

CORPORAL PUNISHMENT

National and International Perspectives



Legal
Assistance
Centre

Research Brief
2016

Promoting alternatives to corporal punishment

The effects of corporal punishment



Some people think that corporal punishment is an effective and harmless means of disciplining children, but a number of studies suggest otherwise.

Research in various countries suggests that the use of corporal punishment is connected with children experiencing various problems including –

- ▶ increased aggression
- ▶ depression and other emotional problems
- ▶ poor academic achievement; and
- ▶ a poor relationship with parents.

Studies also suggest that parents may increase the amount of force used over time until it becomes serious physical abuse. There are a number of cases in Namibia where children have been severely injured or even killed when “discipline” from a caregiver got out of hand.

Children need discipline. The aim of discipline is to teach a child the difference between right and wrong, but corporal punishment does not do this. Although corporal punishment does often result in immediate compliance, it has been shown to be a poor method for helping children understand what constitutes good behaviour or acquire the ability to control their own actions. Take the situation when a child hits another child. If a parent hits the child in punishment for this, the child is certain to be confused. How can using force teach a child that violence is wrong?

Children learn to be aggressive when they are treated with aggression. International research shows that corporal punishment of children can add to the cycle of violence. Children who are beaten learn to see violence as a legitimate response to problems, and have less opportunity to observe non-violent methods of responding to others. As a result, children who are disciplined with corporal punishment are more likely to use violence against their own spouses or children when they become adults. Corporal punishment thus perpetuates violence in Namibia. The prevention of violence in society should begin with efforts to reduce the use of corporal punishment on children.



“There can be no keener revelation of a society’s soul than the way in which it treats its children.”

– Nelson Mandela

“How can we expect children to take human rights seriously and to help build a culture of human rights, while we adults not only persist in slapping, spanking, smacking and beating them, but actually defend doing so as being ‘for their own good’? Smacking children is not just a lesson in bad behaviour; it is a potent demonstration of contempt for the human rights of smaller, weaker people.”

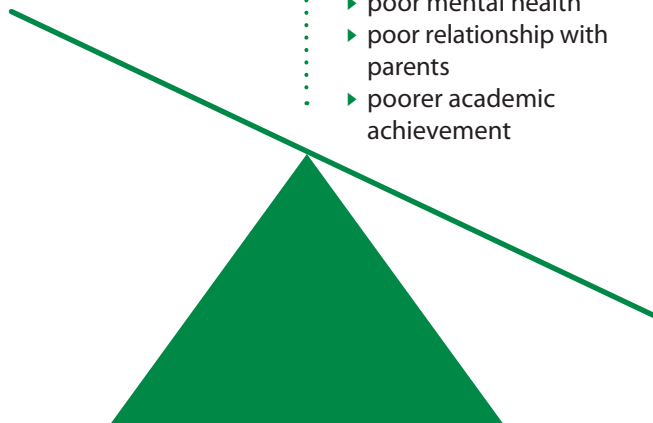
– P Newell and T Hammarberg,
 “The right not to be hit” in
Children’s rights: Turning principles into practice,
 Stockholm, Save the Children Sweden,
 2000 at page 135

Reasons to use corporal punishment

- ▶ results in immediate compliance

Reasons NOT to use corporal punishment

- ▶ escalation to physical abuse
- ▶ lack of moral internalisation
- ▶ increased aggression
- ▶ adult abuse of spouse and children
- ▶ antisocial behaviour
- ▶ poor mental health
- ▶ poor relationship with parents
- ▶ poorer academic achievement



“... You always told me it was just discipline

But for me it felt much more than just discipline.

**In class I hardly listen any more
 Instead I spend my time thinking what I
 have done to deserve all this.**

**If only you’d punish me with something
 else**

**Maybe stop me from watching my
 favourite soapies or hanging out
 with friends on Saturdays.**

I’ve become a sad girl.

