

Chapter 2

Some inappropriate disciplines against children

Objectives: This chapter aims to help trainees understand

1. Concepts and forms of physical and emotional punishment.
2. Why punishment is ineffective and harmful?
3. Why punishment is still used, even though it is ineffective?



What is punishment? Forms of punishment

Punishment

Punishment is any behaviour that someone (usually an adult) applies to a child in order to change negative behaviours and that causes either physical or emotional pain or both for the child. Punishment is harmful to the child's development.

Forms of punishment

- **Physical punishment:** Behaviours that cause pain or injury to a child's body, potentially affecting his or her physical development. These include, but are not limited to, beating with a rod or stick, rapping a child's head with one's knuckles, pulling the child's ears, kicking, forcing the child to kneel, forcing the child to work hard and not allowing the child to eat.
- **Emotional punishment:** Behaviours that cause psychological and emotional pain, such as scolding, cursing, humiliating, inducing panic, threatening or ignoring.



Physical punishment is easier to see while emotional punishment can be more difficult to detect. Emotional punishment can be described in the following ways:

- ▶ **Scolding or shouting:** Speaking to children in a loud or harsh voice can make them feel scared or humiliated. These feelings are exacerbated if the punishment takes place in front of other children or adults.
- ▶ **Ridiculing children:** Some people tease or ridicule children by not taking their questions seriously and giving them foolish answers. Some people make fun of a child's personality. When children feel subjected to ridicule, they may respond rudely, even returning the ridicule. This is similar to adult responses when faced with the same situation.
- ▶ **Making children ashamed:** when children are humiliated, especially in front of other people, they may feel shame. Adults may humiliate their children in front of other adults as a result of feeling that they are themselves being humiliated by their child's bad behaviour.

- ▶ **Making children afraid:** Some adults use fear and a child's imagination as a form of discipline. Using a child's natural fear of ghosts, spiders, night shadows and so on may, if employed too often, lead to obsessive fears in both children and the adults they become.
- ▶ **Threatening:** Many people use threats as a way to discipline children. Often however, children don't really understand the threat, as they cannot yet reason like adults. As such, threats may be an ineffective means of discipline. Further, children's short attention spans may mean that the threat needs to be continually repeated in order to have any effect. This may lead to long-term fears and phobias, even once the child is old enough to reason with. For example, if parents threaten to sell their child or give him or her away to another family if he or she doesn't behave, the child may experience intense separation anxiety long after he or she realises that his or her parents will not really sell him or her.

Everyone makes mistakes sometimes, such as breaking bowls and cups, cutting their finger, getting their clothes dirty, knocking over their ink, losing their books, forgetting something, getting low marks, failing an exam or breaking the traffic laws. Thus, *making mistakes is a normal, natural part of life*, part of the process of learning and growth. Even as parents and teachers, we still make mistakes.

Adults can forgive children and explain why the mistake happened so that children can understand and learn from their mistakes. Many adults, however, use punishments that are not related to the child's mistake, for example, asking them to clean the classroom when they didn't complete their homework or scolding and shouting at them when they are late for school. These punishments may make children feel hurt and sad, become discouraged and want to drop out of school or take some kind of revenge against those that have hurt them. Using positive discipline methodology when children make a mistake will, on the other hand, enable them to learn how to change their undesirable behaviours while still feeling loved, respected, safe, valued and maintaining their dignity.



Punishment and abuse

Physical and emotional punishment and abuse (mistreatment) are both forms of violence. For appropriate intervention, it is important to understand the differences between these two forms:

	Punishment	Abuse
Severity	Produces light physical injuries, for example: hitting and slapping.	Produces light or serious physical injuries.
Intention	Parents and teachers use it as an educational tool.	Normally, there is no educative intention.
Awareness	An adult who punishes does not recognise it as violence. It is a non-recognised form of violence.	An abusive adult has full awareness of his or her acts of violence.

To identify violence, three points should be taken into account:

- **Violence damages child development:** Any violent behaviour towards children (including physical and emotional) will damage the child's development even if it takes place unintentionally.
- **Violence is an abuse of power:** Individuals who use violence against children are abusing the power they have over children. In most cases, the violators have regular and close relationship with children, such as grandparents, parents or teachers.
- **Violence has different forms:** Physical, emotional and sexual. Violence can exist in forms of abuse or neglect.

Physical and emotional punishment is a violent form that violates the rights of the child (will be discussed in Chapter 3) and harms children's development.

