

## Chapter 8

# Education and Advocacy Efforts to Reduce School Corporal Punishment

Any law that bans corporal punishment would need to be accompanied by efforts to inform the public about the law and to educate them about positive discipline and other non-violent methods of correcting children's misbehavior (Global Initiative 2009). In places where policy changes will be difficult or take a long time, educational campaigns can help reduce the use of corporal punishment in schools before it is officially banned.

### 8.1 Educational Campaigns

Some legal scholars have argued that the most effective way of removing corporal punishment from schools will be to change attitudes about it at the community level, rather than a top-down approach of applying state, federal or international law to local schools (Imbrogno 2000). Just as violence toward women was first redefined in the public sphere as a deviant behavior and then state and federal laws followed, once school corporal punishment is defined as deviant, school districts will be compelled to abandon the practice (Imbrogno 2000).

Several interventions have been successful at reducing attitudinal support for corporal punishment. Two recent interventions targeted at parents used educational materials, either baby books (Reich et al. 2012) or a brief video viewed in a pediatric clinic (Scholer et al. 2010), to discourage corporal punishment and encourage positive parenting practices; both were successful in reducing positive attitudes toward corporal punishment. Three other interventions were similarly successful but with non-parents. In one, education students who were asked to write an empirical paper about "the pros and cons of corporal punishment in America's schools" decreased their support for corporal punishment compared with control students who did not write such a paper (Griffin et al. 2000). The second study found that undergraduates who read a 2,000 word summary of the empirical research on corporal punishment reported a significant decrease in their intention to

use corporal punishment with their own children (Robinson et al. 2005). In a third study, reading brief summaries of the empirical research linking corporal punishment to specific detrimental child outcomes led to significant decreases in attitudes about and intention to use corporal punishment among a sample of undergraduates and among a sample of parents (Holden et al. 2013).

In an ambitious effort to reduce support for and use of corporal punishment across the continent of Europe, the Council of Europe launched its “Raise your hand against smacking!” campaign in 2008. The campaign includes a variety of educational materials, including handbooks and brochures for parents and empirically-based books targeting lawmakers. A key feature of the campaign is a public service announcement with eye-catching visuals that show silhouettes of hands helping children and ends with the message, “Hands should nurture, not punish. Raise your hand against smacking” (see [http://www.coe.int/t/dg3/children/corporalpunishment/Campaignpack/Default\\_en.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dg3/children/corporalpunishment/Campaignpack/Default_en.asp) for links to all campaign materials). While the campaign has yet to be evaluated, seven European countries have banned all corporal punishment, including that in schools, since it began (Albania, Luxembourg, Liechtenstein, Macedonia, Malta, Poland, and Republic of Moldova). The “Raise your hand” campaign was instrumental in achieving a ban in the Republic of Moldova, where it was presented directly to Parliament and government ministers (Global Initiative 2014).

Yet, even when corporal punishment is banned from a school, school district, state, or even country, the practice does not immediately end altogether, particularly without an educational campaign. A study of schools in Washington state in 1991–1992 (1 year before the state instituted a ban on school corporal punishment) revealed that 16 % of corporal punishment incidents occurred in schools where it was officially banned (Grossman et al. 1995). In Kenya, where school corporal punishment has been banned since 2001, the practice has continued, typically in the form of caning (Lacey 2006). Focus groups with Kenyan teachers revealed that they were aware of their country’s ban but were steadfast in their belief that corporal punishment was a necessary and effective disciplinary tool to maintain order in schools (Mweru 2010). Similarly, South Africa banned school corporal punishment when it transitioned to a new government and a new Constitution that valued the rights of children in 1996. However, students have reported that corporal punishment continues to be a regular part of education in South Africa (Payet and Franchi 2008).

It is clear that just banning a practice without educating teachers and school administrators about the harms and ineffectiveness of corporal punishment and without providing them with alternative methods will be an ineffective endeavor. Overhauls such as that taken on in Memphis are necessary to provide teachers with effective tools that rely on positive reinforcement and non-physical punishments.

## 8.2 Promotion of Effective Alternatives to Corporal Punishment

A final way that corporal punishment in schools could be reduced would be for individual schools or school districts to replace corporal punishment with other forms of discipline. There is a large body of literature on the effectiveness of various school disciplinary practices and it is beyond the scope of this monograph to provide a comprehensive summary of them. We instead highlight two approaches that have particular promise as methods that could replace corporal punishment in schools that currently use it.

