

Agitation Against Corporal Punishment Is It A Recent Trend From The West?

Not We have read about some of our ancient kings who were against it. Mr. J.C.Dias, Mr Simon Cassie Chetty [1843] and Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan [1879] were some Sri Lankans who fought with the authorities against corporal punishment in the Legislative Council. In 1916 Mr.M.T.Akbar (KC) spoke against corporal punishment, especially of youth.

In 1934 a committee including Sir Baron Jayathilake, Sir Claude Corea, Sir Susantha de Fonseka, Mr.J.E.M. Obeysekara, and Mr.V.E.Chavarimuttu, submitted a report which stated:

"... It is felt that the old idea that a child's wrongdoing was entirely due to inherent wickedness, which could be only driven out of him by severe punishment, was no longer justified. The new idea as regards the causes of crime on the part of the adult has concentrated attention on the mode of treatment of child offenders. With deeper knowledge and broader sympathy, students of crime, who also had extensive experience in the handling of criminals, realized that in many instances the cause of such wrongdoing, especially in the case of children, was wholly external, and it was due to suppression of natural and healthy tendencies imposed by the circumstances of a complex society and also to physical or mental defects for which the child could in no way be held responsible ... It was ultimately acknowledged that punishment, which is merely retributive, is in the case of children wholly inadmissible, and though punishment as a deterrent both to the delinquent himself and others is admissible, yet in the case of children the principle of reforming alone should be the guiding factor in legislation relating to the child offender."

Mr.D.S. Senanayake stated in a debate in the state council, in reference to some teachers who got work out of school children using corporal punishment:

"... when I see that sort of a thing I wish I could get hold of those men by their necks and make them do some work. We speak of cruelty to animals, but to my mind it is horrible to see big hulking persons use the cane on small boys without using the mammothies themselves and getting the small boys to do some lighter work."

Dr. S.A. Wickramasinghe in 1935 stated "... it is hardly necessary for me to detail conditions in order to show that cruelty to children is extremely wide-spread. Apart from cases of torture and heinous offences that are brought before the court houses, harsh and cruel treatment of children is in general considered to be the proper way of bringing them up. Children are mercilessly lashed in the police courts by way of deterrent punishment. In practically all the schools caning is vigorously undertaken. Hurting the child's mind and inflicting physical pain of varying degrees to children are such commonplace things in our country that they are considered to be essential elements of love and affection for children".

It is quite obvious now that this is not a recent trend from the west, and that there were many who really cared for rights of children in the past.

CORPORAL PUNISHMENT OF CHILDREN IS IT REALLY NECESSARY ?



Printed by Sharp Graphic House (Pvt) Ltd. 838457

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We wish to thank SIDA and UNICEF (Project funded by the Government of Norway) and others for sponsoring the printing of this booklet. Thorn Holdings (Pvt) Ltd for sponsoring the graphic layout and Ms. Jayamini de Silva for the creation of the graphics. We are also indebted to EPOCH International for their invaluable advice, and the late Mr. Donavan Moldrich's book "Somewhere a child is crying" which was an important source for the historical aspects.

Teachers who exude warmth, confidence and friendliness towards students make the students respond to them better and thus behave well in the class room. The underlying assumption here is that an approachable and trustworthy teacher acts as a desirable role model for students. Further, it does not make them incited to do anything negative in that particular teacher's class. This is one of the **MOST IMPORTANT** if not **THE MOST IMPORTANT FACTOR** in promoting positive behaviour in students.

"The teacher is not merely an importer of information of cognitive more or less technical skills and ability: he/she also passes on to his (her) pupils the values and norms, the beliefs and patterns of behavior of our society....."

-B.R Wilson, 1962-

A word on counseling.....

Some teachers have taken basic counseling courses and as such it is hoped that the skills learnt would provide valuable ways in dealing with difficult students. Due to the immense workload and the unique responsibilities teachers have towards providing education, it may be difficult for a teacher to act as a counselor as well. The ideal situation would be to have a school counselor on full time or part time basis. Counselors could not only offer services to students who have negative behavioural and attitudinal difficulties but also assist children who are undergoing various stresses such as a death in the family and/or chronic illness. By alleviating the psychological distress of those children the benefit would not only be for the child but also for the entire school community.



