

## Inside Education

### Part 2 Discipline: Can corporal punishment bring back discipline?

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What is the real underlying reason why schools put up with disrespectful, outrageous and uncivil student behaviors? Unfortunately, the culture of victimology is the insidious philosophy that permeates the school and the societal landscape e.g. troubled kids are not responsible for their actions—they are viewed, instead, as victims of school and society's injustices.

A book by psychotherapist Alice Miller, *The Truth Will Set You Free*, claims that: “*all human wretchedness, from terrorist atrocities to everyday unhappiness...can be traced back to childhood ill-treatment—specifically humiliating punishment inflicted on children by their parents.*” There is only one problem with this philosophy—it is not based on provable facts because there are too many variables that take place that cannot be separated out as being a factor or not.

Sacrificing the education of the vast majority by acceding to the anti-social behavior of undisciplined students may seem like an irrational system, but that is the system. As a result, **the need to placate those who believe that undisciplined behaviors are justified put at risk the education of the majority of students who want to learn.** So what's really happening is that the majority of students then become the victims because they are cheated out of a better education. Since there is absolutely no logic or common sense to this lunacy, “desperation” sets in and forces desperate actions to be considered.

An essay, *The Need to Change the U.S. Education System*, is most forceful in stating: “*The first thing American education system needs is appropriate corporal punishment to enforce regulations.*” Of course, the present societal culture and political correctness find such an approach abhorrent, but there is a creeping attempt to bring back the use of corporal punishment.

For example, in our nation's capital, the Board of Education is planning to widen the conditions under which teachers are allowed to use corporal punishment—paddling--against students, responding to concerns that the current policy does not give teachers enough power to quell violence at school and, more importantly, to control their classrooms.

In England, where corporal punishment has been prohibited since 1987, 40 schools have joined forces and are challenging the Government claiming that the law breaches parental rights to choose “loving God-given discipline” for their children. Why this effort on the part of the 40 schools? There has been a decline in discipline since corporal punishment was removed.

**What may be surprising to many is that corporal punishment is legal in 23 states [as of 2018, it's now 19 states].** However, in schools where paddling has been used--the latest data indicates that about 500,000 students were paddled--discipline still remains a problem. What's important to note is that the United States and Canada are the only two industrialized nations that permit corporal punishment. In fact, Poland was the first nation to banish corporal punishment; and consider when it was done--in 1783.

An on-line poll by Mister Poll asked the question: Should school paddling be used? 72% responded “yes” and only 12% responded “no.” It certainly indicates heightened concern and desperation, but it does not translate into school practices.

Whether there should be more, less, or no paddling continues to be debated among psychologists, social workers, physicians, educators, other child care specialists and parents—it's doubtful if any conclusion will ever be reached. The real issue for schools (and society) is that they are running out of options; and rationale disciplinary alternatives must be found.

Presently, the most severe punishment in schools is to be suspended or expelled and both have increased dramatically in recent years; but, the problem of indiscipline has not declined. It's true that, “reported” violence has supposedly declined, but a survey among school resource officers claims that “crimes on school campuses nationwide are underreported to police.” It's also true that nationally suspensions have doubled. As an example, it's incredible to think that in Boston suspensions for prekindergarten through grade 3 have increased yearly for the

past seven years. Isn't age 4 a bit early to start suspending children? Such actions can only be described as "desperation" mixed in with a lot of empty-headedness.

Public Agenda's Deborah Wadsworth sums up the challenge: "*Adults must convincingly signal to the kids, through words and deed, that we value academic achievement and civil and ethical behavior more than we value celebrity status, athletic prowess, or financial success.*" Easier said than done! If deeds are to be examples, parents and school personnel must begin to set an example and change some of their undisciplined behaviors.

The rash of unsportsmanlike behavior by adults—glorified obnoxious behavior in action—is a shameful example. Sports officials and educators involved with youth sports say "*parents and athletes are pushing the limits of acceptable behavior more than in recent memory.*"

The number of recent incidents are too numerous to mention, but one father was beaten to death by another parent over a hockey game, another father pointed a pistol at a coach, and a coach was fired when she took a meat cleaver into school after an argument at a junior high volleyball game. What are students to believe when they see and hear about such unfettered behaviors by adults? The fact is that nationally the problems are so bad that many youth leagues are struggling to find enough sports officials. Of course, the immoral behavior of some religious leaders, politicians, and entertainers (adored and imitated by youth) compound the problem.

Sadly to say, the behavior of some school personnel involving the falsification of school records and test results, fraud, sex and other unethical behaviors is a growing and shameful trend. An article in Christian Science Monitor, "*When teachers' ethics come into question*" makes a very disturbing and shocking observation: "**At the root of the problem (immoral and unethical behaviors) is a generation of teachers that has come of age never having learned basic rights and wrongs.**"

If this is true of teachers, it is also true of the rest of the adult generation—parents included. Consider what one survey of students revealed: 20% started using drugs with their parents starting as young as age 7. Yet, in spite of the societal moral and ethical malaise, there is still much that schools can do to prevent and deal with misbehavior--not through extreme measures caused by desperation--but rather by educationally and psychologically rationale means.