Activity: *Return to childhood to understand punishment*

**Objectives**

To understand what punishment is, its forms and consequences

**Target audience**

Parents and teachers, caregivers and people who work with children

**Time**

30 minutes

**Method**

Small-group discussion, sharing and summarising

**Material**

A0-size papers and colour pens or board and chalk

Process

Step 1 (10 minutes)

Question: *Is there anyone in the class who has never made any mistakes?* Who did make a mistake as a child?

Question: *What were those mistakes?* The trainer writes a list of the mistakes offered on the board or A0 paper.

Question: *What did adults (parent/teachers) do to punish you and how?* Please write down trainees' answer on the board. You can write into two columns: physical and emotional punishment. You can give trainees the handout "*What do children say? What do adults think?*".

Step 2 (10 minutes)

Question: *What did you feel and learn when people treated you this way?* Trainees answer and trainer writes on the board or A0 paper.

Conclusion (10 minutes)

Making mistakes is normal, natural and everyone does it. Children are often physically and emotionally punished whenever they make a mistake or are 'naughty' (see Suggested Knowledge 1 above). You can give homework: *Each trainee reviews him or herself – does he or she often punish his or her children or not? How? What are the consequences?*

Why is punishment ineffective and harmful?

Physical consequence

- Beating or punishing children is a form of violence form that causes pain and injury. In extreme cases, beating children may cause permanent disability.

Psychological and emotional consequence

- Children may become confused and unclear about the situation. For example, their parents say that they love them but the child just feels the pain of being beaten; they do not understand what they have done wrong or what they should do.
- Children may feel worried, humiliated or disgraced and suffer from loss of self-esteem and confidence.
- Children may feel less valued and may begin to hate themselves and other people. Children who feel worthless may misbehave, thinking that their actions are not valued, creating a vicious cycle.
- Once punished, children may feel that they have already paid for their mistake and may repeat it.
- Children may become angry and want to take revenge against adults.
- Children may feel forced to find a way of hiding their mistakes from adults to avoid punishment next time.
- Regularly beating children will create a resistance, making the punishment less effective over time. Children will not learn discipline; rather they will learn a bad example of how to deal with mistakes.
- Beating children can set up a vicious cycle in the family and society, telling children that violence is the solution and that beating smaller and weaker people is acceptable.
- Parents and adults will need to find other methods of discipline when children become as strong as adults. As such, it is important to find different, non-violent discipline strategies when children are still young.



When they are physically and emotionally punished, children may appear shy, passive, unconfident and frightened, especially when those that have punished them are nearby them. They are often fearful of making mistakes or feeling discouraged.

Punishment is both ineffective and harmful

- ▶ Punishments may not make children do what adults want.
- ▶ Punishment can make children scared of parents or teachers and other powerful people. This fear may cause them to perform poorly in school.
- ▶ Children often avoid situations and people that make them feel afraid. They may hide, leave home or drop out of school.
- ▶ The more children are frightened of punishment by parents or teachers, the worse situation may become.
- ▶ The more beating or punishment children suffer, the less active and adaptive they may become.
- ▶ J.J. Bigner et al (1994) have found that using an autocratic educational style and punishments such as scolding, beating or forbidding some favourite activities to control children, is negatively correlated to the level of the child's creativeness.

Some facts about spanking

Source: Adapted from Bigner J. J. (1994). Parent-child relations – An Introduction to parenting.

- Spanking children on their bottoms is a common punishment by parents, especially to young children.
- Spanking is usually used to replace positive communication with children when they exhibit negative behaviours.
- Children are mostly spanked when adults are angry.
- Boys are spanked more frequently than are girls.
- Children who are spanked tend to show higher incidence of cruel behaviours than children who are not spanked.
- Spanking has been linked to children experiencing negative feelings and losing confidence.
- Punishment may force children to obey their parents' expectation immediately but in the long run, if it is overused, it may increase negative behaviours, possibly even pushing teenagers to crime and other activities that have ramifications in adulthood.
- Children who are bullies at school are often those children who are punished at home.
- People who spank children were often treated similarly when they were young.

Activity: Discussion about spanking

	Objectives	To understand how spanking children on the bottom affects them
	Target audience	Parents and teachers, caregivers and people who work with children
	Time	10 minutes
	Method	Quick thinking and sharing
	Materials	A0-size papers and colour pens or board and chalk

Process

Ask the trainees whether or not they believe in spanking?

Step 1 (5 minutes)

Distribute handout about Spanking (see handouts of this chapter) to each group of two to three people. You can also write the situation on the board or on a half page of A0 paper. Request trainees to discuss following questions: how do children feel and what did they learn?