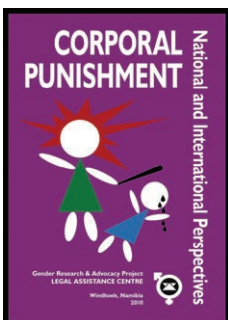
Nothing matters anymore.

This has finished me.

**My flesh has faded away with all your
 beatings; and bones is what’s left.**

**If only you could understand me and
 maybe I’d be happy again.”**

– Excerpt from poem by Namibian child



For a detailed discussion on research into the use of corporal punishment compared to positive discipline and a discussion on the linkage between the use of corporal punishment and the use or acceptance of violence in later life, see the LAC monograph *Corporal Punishment: National and International Perspectives* (available at www.lac.org.na)

Public opinion in Namibia about corporal punishment

There is a perception that corporal punishment of children is popular in Namibia, but the reality is somewhat more complex. A study carried out in eight regions of Namibia found that the people surveyed believed that there were many circumstances which justified hitting children – but at the same time, more than half of those surveyed said that physical punishment is *not* a necessary part of child-rearing. Many of those surveyed understood domestic violence as including family violence against children.

BELIEFS ABOUT JUSTIFICATIONS FOR HITTING CHILDREN – CAPRIVI, ERONGO, KARAS, KAVANGO, KUNENE, OHANGWENA, OMAHEKE AND OTJOZONDJUPA REGIONS, 2007-2008			
Statement	Agree or strongly agree with right to hit		
	Men	Women	All
A parent has a right to hit his or her child ...			
... if the child is disobedient	79%	77%	78%
... if the child talks back to the parent	79%	77%	78%
... if he/she does not want to go to school	65%	60%	63%
... if the child brings shame to the family	58%	50%	54%
... if the child runs away from home	54%	47%	51%
... if the child has sex with someone	50%	47%	49%
... if daughter brings home a boyfriend much older than her	54%	41%	47%
... if he/she has body piercing/tattoos	47%	42%	44%
... if he/she dresses inappropriately	44%	42%	43%
... if a son brings home a girlfriend much older than him	48%	37%	43%
... if the child performs poorly in school	30%	24%	27%

Source: Based on SIAPAC, *Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices Study on Factors and Traditional Practices that may Perpetuate or Protect Namibians from Gender Based Violence and Discrimination: Caprivi, Erongo, Karas, Kavango, Kunene, Ohangwena, Omaheke, and Otjozondjupa Regions (Final Report)*, Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare, Table 5 at page 52 (based on interviews with 1 680 respondents: 210 in each of the eight regions, half men and half women). Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole percent, with all 0.5 percentages rounded upwards.

What do children in Namibia think about the use of corporal punishment?

Corporal punishment was discussed as part of the extensive consultation process conducted by the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare in 2009 to guide the revision of the Child Care and Protection Bill. The topic inspired substantial debate at all stages of the consultation process. Overall, the feedback received from the public supported the use of alternative forms of discipline and called for a reduction in the levels of corporal punishment in Namibia. Children who were consulted during this process overwhelmingly recommended that parents should rather explain what the child has done wrong and use other forms of discipline, such as taking away privileges.

This input included over 2 000 comments collected from discussions facilitated by the Ombetja Yehinga Organisation with learners and out-of-school youth in Kunene Region. The children's comments provide rich and detailed information. Some children spoke about how they were beaten, indicating that beatings on the hands, buttocks and around the head are common, along with the use of sticks. Common reasons for beating were failure at school or failure to help with chores around the home. The most revealing comments from the children concerned how they felt about being beaten – they reported anger, unhappiness and even thoughts of committing suicide. Many believe that corporal punishment leads to increased aggression by children, and many gave examples of alternatives to corporal punishment that parents and teachers could use.



Promotion of alternatives to corporal punishment

Corporal punishment is not the only way to discipline children. There are a number of other ways to do so. The appropriate type of discipline depends on the age of the child and the child's response to the discipline used. (Some children respond better than others to some forms of discipline.) Five ideas for positive discipline are shown below.

