Policy Statement on Corporal Punishment in Schools

A.C.A. favours total abolition of corporal punishment in schools, as an ultimate goal.

1. The sanctioning of corporal punishment in a community increases the likelihood of children being physically harmed.¹ If any level of physical violence upon a person is condoned, however mild, there will occur incidents of excess.
2. Corporal punishment can do psychological damage as well as physical harm. Overseas and local studies² find that physical punishment not only causes pain and humiliation but also fosters resentment and hostility in children. Overseas studies affirm that physical punishment encourages children to act aggressively themselves.³
3. It is important to remember that parents and teachers are models to children who learn by imitation, and exposure to aggressive models heightens children's aggressive behaviour.
4. To threaten or to use corporal punishment is to control through fear. It is an aversive technique: children learn to avoid punishment rather than to develop positive attitudes towards learning. Corporal punishment (or its threat), may temporarily inhibit unwanted behaviour in the classroom but it can also lead to counter-productive behaviour, such as lying, blaming other students, displaced aggression towards other students, rebelliousness and truancy. It can lead to anxiety, depression and loss of self-esteem, which can be extremely detrimental to a child's general development besides impeding his academic progress.
5. It is recognised that some teachers are worried about losing classroom control if they do not have the backing of corporal punishment. However, some teachers do well without using the threat of corporal punishment and there are other, more positive ways of maintaining discipline, which have been well researched and found effective, even in situations where class management had previously been a problem (eg. with minority group children and academically poor children from underprivileged areas).^{4,5,6}
6. A.C.A. is deeply concerned that corporal punishment in kindergartens is only "discouraged" and not disallowed, so that teachers can still legitimately use physical punishment on very young children.
7. One of A.C.A.'s goals is to teach parents better ways of training children than by using physical punishment, thus reducing the risk of abuse and enhancing healthy child development. A.C.A. considers that if our professional educators take a lead by banning corporal punishment in schools, this would demonstrate an important principle to the community and help to change public attitudes towards physical punishment.
8. There are strongly held beliefs about corporal punishment, in Hong Kong and in other communities, that have no basis in fact. Some of these myths are: that corporal punishment builds character, that corporal punishment teaches respect and obedience, that it is the only kind of punishment that some children understand, that a parent or teacher is neglecting his duty if he does not use corporal punishment in certain circumstances, that children will run wild if corporal punishment is eliminated. Where studies have been carried out (including studies of schools where corporal punishment has been abolished), these myths have all been disproved.⁷

9. A.C.A. appreciates that corporal punishment, at home and at school, is still quite commonly accepted in the community and we do not expect to eradicate established customs overnight. However, we hold to our policy of advocating the abolition of corporal punishment in schools, on ethical and practical grounds. Ethically, we regard corporal punishment as an affront to a child's dignity and self-respect. Practically, corporal punishment can harm a child physically and emotionally and be seriously detrimental to his future life.

REFERENCES

1. Gils. D. (1970)
2. B.G.C.A., Hong Kong (1983) "Parenthood in Contemporary Hong Kong: The Experience of Mothers".
3. Bandura, Ross: "Social Learning in Early and Middle Childhood", edited by D.M. Gelfand.
4. National Diffusion Network: "Educational Programs that Work"
Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development, U.S.A. (1979)
5. Feshbach and Feshbach : "Alternatives to Corporal Punishment" Journal of Clinical Child Psychology 11. (1975)
6. Maurer, A. "Corporal Punishment in the School Setting" Educational Perspectives 19. (1980)
7. Dubanski, Inaba, Kent and Gerkewicz: "Corporal Punishment in Schools: Myths, Problems and Alternatives". Child Abuse and Neglect, U.S.A. Vol.7 (1983)

Date: 24th October 1986