Decades of research make clear that substituting other harsh punishments for corporal punishment is not the answer. Suspensions, expulsions, and zero tolerance policies that enforce suspensions and expulsions without attention to mitigating circumstances have been largely criticized for their overuse and harmful effects (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force 2008). Zero tolerance policies, which emphasize harsh consequences including referral to law enforcement, have been a particular cause for criticism for their role in creating a “school to prison pipeline” (ACLU 2008).

An in-depth study in Texas illustrates the key problems with these practices. One in six students was found to have been either suspended or expelled during 7th through 12th grades (Fabelo et al. 2011). Suspensions and expulsions were also found to be used repeatedly for the same students, with those in the school disciplinary system given an average of 8 suspensions or expulsions (Fabelo et al. 2011). Disparities by race, gender, and disability status were also found. Suspensions and expulsions were linked with poor school performance, including a doubled likelihood that the student would repeat a grade, even after controlling for a host of student-level (e.g., race, gender, disability status, socioeconomic status, limited English proficiency) and school-level characteristics (e.g., percent meeting state achievement test standards, student to teacher ratio, student body diversity, drop-out rate). Suspensions and expulsions were associated with increased behavior problems, including a three-fold increase in the likelihood that the student would be involved with the juvenile justice system the year after a suspension or expulsion, again controlling for student and school characteristics (Fabelo et al. 2011).

If suspensions, expulsions, and zero tolerance policies are ineffective, what should schools do instead? The U.S. Department of Education recently released a set of guiding principles for improving discipline in schools (U.S. Department of Education 2014). This guide advocates for an “instructional approach” to discipline such that misbehaviors are used as opportunities for children to learn, practice, and be rewarded for appropriate and positive behavior. It also recommends that schools should have:

a discipline policy that sets high expectations for behavior; provides clear, developmentally appropriate, and proportional consequences for misbehavior; and uses disciplinary incidents to help students learn from their mistakes, improve their behavior, and meet high expectations (U.S. Department of Education 2014, p. 3).

Although corporal punishment is not mentioned in the guiding principles document, it does state that “restraint and seclusion should *never* be used for punishment or discipline” (p. 14).

A review of research on school discipline programs (Osher et al. 2010) identified four conditions that were required for a school to be promotive of student learning, namely authentic challenges, physical and emotional safety, connectedness, and a positive school climate. Successful schools met these conditions by the implementation of positive behavioral supports, engaged teachers, social emotional learning, and/or supportive relationships. Osher et al. (2010) highlighted two programs that met these goals—school-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports and social emotional learning—and we summarize each approach and the research evidence below. Both approaches emphasize prevention and both have the goal of creating a positive learning environment for students.

### ***8.2.1 School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports***

School-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports (SWPBIS) is a holistic approach to preventing student misbehavior that targets both teacher and student behaviors (Osher et al. 2010). As its name suggests, SWPBIS is a universal, school-wide prevention model (Bradshaw et al. 2010). Teachers are trained to actively teach and model appropriate behavior, to reward appropriate behavior and academic effort, and to implement consistent and non-punitive consequences when expectations are not met (Osher et al. 2010). Positively stated expectations for behavior (e.g., “Be respectful, responsible, and ready to learn,” Bradshaw et al. 2010, p. 134) are taught explicitly to students and then posted around the school for reinforcement.

An early study of SWPBIS found that it reduced misbehavior and disciplinary referrals in schools (Taylor-Greene et al. 1997). A later study demonstrated the effectiveness of the SWPBIS model through a group-randomized trial in 37 elementary schools, which found that disciplinary referrals to the principal’s office and suspensions decreased significantly over the five years of the study (Bradshaw et al. 2010). No significant program impacts were found on student achievement (Bradshaw et al. 2010). The SWPBIS model appears feasible for schools as it has been put in place in schools around the country. One study of state-wide implementation of SWPBIS in seven states (Colorado, Florida, Illinois, Maryland, Missouri, North Carolina, and Oregon) found that all states were able to successfully implement the program and to bring it to scale in several hundred schools each, particularly once local capacity of program trainers and coaches was established (Horner et al. 2013). SWPBIS thus has promise to be an effective alternative for school districts or states that decide to eliminate corporal punishment as a form of discipline.