1. **Explain the problem.** Make sure the child knows what he has done wrong.
2. **Make the child take responsibility for his actions.** For example, if he breaks something on purpose, you could make him fix it.
3. **Use "time-outs".** This is when you take the child away from what he was doing to get him to calm down and think about what he has done.
4. **Take away privileges,** such as being allowed to watch television or play with friends.
5. **Don't say things that you don't mean,** such as telling him you will give him away. He must always know you love him even though what he did was wrong, and he must know you are prepared to follow through on what you say.

When his behaviour improves, don't forget to tell him he is doing a good job.

I try to explain to my boy when I am not happy with something he does. He talks to me when he is upset too. If I beat my son, he won't learn why I was upset with him. If I tell him why I was upset, he will understand why he should change his behaviour.

Read more in the two LAC comics on alternatives to corporal punishment.

Alternatives to CORPORAL PUNISHMENT

Comic 1

Alternatives to CORPORAL PUNISHMENT

Comic 2

I still punish him of course! He is not getting any pocket money this week because he didn't do his homework. Good grades mean he will get a good job. A bad job means he will earn very little money. I have explained this to him in a calm voice. And by not giving him any pocket money for a week, I hope he learns that homework is important.

Responding to defences of corporal punishment

People use many different reasons to justify the use of corporal punishment. But for each argument in favour of using corporal punishment, there are convincing counter-arguments that support the use of positive discipline.

EXCUSE FOR USING CORPORAL PUNISHMENT	RESPONSE AS TO WHY POSITIVE DISCIPLINE IS BETTER	RELATED STATEMENTS OF EXPERTS AND CHILDREN
Corporal punishment is part of my religious belief.	→ Other people interpret the same religious teachings to have a different meaning, and one that does not justify the use of corporal punishment. Many religious leaders and groups have spoken out against the use of corporal punishment.	<p data-bbox="1007 456 1453 920">“I support the Global Initiative to eliminate all corporal punishment at home, at school, in institutions and community. This worldwide movement has gained prominence through the current UN Secretary General’s Global Study on Violence against Children. Progress towards abolishing corporal punishment is being made, but millions of the world’s children still suffer from humiliating acts of violence and these violations of their rights as human beings can have serious and lifelong effects. Violence begets violence and we shall reap a whirlwind. Children can be disciplined without violence that instils fear and misery, and I look forward to church communities working with other organisations to use the context of the Study to make progress towards ending all forms of violence against children. If we really want a peaceful and compassionate world, we need to build communities of trust where all children are respected, where home and school are safe places to be and where discipline is taught by example. May God give us grace to love our children as He loves them and may their trust in us lead them to trust in Him.”</p> <p data-bbox="1007 920 1453 969">– Desmond M. Tutu, Archbishop Emeritus, <i>Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children Annual Report 2006</i>.</p>
Corporal punishment is part of my culture.	→ Culture changes. Wife-beating was also part of many cultures but this is now stopping.	<p data-bbox="1007 969 1453 1144">“There is no more obvious sign of the low status which children still enjoy in most of the world than the readiness of adults to defend smacking, slapping, and beating them”.</p> <p data-bbox="1007 1144 1453 1211">– P Newell, “Respecting children’s right to physical integrity”, in Bob Franklin, ed, <i>The Handbook of Children’s Rights: Comparative Policy and Practice</i>, London: Routledge, 1995</p>
Parents have the right to bring up their children as they see fit and that this should only be challenged in extreme cases like child abuse.	→ The impact of corporal punishment can have wide-reaching effects. Domestic violence is not a private affair, nor is the use of corporal punishment.	<p data-bbox="1007 1211 1453 1294">“I tried beating my younger sister but it didn’t make her obey.”</p> <p data-bbox="1007 1294 1453 1368">– Quote from a Namibian child</p>
There is a difference between a vicious beating and little smacks.	→ A light smack and a violent beating are different and many people can differentiate between the two. However there are some people who do not see the difference, particularly when they act in the heat of the moment. There have been some children in Namibia who have been seriously injured by “punishment”, or even beaten to death.	<p data-bbox="1007 1368 1453 1637">“I am a young child and when I came home late, my parents started to beat me with a whip. I saw one parent beat a small baby even though that baby did not make any mistake.”</p> <p data-bbox="1007 1637 1453 1675">– Quote from a Namibian child</p>
I was hit as a child and it didn’t harm me.	→ Just think what you could have been.	<p data-bbox="1007 1675 1453 1794">“The other night, my dad hit me and it made me cry. I wish I could hit him back.”</p> <p data-bbox="1007 1794 1453 1839">– Quote from a Namibian child</p>
Children learn from smacking to respect their elders, to obey rules, to work hard and to distinguish between right and wrong	→ Children learn how to avoid a beating, they don’t learn why something is wrong or why they should change their behaviour.	<p data-bbox="1007 1839 1453 1951">“I want to be punished by words, because I am mature enough to understand the correct actions.”</p> <p data-bbox="1007 1951 1453 1989">– Quote from a Namibian child</p>