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When not attended by a teacher, do not expect a classroom full of children to be quiet and motionless. Teach them to talk quietly and respect other students' right to learn in a quiet classroom. Teach them how to have fun without spoiling other's.

- ◆ **Add age to the equation.** Alter the method of discipline and reasoning according to children's age. Understand that children of different developmental stages have different needs and abilities. Use the methods that are more effective for each stage.
- ✓ With younger children, corrections should be done immediately as they would not be able to relate to the incident if the correction is done a few hours or days later. Give short and clear reasons for using a disciplinary



method. As the children get older, use reasoning increasingly. For 'cutting school' or 'fighting', older children could be ordered to sweep the corridor or explain to other children the 'bad' consequences of such behaviour.

- ◆ **Do not punish accidents.** When punished for accidents, children might feel reluctant to inform and ask for help even in life threatening and dangerous situations. Mistakes and accidents happen. Teach them how to correct them and prevent them in the future.
- ◆ **Give a second chance.** If a child has done something that he/she believed to be right, explain rather than punish and give the child a chance to correct the behaviour.

E.g: If a child has picked flowers from the school garden to put in the class vase not

knowing that it is not allowed, explain and give the child another chance.

- ◆ **Let bygones be bygones.** Do not label children as 'bad', but you may tell them that what they have done is wrong. Understand that many children learn through their mistakes. Be empathetic and help them in the process.
- ◆ **Do not punish yourself.** Keep cool and calm when correcting a child.

Violence in society is one of the most frequently discussed topics in Sri Lanka. Where does it originate?

Research has shown that armed conflict in a country is often associated with violence exhibited in the community. Children are often exposed to violence **at home or school**, in the form of **domestic violence, corporal punishment** or through the media. It is, therefore, not difficult to see why violence can be a problem in the Sri Lankan community.

Sri Lanka, like most nations, recognized children's equal rights to protection from all physical and mental violence when it ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which provides "state parties to the convention to take all measures to ensure that school discipline is administered in a manner consistent with the child's human dignity and in conformity with the provisions of the convention". Article 28(2)

Is corporal punishment of children an appropriate form of culture we have inherited?

Although ancient kings of Sri Lanka were known to have tortured "wrongdoers", there is little documentation of it being enforced on children. History recalls **VOHARAKA TISSA** who declared a law setting aside any bodily harm by way of punishment. **KING VIJAYABAHU II** is also credited for his compassion. **KING VIJAYABAHU III** extended his compassion to children.

In ancient Sri Lanka, Buddhist priests in Pirivenas taught children, and corporal punishment is scarcely documented. **Many of the Buddhist values helped to protect children in our culture.** In the Hindu culture Swami Vivekananda is quoted to have said, "A student's mind has to be helped to grow and not sawed, planed, and chiseled like a plank." Thus the teacher's task is more that of a



gardener than that of a carpenter. Yet, during these times, in Europe, corporal punishment was common in schools. Thus, it is likely that, European teachers who came to Sri Lanka introduced corporal punishment to our schools, especially in the larger towns.

Everyone agrees that it is bad to hit an adult even if s/he has done something really bad like stealing or taking a bribe. Is it then right to hit a child who is weaker and more fragile for trivial things like taking a chocolate without asking, for shouting loud in school or lying? **It must also be remembered that children often lie for the fear of being beaten.**

WHY SHOULD YOU NOT PHYSICALLY PUNISH CHILDREN?

Beating a child causes **pain, injury, humiliation, anxiety, anger** and feelings of vengeance which could cause long-term psychological effects.

"All beings tremble before" punishment; all fear death; all love life. See yourself in others. Then whom can you hurt? What harm can you do?"

Dhammapada-

Physically abused children may, as adults display antisocial and violent behaviour. They may also be aggressive towards their spouse and children. It has also been shown that a level of **substance abuse and suicide** is often associated.

LET'S LOOK AT SOME MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT BEATING CHILDREN:

X FALSE: "Physical punishment is a necessary part of upbringing. Children learn from smacking or beating to respect their elders, to distinguish right from wrong, to obey rules and work hard. Without physical punishment children will be spoilt and undisciplined."