Ask trainees to share their thinking and discussion results.

Suggested analysis:

Step 2 (3 minutes)

An thinks that biting Vinh will get Vinh to do what he wants. Beating An in this point of time just reinforces his belief that hurting other people to compel them to do what she wants, or when she is angry or frustrated is normal and acceptable. Other more effective methods - which will be discussed further in the next session - include asking An to use verbal communication when she is angry or wants somebody to follow her. At the beginning, An wants her parents and teachers to understand that her teddy bear is very valuable to her. While An needs to have the message not to bite others told to her clearly and consistently, it is also important that An's parents and teachers listen to her side of the story. If An believes that her feelings and opinions are not seriously considered, she will be less inclined to change her negative behaviour.

Conclusion (2 minutes)

Though children may stop negative behaviours immediately after they are spanked or punished, ultimately they will learn that hurting other people when they are angry is acceptable.

Activity: Discussion about another case of punishment

**Objectives**

To understand the consequences of punishment

**Target audience**

Parents and teachers, caregivers and people who work with children

**Time**

10 minutes

**Method**

Quick thinking and sharing

**Materials**

A0-size papers and colour pens or board and chalk

Process

Step 1
(5 minutes)

Distribute handout *Punish the Child* (in the handouts of this chapter) to each group of two or three people. You can also write the situation on the board or on a half page of A0 paper. Request trainees to discuss questions given in the card.

Step 2
(3 minutes)

Ask trainees to share their thinking and discussion results.

Conclusion
(2 minutes)

Being punished and beaten, Kien may learn the following things:

- Never do it again
- Hide his mistake
- Shift the blame to other children and tell a lie
- Avoid being caught the next time
- Believe that he is not a good person, that he is naughty, careless and worthless.
- He may feel angry and want to take revenge against the person who beat him.

Children may become more obedient as they don't want to be beaten again. However, do you want your child changing his or her behaviours through fear or out of respect for you? Realising the right and wrong of the situation as well as other possible solutions for next time.

Suggested
knowledge

3

If punishment is ineffective, why are people still using it?

Some thoughts of adults relating to punishing children

- Adults are always correct.
- Adults are the ones who should decide what is right and what is wrong.
- Adults don't need to give reasons but just ask children to do something.
- Stubborn children must be broken as soon as possible.
- Adults must never show weak emotions, such as fear or hurt.
- Parents will lose their power and authority if they don't beat children.
- Spare the rod, spoil the child.
- "Just as the twig is bent, so the tree is inclined", meaning a naughty child will become a dysfunctional adult
- If a child that argues with his or her parents, he or she is a naughty child.
- Parents and teachers must be strict with children in order to earn their respect.
- I was beaten when I was young and I became a good person.
- I beat children out of a sense of love and want my child to be a good adult.
- Without the rod, children will not feel fear, without fear, they may easily become naughty. Other forms of discipline don't seem as effective as beating.

There have been many debates relating to above thoughts. For example, 'spare the rod, spoil the child' means that if people want something good for children, they must be strict with them and, conversely, if people pamper children and meet all of their needs, their child will become spoilt. Most people usually accept this fact, however, if 'the rod' is seen as the only means of disciplining a child it becomes a punishment. These boundaries mentioned in many



of the above points are not always clear and this ambiguity may lead some people to use arguments such as these to justify their use of punishment against children.

People may punish children for reasons unrelated to their bad behaviours, either unconsciously or for reasons they deny

- When adults are angry with someone else, such as their spouse, they may take their anger and frustration on their children.
- When people are angry they may be temporarily unable to think of other effective disciplines.
- Some people may not know about positive disciplines.
- Beating and punishment may appear to be easier and faster and require less time and effort than positive disciplines.
- Some people value obedience and docility in children and do not tolerate children arguing with them or answering back. In this environment, children may become inactive, dependent and lose their passion, enthusiasm and interest for study or play.

It is, however, possible for parents and teachers to educate children without punishment and scolding. There are alternative methods. These alternatives are generally known as *positive discipline methods*. A few general points will be outlined below before they are explored in detail in Chapter 4.