What does the law say about the use of corporal punishment?

Corporal punishment in schools and other public settings

Shortly after Independence, the Namibian Supreme Court found that Article 8(1) of the Namibian Constitution prohibits corporal punishment by any “organ of state”. This includes corporal punishment in government schools as well as the administration of corporal punishment to adult or juvenile offenders as punishment for a crime.

The court’s reasoning was as follows:

- 1) Every human being has an **inviolable dignity**. A physical assault sanctified by the power and the authority of the State violates that dignity.
- 2) Corporal punishment is **intended to cause acute pain & physical suffering** which strips the recipient of all dignity and self-respect. It is contrary to the traditional humanity practised by almost the whole of the civilised world.
- 3) The fact that these assaults on a human being are **systematically planned, prescribed and executed by an organised society** makes the practice inherently objectionable. *It demeans* the society which permits it as much as the citizen who receives it.
- 4) It is in part at least premised on **irrationality, retribution and insensitivity**. It makes no appeal to the emotional sensitivity and the rational capacity of the person in question.
- 5) It is inherently **arbitrary and capable of abuse** leaving the intensity & the quality of the punishment subject to the temperament, personality and idiosyncrasies of the particular person who applies the punishment.
- 6) It is **alien and humiliating** when it is inflicted by a person who is a relative stranger to the person punished and who has no emotional bonds with him.

– Summary of *Ex Parte Attorney-General, Namibia: In Re Corporal Punishment by Organs of State*, 1991 NR 178 (SC)

The ruling of the Supreme Court on corporal punishment was codified in the Education Act 16 of 2001 which clearly applied the prohibition on corporal punishment to state schools, hostels and private schools.

Education Act 16 of 2001, section 56(1)

“A teacher or any other person employed at a state school or hostel or private school or hostel commits misconduct, if such teacher or person, in the performance of his or her official duties imposes or administers corporal punishment upon a learner, or causes corporal punishment to be imposed or administered upon a learner.”



The Act is bolstered by the Namibian Code of Conduct for Teaching Service, which states that a teacher “may not administer corporal or any other degrading punishment upon a learner”. Failure to comply with the Code of Conduct constitutes misconduct and must be dealt with in terms of the Public Service Act 13 of 1995. This means that the misconduct could lead to suspension followed by an enquiry, with the ultimate result being reprimand, a fine, transfer to another post, a reduction in salary or rank, and possible dismissal, depending on the recommendation of the disciplinary committee which considers the case. Depending on the seriousness of the infringement of the Code of Conduct, the teacher in question may also “be given the necessary counselling and advice and opportunity to correct his or her behaviour”.

Despite these clear rules, the use of corporal punishment in some schools persists. In fact, in 2005, a school student was awarded N\$35 000 in damages after a teacher beat him several times in his face with an open hand and over his body with a plastic pipe with steel wire inside, in connection with an accusation that he had stolen a fellow student’s cellphone.