TRUE : Children need discipline, and particularly need to learn self discipline. Physical punishment is a very ineffective form of discipline. When you ask children why they were beaten **they would always almost say** "For doing something wrong", but would **NOT** remember the specific misbehaviour. When children are smacked, they would **NOT** hear your explanations. How can they hear when they are crying? **When they are hurt or humiliated**, they are 'angry' rather than 'sorry'.



◆ **Make them clear.**

X "I'm your new teacher. Do not try to mess with me!!"

✓ "I'm your new teacher. I'm going to write down the things I expect from you all while I'm in the class, on the black board. That will make sure that we all have a pleasant class."

◆ **Word the instructions positively.** Give them the right ideas instead of the wrong ones.

X "Don't write on the walls!"

✓ "Keep the walls clean!"

X "Don't shout!"

✓ "Be quiet!"

◆ **Be consistent.** Discuss the current behavioural problems at staff and parent-teacher meetings and come to an agreement about the actions to be taken regarding misbehaviours. Every member of the staff should take the same stand for all the students, without partiality or favouritism. Inconsistent outcomes create confusions.

◆ **Let the children know the consequences of their behaviour.** The idea is not to surprise and punish children but to prevent them from wrong doings. This method gives the children a chance to think before they act and be responsible for their own behaviour.

✓ "I expect you all to do all the homework I give you. If you don't do it, unless you have a very good reason, you all will have to do additional homework, plus, write an essay on why you didn't do it in the first place".

◆ **Think practically.** Think of applicable disciplinary actions. Let the children know that you are serious.

◆ **Be true to your word.** Make sure you do what you say.

◆ **Do not expect the near impossible.** Be understanding.



When a child is misbehaving or lagging behind in school work.....

▲ **Find out what is wrong-** this is very important. Invariably, when we talk to a child and find out the real reason for his/her behaviour we realize that our initial understanding was totally wrong. Why did s/he fall asleep in class? Could it be that they have had nothing to eat? Did s/he share a bed with several siblings? Did their parents quarrel the entire night? If so, would it help to insult the student? Would it help to cane the student or make him/her stand for hours in the hot sun? Each child may have individual problems, which needs to be dealt with separately.



▲ **Discuss with child** - It is very important that a teacher or a student counselor discuss the child's difficult behaviour with him/her. Naturally such a person should be approachable, empathic, trustworthy and caring. This makes the child feel wanted and ultimately makes the student share his/her problem with another. This sharing assists adults to help the student solve whatever difficulty he/she is having.



▲ **Discuss with the parents** - Discussions with the parents always helps. One need not go on about all the problematic aspects of the child. Try to indicate to the parents that you are trying to help and mutually cooperate between all parties, which would ultimately benefit the child.

Small steps to begin with.....

- ◆ Set reasonable limits. Do not set them too high or too low.
- ✗ "If I hear even the smallest sound from this class while I teach I'll make you all regret it!!!"
- ✓ "I expect you all to be quiet while I teach. If you want to speak to me, raise your hand. You shouldn't be talking with the student next to you".

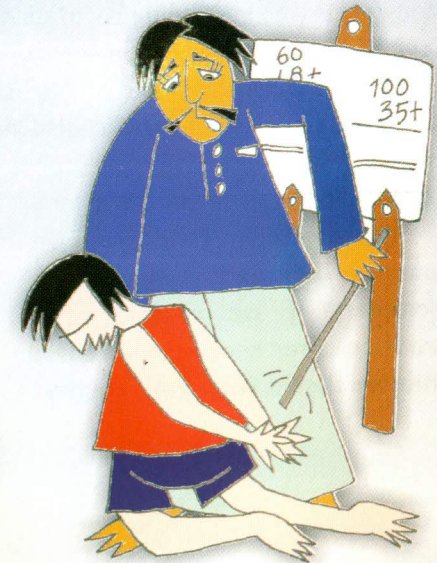


A smack shows that 'you are angry', but **NOT** 'what you are angry about'. If you think of a classroom or a family it is the same children who are beaten over and over again for the same "**WRONG DOINGS**". If beating is 'corrective' it shouldn't be that way. Those who frequently 'misbehave' develop a 'resistance' to beating and may even laugh when beaten. They are often 'respected' by peers in class for being 'tough', which makes their misbehaviour worse.