Try to think about the following points before punishing children

- There may be a hidden reason behind children's misbehaviour. Try to discover what that may be (Chapter 1, Suggested Knowledge 3).
- Don't expect children to behave like adults.
- Accept that children, like everyone, will make mistakes. Mistakes should be considered as an opportunity to help children to learn more appropriate behaviours.
- Encourage children if their negative behaviours are caused by lack of confidence.
- When showing dissatisfaction with a child's negative behaviours, it is important to focus on the behaviours, not on the child's personality. Try not to say things like "you are very bad and stupid for doing that". Rather, say, "that is very bad behaviour. Please try not to do it again".
- Don't just focus on correcting bad behaviours. Desirable behaviours should be reinforced through praise and a positive attitude.

Handouts

What Do Children Say? What Do Adults Think?

Research conducted in 2005 on the comparison of physical and emotional punishments to children in nine countries and regions (Cambodia, Fiji, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Laos, Mongolia, Philippines, Korea and Vietnam) had the following results:

Forms of Punishment	At home (%)			In school (%)		
	Hong Kong	Korea	Vietnam	Hong Kong	Korea	Vietnam
Physical punishment	71	97	81	54	94	69
Emotional punishment	29	3	19	46	6	31

In Vietnam, how do adults often punish children?

- Beat with tools (stick, rod, broom, belt and rope)
- Punch
- Kick
- Pinch (ears and other parts of body)
- Throw things at the body
- Tie to a tree
- Tie to an ant's nest
- Tie with a lash to the back seat of bicycle and make the children run after the bicycle
- Force to stand in the sun
- Make the child run many laps around the school playground
- Hang the child up on a hook or tree
- Confine the child, alone
- Scold and shout
- Verbally denigrate

Some Inappropriate Disciplines used on children in a highland commune

- Demand the child to clean the toilet for a week for their poor learning performance
- Demand a 6-year-old child to stay outside of the house because of making their clothes dirty.
- Scold at a 14-year-old daughter with, "What the hell? You'd be better off dead!" because she argues back to her father.
- Beat the child with rod for playing over time and arguing back to an adult.
- Tie a boy to a pillar because he does not come home immediately after school.
- Tie both brothers to the pillar and beat them with rod because they are teasing each other.
- Demand a little child to sit still in a drawn circle for some hours.
- Force a daughter to slap her own face 50 or 100 times because she plays with a plastic knife and sword and collects small pieces of wood for building a castle.
- Demand a 4-year-old child to stand in the corner until his mother forgives him.
- Scold, shout and threaten to put the small child away for not doing exercises.



Spanking

Situation

1. An, a three-year-old girl, is playing with her favourite teddy bear. This teddy bear is like a close friend to her. After playing for a while, she leaves the teddy bear beside her. Suddenly she notices Vinh, a two-year-old boy, is taking the teddy bear. The teacher is busy in another corner. An is angry and tries to take the teddy bear back. She pushes Vinh but he holds tightly onto the teddy bear. The teacher still does not know notice. An keeps trying to get the teddy bear back but Vinh does not give up. An bites Vinh and he starts to cry. Vinh has a lot of tears. This is not the first time that An has bitten another child. Both An and Vinh are crying and teacher is very angry.

2. The same situation but it happens at home between two children.

The teacher or parent does not stay calm so he or she beats each child to bring an end to the situation.

Please answer the following questions:

1. Imagine that parents or teachers beat the children on their bottoms, how do you think An and Vinh will feel?

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.....
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.....

2. What lessons will An learn?

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Punish the child

Situation

Kien, an 11-year-old boy, is playing with some children in his neighbour's house when he unintentionally breaks the teapot.

Please answer the following question:

1. What would you do if you were his parent?

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.....
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2. Imagine that you beat him (spank his bottom, twist his ears and shout, for example). What will Kien learn?

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.....
.....



Why do people still use punishment though it is ineffective?

Do you think the following sentences are true or false?	False	True
1. An adult is the head of the family, the child is the dependant	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. There is no excuse for a child to talk back to or argue with a parent	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Adults are the ones who should decide what is right and what is wrong	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Adults are always correct	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Parents/ teachers must be strict with children in order to have their respect	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Spare the rod, help the child. Love is better than bad words	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. I was beaten a lot when I was young and now I am a good person	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Children's obstinacy must be broken as soon as possible	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Spare the rod, spoil the child	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Adults must never show 'weak' emotions, such as fear or hurt	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Without the rod, children will not be afraid, without being afraid they easily become naughty	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. Adults don't need to give a reasons but just tell children what to do and how to do it	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. Parents will lose their power and authority if they don't beat their children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. I've tried other ways and they are not as effective as the rod	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. Children will behave better when parents and teachers love them, treat them with consistency and respect their needs and emotions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>