Corporal punishment in the home

The Child Care and Protection Act 3 of 2015 says that any person who has control of a child, including the child’s parents, must respect the child’s right to dignity. This means that only forms of discipline which respect the child’s dignity will be allowed in the home. How this is understood in practice will develop over time, as alternative forms of discipline are popularised.

The Act gives the Minister of Gender Equality and Child Welfare a duty to take reasonable steps to promote alternatives to corporal punishment across the country, and to educate the public on the topic of corporal punishment.



The Child Care and Protection Act also outlaws the use of corporal punishment at any registered facility which cares for children (including children's homes, shelters, crèches and day care centres), and in any form of alternative care where the child has been placed in terms of a court order (such as foster care or court-ordered kinship care).

Severe manifestations of corporal punishment could be addressed through the Combating of Domestic Violence Act 4 of 2003. This law allows victims of domestic violence, or anyone with an interest in their well-being, to seek a protection order and/or bring criminal charges against abusers in the domestic sphere. The domestic relationships covered by the Act include parent and child, as well as extended family members related by blood, marriage, or adoption, provided that they share a domestic connection (such as living in the same home).

Child Care and Protection Act 3 of 2015, section 228

Corporal punishment

(1) A person who has control of a child, including a person who has parental responsibilities and rights in respect of the child, must respect the child's right to dignity conferred by Article 8 of the Namibian Constitution.

(2) Any legislative provision and any rule of common or customary law authorising corporal punishment of a child by a court, including the court of a traditional leader, is repealed to the extent that it authorises such punishment.

(3) A person may not administer corporal punishment to a child at any residential child care facility, place of care, shelter, early childhood development centre, a school, whether a state or private school or to a child in foster care, prison, police cell or any other form of alternative care resulting from a court order.

(4) The Minister must take all reasonable steps to ensure that –

- (a) education and awareness-raising programmes concerning the effect of subsections (1), (2) and (3) are implemented in all the regions in Namibia; and
- (b) programmes and materials promoting appropriate discipline at home and in other contexts where children are cared for are available in all the regions in Namibia.