There is a lot of excitement in a class when a teacher is provoked and angry and it provides "entertainment" to the onlookers.

On the other hand, children who usually behave well may suffer deep and disproportionate trauma when beaten and humiliated, which may affect them for a long time. Some children may refuse to go to school, not because they are beaten, but because they are emotionally affected when others are beaten.

✗ **FALSE:** "I was hit as a child and it didn't do me any harm. I am what I am today because my parents and teachers beat me." **You would have been in this position (or even better) without the beating.** Have you ever thought of those who went astray because of beating? Everyone is not affected the same way.



Research has revealed that those who have been beaten as children and those who have beaten children in the past are the most resistant to change.

This is probably because:

Most of us love our parents and also our teachers. We have many pleasant memories of them. They love us and we love them. We would not like to say unpleasant things about them, even though we may have had some unpleasant experiences of being beaten at times. When we talk against corporal punishment, we may feel it would have a reflection against those very people who punished us physically but whom we love for many more reasons? Would that prevent us from discussing this issue? At the same time those who have hit their children or students in the past would feel condemned and guilty, would try to justify what they have done in the past.



It is not too late!

Many of us who may be guilty of smacking our children or students, may have done it because we were continuing a practice of the previous generation and because we were not aware of the bad effects of corporal punishment. We do not have to feel guilty. We also need not blame the previous generation because they were acting in accordance with the general culture of the time, nor should bonds of love and gratitude which children have towards their elders be denied. **However, if we continue the practice after knowing the facts, then we should feel really guilty!**



What to do when a child is suspected of having a developmental disorder:

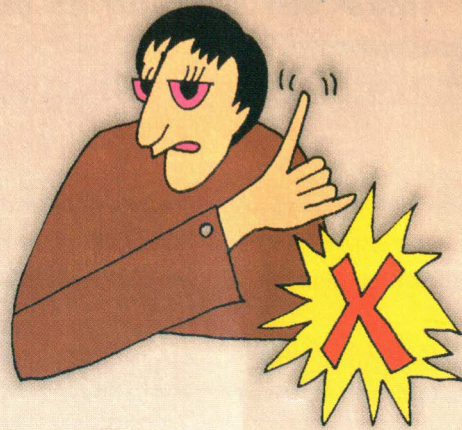
- ▲ Recognise that constant harsh criticism and physical punishment could result in low-self esteem, low self-expectations, depression and some times aggression and anxiety. The psychological damage done in childhood could negatively affect the individuals throughout their lives and the lives of others around them.
- ▲ When the symptoms of the disorder are recognized, it is important that the child is given proper medical and psychological attention. This has been shown to reduce the core symptoms of the disorder and help children to improve academic and social performances.
- ▲ Understanding and support provided at the school seem to play an important role in the eventual outcome of the children with learning disabilities.

Other factors that may be instrumental in breaking down discipline in school:

- ◆ Poor health, malnutrition, poor eyesight or hearing can make students tired and sleepy with little energy left for learning. This can be mistaken for laziness or disobedience.
- ◆ Some students do not know the purpose of education and what is required to obtain an education.
- ◆ In an attempt to divert attention away from their inability to learn, some learners can disrupt class and school deliberately.
- ◆ Lack of respect for school and learning situations.
- ◆ Lack of respect for school property, e.g vandalism, breaking school property.
- ◆ Poor attitudes of students' peer group towards school/learning can reduce students' interest in education. The students sometimes cannot distinguish between pleasing their peer group and what is in their best interest.
- ◆ Interest in matters other than education can distract children from school work and school attendance.

Learning Disorders

Academic achievement is highly valued in our society. Adults often regard the performances of children as a reflection of their own ability to teach and discipline. Parents and teachers often invest a great deal of time and emotional energy to assure their children's academic success. As a result it can be extremely upsetting when a child with no obvious intellectual deficit does not achieve as expected. It indirectly affects the adults self image as good teachers. They might intensify their teaching methods and also blame the child attributing failures to the child's behavioural characteristics (e.g. For being 'lazy', 'careless', 'unmotivated', etc.)



