

Position Paper on Corporal Punishment in the Schools

“If we are ever to turn toward a kindlier society and a safer world, a revulsion against the physical punishment of children would be a good place to start.”-Dr. Benjamin Spock

Definition and Prevalence Rate of Corporal Punishment

Corporal punishment is defined by Florida Statutes as the moderate use of physical force or physical contact by a teacher or principal to maintain discipline or to enforce school rules (s. 1006.07(1), Florida Statutes). Every industrialized country in the world except for the U.S., Canada, and one state in Australia now prohibit corporal punishment in the schools. In the U.S., the most typical form of school corporal punishment is the striking of the student’s buttocks with a wooden paddle by a school authority (NASP, 2002). Although 28 states have now prohibited the use of corporal punishment, Florida statutes still allow for each individual district to determine if they will permit principals and/or teachers to use corporal punishment as a means of controlling students’ conduct. In the 2003-2004 academic year, 43 of the 67 Florida school districts (64%) reported students receiving corporal punishment (a total of 10,039 students). Counties with the most incidents of corporal punishment for 2003-2004 were: Duval (1,026), Jackson (716), Santa Rosa (707), Walton (575), Columbia (557), Baker (445) and Holmes (444). Furthermore, many are concerned that across the country, corporal punishment is used much more often on poor children, Black children, and children with disabilities.

Consequences of Corporal Punishment

Schools are the only institutions in America in which striking another person is legally sanctioned. It is not allowed in prisons, in the military, or in mental hospitals. In a society that is already marred by appalling rates of physical violence, schools should not be condoning a practice that contributes to the cycle of child abuse and the pro-violence attitudes of American youth. Corporal punishment has been found to be associated with higher levels of violence and aggression, decreased self-control, and symptoms of depression and anxiety. Bruises and broken bones are not unusual consequences of corporal punishment; tragically, children have even died as a result of corporal punishment.

Alternatives to Corporal Punishment

The **Florida Association of School Psychologists (FASP)** is one of over 40 organizations that oppose the use of corporal punishment in schools, including the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Bar Association, and the National Association of State Boards of Education. FASP recognizes that discipline is necessary for effective schooling, but encourages schools and teachers to utilize one of the numerous empirically-supported alternatives to corporal punishment, including:

- Positive Behavioral Support
- Behavioral contracting
- Positive reinforcement of appropriate behavior
- Social skills training
- Disciplinary consequences with instructional or reflective components
- Programs that emphasize early diagnosis and intervention
- Student Recognition Programs
- Peer Mediation
- Providing parent training and classes on effective discipline

School Psychologists can provide many direct and indirect services to improve the discipline of individual children as well as services to improve classroom and schoolwide discipline. FASP supports legislation that abolishes corporal punishment in the schools, and encourages legislators, parents, teachers, and school administrators to adopt more effective and constructive alternatives to school discipline.

For further information on corporal punishment in Florida, please contact:
Bob Templeton, FASP President (benbobbart@aol.com or (561)434-8972)
Dr. Gene Cash, FASP Legislative Committee Chair (Gcash1@aol.com or 954/963-5363)
Bob and John Cerra, FASP lobbyists (850)222-4428)

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Position Paper on Corporal Punishment in the Schools adopted by the FASP Executive Board April 2007.