Corporal punishment is PROHIBITED by law –

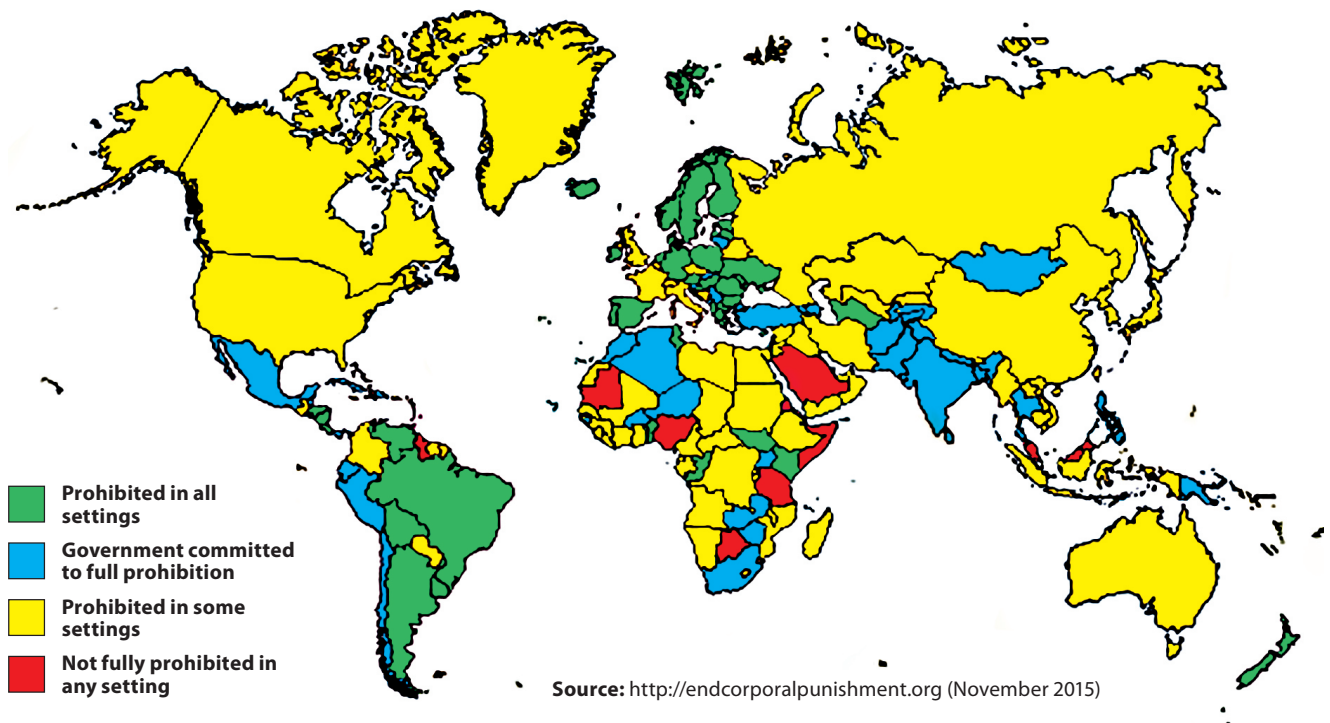
- at any **registered facility** which cares for children (including children's homes, shelters, crèches and day-care centres);
- in any form of **alternative care** where a child is placed in terms of a court order (such as foster care and court-ordered kinship care);
- in public and private **schools**; and
- in **prisons and police cells**.



"It shouldn't hurt to be a child."

Examples from other countries

In 1979, Sweden became the first country to explicitly prohibit all corporal punishment and other humiliating treatment of children. According to Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, as of 2015, 47 states have prohibited all corporal punishment of children, including in the family home (<http://endcorporalpunishment.org>). In Africa, Benin, Cape Verde, South Sudan, the Republic of Congo, Kenya, Tunisia and Togo all prohibit corporal punishment of children, including corporal punishment in the home.



International agreements

Namibia is a party to the **Convention on the Rights of the Child**, Article 19 of this Convention requires that State Parties take “*all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s), or any other person who has the care of the child*”.

In 1994, the Committee on the Rights of the Child stressed that corporal punishment of children is incompatible with the Convention and called for the revision of legislation, as well as the development of awareness and educational campaigns, to prevent child abuse and the physical punishment of children.

In 2006, the Committee issued a General Comment on corporal punishment, which stated: “*Addressing the widespread acceptance or tolerance of corporal punishment of children and eliminating it, in the family, schools and other settings, is not only an obligation of States parties under the Convention. It is also a key strategy for reducing and preventing all forms of violence in societies.*”

The **African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child** similarly requires that states take legislative measures to protect children from all forms of torture and inhuman or degrading treatment (Articles 16 and 17) and to ensure that discipline of children, whether at home or in schools, respects their human dignity (Articles 11 and 20).

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

If many people in Namibia support the use of corporal punishment, shouldn't the government follow public opinion?

No, in this situation the government must provide a positive lead that the public can follow. Corporal punishment is a form of violence that should not be allowed to continue. From an international perspective, in countries where legislation has been changed to prohibit the use of corporal punishment, this has usually taken place before overall public opinion has supported the change.

But what if you need to smack a child to stop the child from hurting himself or herself?

Using pain to prevent pain does not make sense. There are other methods of discipline that will be effective in these situations. Also, there is a distinction between corporal punishment and restraining a child briefly in an emergency situation – such as holding back a child who is about to run in front of a moving car.

Aren't corporal punishment and child abuse different?

A light smack and a violent beating are different and many people can differentiate between the two. However there are some people who do not see the difference, particularly when they act in the heat of the moment. There have been some children in Namibia who have been seriously injured by "punishment", or even beaten to death.