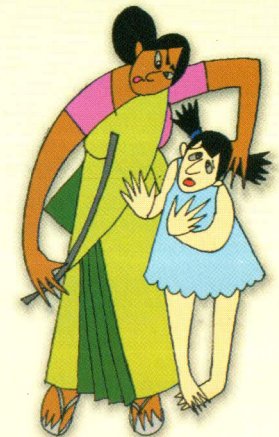
As adults and teachers, it is important to know that, if a child is lagging behind in reading and written expressions, characterized by academic performance that is substantially below what would be expected given the child's age and intelligence, it could be due to a **learning disorder**.

If the child does not have difficulty with sight or hearing, and there is a significant difference between the child's reading ability and what would be expected for a child of the same age, it is likely that the child has a reading disorder. For example, dyslexia could result in a child's inability to pronounce words and misapplication of common rules of pronunciation. Dyslexia differs from poor reading as children with dyslexia have the expected intelligence level for their age. The attribution of their low academic performances to personal characteristics by teachers and adults, and many attempts to improve their performances through verbal and physical punishments make their schooling experience an unpleasant one and the effects often last beyond school age.

- X FALSE:** Children are the possessions of parents. The parents have every right to punish their own children in any way they feel appropriate.
- ✓ TRUE:** Though parents bring their children to this world, children too have a right to protection from physical and other violence whether it be by parents, teachers or others. The Convention of the Rights of the Child, to which Sri Lanka is a signatory, and the Penal Code Amendment of 1995, provide legal protection and recognise children as individuals entitled to human rights and dignity, along with every other adult.
- X FALSE:** 'Parents punish children because they care for them, for the children's own sake or to protect them from danger'.

Adults hit children for 4 reasons :

- ◆ **When adults are frustrated and angry**
- ✓ TRUE:** When you come home tired, have problems in the work place, have economic problems or problems with your spouse, the slightest thing could 'upset' you, including the normal playful but 'loud' behaviour or a minor misbehaviour of a child. Hitting the child may sometimes relieve your frustration at times. **But is it fair by the child?**
- ◆ **To 'correct' the child**
- X FALSE:** If a child is 'naughty' in school and hits other children, should the teacher hit the child to 'maintain discipline'? Stop and think! This child is probably physically punished and bullied at home; that is why he is taking it out on others in school. Although this child has done something wrong in school, if you hit him/her back to 'correct', what message of modeling are you giving the child? "When somebody does something wrong (such as hitting someone), you 'correct' it by hitting back". In other words you reinforce in the child that hitting is the solution when somebody does something wrong. Would that prevent the child from hitting others? No! You may only control the situation temporarily and the child may be quiet only for a short time.



◆ For Retribution

✓ **TRUE:** Suppose a child of 10 years says something 'bad' about a teacher, and the teacher gets to know about it. The child may have repeated something s/he overheard, and may not have known the meaning of what s/he repeated. The following day the child is brought to the office, slapped repeatedly leaving bruises, asked to walk on knees and kept to stand in the hot sun for hours. This would be an example of 'retribution'



◆ Punishment to protect children from 'Danger'.

X **FALSE:** When a child runs to a dangerous place like a busy road, you **MUST STOP** him/her and then explain the danger. But if you hit to stop, you not only distract the child from the message of 'danger' that you want the child to learn but also confuse the child by giving a wrong message (violence).

Since physical punishment is ineffective, 'mild' punishments tend to escalate to more severe violence, as the child gets older.

"Violence breeds violence, compassion leads to non-violence"
-Dhammapada-

"Omm, may Brahman protects us, both student and teacher; may he nourish us both; may we both acquire energy by this education; may we both become illuminated as a result of education; may we not hate each other. Omm, shanthy. Shanthy"

-An Ancient Hindu

Poem-



A child's 'bad' behaviour or performances could be due to a developmental disorder:

Attention Deficit / Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

Adults expect children to pay attention to instructions, act accordingly, and control their impulses. But it is important to know that some children, due to biological reasons, find it difficult to do this very thing expected of them.