### **8.2.2 Social Emotional Learning Approaches**

Social emotional learning (SEL) approaches to preventing student misbehavior are also universal but take a different approach, namely one aimed at enhancing students' individual skills and resources. The SEL strategy is to prevent student misbehavior by developing skills in self-regulation, conflict resolution, moral behavior, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making [Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) 2012; Osher et al. 2010]. SEL skills are conveyed to students through direct instruction, modeling, and opportunities to practice skills and are reinforced through enhanced classroom management and through school-wide activities aimed at community building (Durlak et al. 2011).

There is a broad array of successful SEL programs for all grade levels (CASEL 2012). A meta-analysis that compared the findings from over 200 SEL programs found that children in such programs showed greater improvements in their SEL skills, their positive social behavior, their conduct problems, their emotional distress, and their academic performance than did children in control groups (Durlak et al. 2011). These results provide strong evidence that SEL programs are effective at improving student behavior as well as their academic achievement.

## **8.3 Advocacy**

The consistency of the research linking corporal punishment with undesirable outcomes, the evidence of injuries linked to school corporal punishment, and changes in attitudes about the appropriateness of school personnel hitting children in the name of discipline have led several professional organizations to voice concern about and advocate for the abolition of school corporal punishment.

Concern among professional organizations about the potential harm of corporal punishment in schools began in the 1970s. The American Civil Liberties Union and the American Orthopsychiatry Association co-sponsored a conference on school corporal punishment in 1972 that was strongly critical of the practice (Hyman et al. 1977). The American Psychological Association (APA) then became the first professional organization to pass a resolution stating its opposition to school corporal punishment in 1975 (APA 1975). In its resolution, APA stated that,

It is evident that socially acceptable goals of education, training, and socialization can be achieved without the use of physical violence against children, and that children so raised, grow to moral and competent adulthood (APA 1975, para. 2).

The National Education Association (NEA) called for corporal punishment to be abolished from schools in 1975, and reaffirmed its belief that “corporal punishment has no place in public education” in its 2013–2014 resolutions (National Education Association 2013). The American Public Health Association (APHA) called for a ban in 1979 (APHA 1980).

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) first called for a legal ban on all school corporal punishment in a policy statement in 1984, at which time 47 states permitted school corporal punishment (AAP, Committee on School Health 1984). It revised its statement in 1991 to include the promotion of alternatives to corporal punishment:

The American Academy of Pediatrics urges parents, educators, school administrators, school board members, legislators, and other adults to seek (1) the legal prohibition by all states of corporal punishment in schools and (2) the employment of alternative methods of managing student behavior (AAP, Committee on School Health 1991, p. 173).

Nine years later, with 23 states still allowing school corporal punishment, the AAP reiterated this statement (AAP, Committee on School Health 2000). An important aspect of this resolution is that it encourages its members “to seek” a ban on corporal punishment, thus clearly endorsing an advocacy role for pediatricians. This advocacy role was emphasized in an accompanying statement by the Committee on School Health of AAP which called on pediatricians to “assume a leadership role in a national movement to abolish corporal punishment in schools and to promote alternative disciplinary activities” (Poole et al. 1991, p. 167).

Other organizations have also called on their members to advocate against school corporal punishment. The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) called for a ban on corporal punishment in 1984 and reiterated its support for a ban in its 2012 policy statements (NASW 2012). An article in a journal published by NASW exhorted social workers “to advocate for effective alternatives to corporal punishment and to work to ban corporal punishment” (Dupper and Dingus 2008, p. 243).

A wide range of national organizations for professionals who work in schools and education settings has called for the abolition of corporal punishment in schools, including the American School Counselor Association, National Association for the Education of Young Children, National Association of Elementary School Principals, National Association of School Nurses, National Association of School Psychologists, National Association of Secondary School Principals, National Association for State Boards of Education, and National Parent Teachers Association (Center for Effective Discipline 2008).

Concern over the potential harm of school corporal punishment has also been voiced by national organizations of professionals who work with children outside of education. In addition to the resolutions by AAP, APA, APHA, and NASW noted above, organizations across a range of professions have issued policy statements calling for a ban on school corporal punishment, including the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, American Academy of Family Physicians, American Bar Association, American Civil Liberties Union, American Medical Association, National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners, and National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (Center for Effective Discipline 2008). The Society for Adolescent Medicine (SAM) in particular has published a strongly worded policy statement, in which it states that,

...corporal punishment in schools is an ineffective, dangerous, and unacceptable method of discipline. The use of corporal punishment in the school reinforces physical aggression as an acceptable and effective means of eliminating unwanted behavior in our society. We join many other national and international organizations recommending that it be banned and urge that nonviolent methods of classroom control be utilized in our school system (SAM 2003, p. 391).