– Questions and answers modelled on the **Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children** and **Save the Children Sweden** publication *Prohibiting all corporal punishment of children*

CASE EXAMPLES FROM NAMIBIA

Several Namibian cases illustrate the difficulty of drawing distinctions between acceptable and unacceptable physical punishment and show how matters can escalate, with tragic consequences.

A Namibian court case decided in 1996 involved a man convicted of murder for beating his 4-year-old daughter to death. The daughter was very ill and consequently unable to walk. On the night in question, her father fetched her from the house of a neighbour. She pleaded with him to carry her but he beat her because, in his own words, "I thought she's not walking very fast as I wanted, as I wished". The court found that, although the father was drunk at the time, he still knew what he was doing. The judge in the case commented, "Society cannot tolerate that those most vulnerable members of society, ie the children, be abused by those persons who are supposed to care for them with love and affection"

In a 2004 incident, a grandmother summoned a neighbour to help her "punish" a 10-year-old boy who ate four dried fish. The boy, who was tied to a tree and beaten with sticks, ultimately died from his injuries and the grandmother and the neighbour were each sentenced to 15 years imprisonment for his murder.

In 2008, police arrested a 55-year-old woman on a charge of assault with intent to cause grievous bodily harm, after she allegedly burnt her two grandchildren on the lips with hot coals and then forced the coals into their mouths, because they ate a piece of chicken without her permission.

In a 2010 case, a father was convicted of culpable homicide for the death of his 6-year-old daughter. The father forced the child to eat dinner after she had had enough. After she vomited onto the food and refused to eat more, he broke off two branches from a nearby bush and started hitting the child all over her body until she ran away. The father gave chase and the child ultimately died of a fractured skull. The court found that the father's initial intent was to chastise his child – but that the boundaries of chastisement were clearly exceeded.

– Excerpted from **Corporal Punishment: National and International Perspectives**, Legal Assistance Centre, 2010