The primary characteristics of children with **ADHD** are a pattern of inattention or hyperactivity-impulsivity, or both. Children with this disorder have great difficulty in sustaining their attention to a task or activity. As a consequence, their tasks are frequently unfinished and they often seem not to be listening when someone else is speaking. In addition to this disruption in attention, some children with **ADHD** also display motor hyperactivity. Children with this disorder are often described 'fidgety' in school, unable to sit still for more than few minutes. Impulsive actions apparently without thinking- is a common complaint made about children with **ADHD**. For instance, during a lesson, a child with **ADHD** might shout out responses to the questions even before the teacher had a chance to finish the sentence.



Academic performance of children with **ADHD** tends to suffer, especially as the child grows up. They are likely to be unpopular and face rejection by their peers as inattention and hyperactivity can get in the way of establishing and maintaining friendships. Problems with peers combined with frequent negative feedback from parents and teachers often result in low self esteem.



Problems at home could make a child feel afraid, abandoned, confused, guilty and angry. These feelings can drain energy and motivation from school work. Poverty and alcohol abuse at home can also force learners to miss classes or even leave school.

Problems with an origin outside the school could cause difficulties:

- ◆ Violence in society (e.g. As a result of the war) is brought into school
- ◆ Fear and uncertainty of the future
- ◆ Uncertainty of loved ones returning from war
- ◆ The mob psychology, which takes over in certain situations and overrules individual common-sense
- ◆ Abuse and alcohol and other substances in the society

Problems with class room conditions:

- ◆ Too many students, poor lighting, inadequate ventilation in hot class rooms
- ◆ Too few desks, lack of text books or teaching materials

Teachers may some times foster an environment that breaks down discipline in the class room:

- ◆ Not properly prepared for the lessons and Unsound teaching methods
- ◆ Lack of interest in the learner and/or the lesson
- ◆ Poor class room management skills
- ◆ Negative attitudes towards students
- ◆ Lack of respect for time
- ◆ Lack of proper conduct inside and outside school



What can we do?

Other forms of humiliating and inhumane punishments should not replace physical punishment. Adults would often need some guidelines on **alternative methods of discipline.**

Solving problems of discipline does not rest on one group of people like teachers. The parents, teachers and children should play equally important roles. Above all, **EVERY** member of our society should **understand and support the correct aspects of positive discipline.** Disciplinary methods cannot be imposed by anyone, but a correct understanding and an attitude should evolve from within the society. However, guidance and correct directions to achieve this is important. The support of the community, including the clergy, media and the judiciary system is crucial.

Disciplinary problems can have many causes, and if we all take time to understand these causes we will all be better able to understand them, and we will then be better equipped to cope with these problems.

Problems at home can cause children a great deal of tension and emotional problems. These problems may result from:

- ◆ Poverty
- ◆ Poor supervision at home
- ◆ Unhappy parents
- ◆ Alcohol and drug abuse by parents, usually the father



WHAT IS CHILD ABUSE ?



Verbally abusing a child



Teasing a child unnecessarily



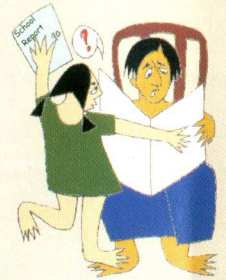
Exposing a child to pornographic acts or literature.



Touching a child where he/ she doesn't want to be touched.



Forcing a child to touch you.



Breaking down the self-confidence of a child.



Hitting or hurting a child - often to relieve your own frustration.



Manipulating a child



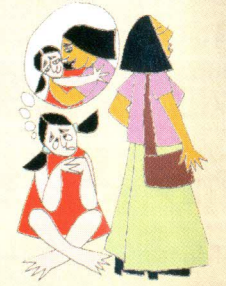
Not taking care of a child, for example: unclean, unclothed, unfed child



Using a child as a servant



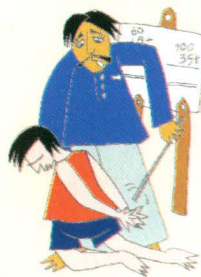
Not listening to a child



Neglecting emotional needs of a child



Making your own child a 'servant', depriving of time for education / leisure



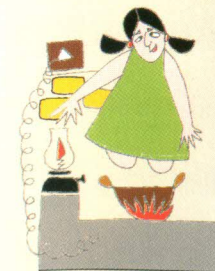
Hitting and ridiculing a child at school



Neglecting a child's medical needs



Neglecting a child's educational needs



Leaving a child without supervision

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