TWENTY ALTERNATIVES TO CORPORAL PUNISHMENT

- 1. LOOK FOR UNDERLYING NEEDS.**
Example: Give your child something to play with while waiting in line.
- 2. GIVE INFORMATION AND REASONS.**
Example: If your child colours on the wall, explain why we colour on paper only.
- 3. LOOK FOR UNDERLYING FEELINGS.**
Acknowledge, accept and listen to feelings.
Example: If your child hits his baby sister, encourage him to express his anger and jealousy in harmless ways. He may need to cry or rage.
- 4. CHANGE THE ENVIRONMENT.**
This is sometimes easier than trying to change the child.
Example: If your child repeatedly takes things out of the kitchen cupboards, put a childproof lock on them.
- 5. FIND ACCEPTABLE ALTERNATIVES.**
Redirect your child's behaviour.
Example: If you do not want your child to play inside the house, don't just say no. Tell her where she can play.
- 6. DEMONSTRATE HOW YOU WANT YOUR CHILD TO BEHAVE.**
Example: If your child pulls a cat's tail, show him how to pet a cat. Do not rely on words alone.
- 7. GIVE CHOICES RATHER THAN COMMANDS.**
Decision-making empowers children; commands invite a power struggle.
Example: "Would you like to brush your teeth before or after putting your pajamas on?"
- 8. MAKE SMALL CONCESSIONS.**
Example: "I'll let you skip brushing your teeth tonight because you are so tired."
- 9. PROVIDE FOR A PERIOD OF PREPARATION.**
Example: If you are counting on company for dinner, tell your child how you expect him to behave. Be specific. Role-playing can help prepare a child for potentially difficult situations.
- 10. LET NATURAL CONSEQUENCES OCCUR (when appropriate).**
Don't rescue too much.
Example: A child who does not hang up her towel may find it still wet the next day. (But don't create artificial consequences.)
- 11. COMMUNICATE YOUR OWN FEELINGS.**
Let children know how their behaviour affects you.
Example: "I get so tired of cleaning up after you."
- 12. USE ACTIONS WHEN NECESSARY.**
Example: If your child insists on running across streets, hold his hand tightly (while explaining the dangers).
- 13. HOLD YOUR CHILD.**
Children who are acting aggressively or obnoxiously can benefit from being held in a loving and supportive way that allows them to channel their pent-up feelings into healing tears.
- 14. REMOVE YOUR CHILD FROM THE SITUATION AND STAY WITH HER.**
Use the time for listening, sharing feelings, holding, and conflict-resolution.
- 15. DO IT TOGETHER, BE PLAYFUL.**
Many conflict situations can be turned into games.
Example: "Let's pretend we're a soccer team and clean up your bedroom together." "Every time you put your dirty clothes in the laundry basket you score a goal."
- 16. DEFUSE THE SITUATION WITH LAUGHTER.**
Example: If your child is mad at you, invite him to express his anger in a playful pillow fight with you. Play your part by surrendering dramatically. Laughter helps resolve anger and feelings of powerlessness.
- 17. MAKE A DEAL, NEGOTIATE.**
Example: If you're ready to leave the playground and your child is having fun, reach an agreement on the number of times she may go down the slide before leaving.
- 18. DO MUTUAL CONFLICT-RESOLUTION.**
Discuss ongoing conflicts with your children, state your own needs, and ask for their help in finding solutions. Determine rules together. Hold family meetings.
- 19. REVISE YOUR EXPECTATIONS.**
Young children have intense feelings and needs and are naturally loud, curious, messy, wilful, impatient, demanding, creative, forgetful, fearful, self-centred, and full of energy. Try to accept them as they are.
- 20. TAKE A PARENTAL TIME-OUT.**
Leave the room and do whatever is needed to regain your sense of composure and good judgment.
Examples: call a friend, cry, meditate, or take a shower.

– Aletha Solter, PhD, 1996
(with slight edits for Namibian context);
a previous version of this list was published in
Mothering magazine, Vol 65, 1992



Against Corporal Punishment of Children

Statement by Rev Maria Kapere

Windhoek, Namibia, July 2010

Corporal punishment's usefulness is very limited. When done in anger and with force by teachers and parents it may cause damage rather than transforming an undisciplined child. Parents' and teachers' attitude, language and actions will positively direct children into becoming responsible and accountable human beings. We as adults are given responsibility over children, and we need to nurture them and take care of them. As adults we should be able to distinguish between what is cruel and what is compassionate, between what is safe and what is unsafe. There is no evidence that hitting children does them good. My opinion is that hitting a child can do more harm than good. How can we, who are given the responsibility over children, inflict violence and pain upon them? We must remember that the main goal of corporal punishment is to immediately stop inappropriate behaviour; it is a means to inflict pain to stop a certain type of behaviour. Yes, the behaviour may stop for that given moment, because the child may feel pain. But soon that pain will disappear and the behaviour will reappear. The gains of corporal punishment are thus short-term.

Raising three children has taught me that corporal punishment tends to cultivate deceitfulness, fear, violence, resentment and rejection of parental authority. Violence is not a good teaching tool, discipline is. There is a big difference between discipline and corporal punishment. I am in support of disciplining children. And let it be made clear that discipline does not mean hitting a child. To discipline is to teach a child to do right instead of merely stopping inappropriate behaviour through pain. Discipline, unlike corporal punishment, always leaves a positive impression, it is a means to teach and parent children through love. The goal behind discipline is for children to develop personally, socially and spiritually. We should discipline children in a way that they will feel they are still good and capable people who can make positive changes, versus disciplining them in a way that makes them feel they are bad people who are not capable of anything and who cannot do anything worthwhile. I end with an extract from the Holy Bible: "Train a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not turn from it." – Proverbs 22:6.

– Rev Maria Kapere, Secretary-General of the Council of Churches in Namibia, writing in her personal capacity

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