The Society even declared that children subject to corporal punishment in schools,

are being physically and mentally abused and no data exist demonstrating that such victims develop enhanced social skills or self-control skills (SAM 2003, p. 388).

A complete listing of organizations opposed to corporal punishment in schools is available in Table 8.1. It is clear that organizations representing professionals across a range of medical, legal, and social service disciplines share concern about the potential negative effects of school corporal punishment on children.

An additional source of advocates against corporal punishment in schools comes from an unlikely source, namely religious organizations in the U.S. The Unitarian Universalist General Assembly was the first such organization to speak out against school corporal punishment. It passed a resolution in 1973 opposing the practice and promoted direct advocacy when it urged its members to “work actively through school boards, legislatures, and courts to help arouse public opinion to bring an end to the practice” (Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations 1973). It took another 30 years for another religious organization to take a similar step, but in 2004, the United Methodist Church passed a resolution calling on states to abolish corporal punishment from schools, child care, and residential care facilities (United Methodist Church 2008). The Church also passed a similar resolution encouraging parents not to use corporal punishment (United Methodist Church 2012). The third religious organization to oppose corporal punishment in schools is the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, USA, which adopted a resolution calling for parents to avoid using corporal punishment of children (2012). While the resolution did not specifically mention schools, their position can be implicitly assumed to include corporal punishment in schools given that a statement against corporal punishment in homes is the more culturally difficult stand to take.

As observed by Nadine Block and Robert Fathman (1988), two advocates who have worked to ban school corporal punishment for several decades, most legislation on corporal punishment is passed only with the vocal support of advocacy groups. A coalition of groups who share a commitment to ending school corporal punishment can provide the needed energy for advocacy of a state or federal bill ending school corporal punishment. At the moment, there is no active movement to organize the efforts of these organizations around their commitment to abolishing corporal punishment in schools. One such body that could be revived is the National Coalition to Abolish Corporal Punishment in Schools (NCACPS). NCACPS was established in 1987 as a joint effort of the National Center on Child Abuse Prevention, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Bar Association, the Parent-Teacher Association, the National Education Association, the

**Table 8.1** List of national organizations opposed to school corporal punishment

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
American Academy of Family Physicians
American Academy of Pediatrics
American Counseling Association
American of School Administrators
American Bar Association
American Civil Liberties Union
American Humane Association
American Humanist Association
American Medical Association
American Orthopsychiatric Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychological Association
American Public Health Association
American School Counselor Association
Association for Childhood Education International
Association of Junior Leagues
Attachment Parenting International
Council for Exceptional Children
Defense for Children International
Friends Committee on Legislation
International Society for the Study of Trauma and Disassociation
National Association for State Departments of Education
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
National Association for the Education of Young Children
National Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
National Association of School Nurses
National Association of School Psychologists
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Association of Social Workers
National Association for State Boards of Education
National Council of Teachers of English
National Education Association
National Foster Parents Association
National Indian Education Association
National Mental Health Association
National Organization for Women
National Parent Teachers Association
National Women’s Political Caucus
Prevent Child Abuse America

(continued)



**Table 8.1** (continued)

Society for Adolescent Medicine
Unitarian Universalist General Assembly
United Methodist Church General Assembly
U.S. Department of Defense: Office of Dependents Schools Overseas

*Source* Center for Effective Discipline (2008). U.S. Organizations Opposed to School Corporal Punishment. Retrieved from: <http://www.stophitting.com/index.php?page=usorgs>

Society for Adolescent Medicine, and 20 other professional groups (Block 2013; Society for Adolescent Medicine 2003). However, NCACPS was folded into the Center for Effective Discipline and is not currently active on its own. It will likely take one or more of the organizations named above to revive the NCACPS, or to create a new coalition, that can mobilize their constituencies toward advocacy at the state and federal levels.

### 8.4 Summary

Even when corporal punishment is banned from schools, attitudes of school personnel and of the public can be slow to change. Studies of locales that have banned school corporal punishment make clear that education campaigns are needed to change attitudes about and use of corporal punishment even after the practice is officially banned. Several educational approaches have been shown to be effective at changing attitudes about corporal punishment, including the use of videos, printed materials, or baby books to present the arguments against using corporal punishment. Many prominent professional organizations oppose school corporal punishment and advocate against its use, including the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Psychological Association, the American Public Health Association, the National Association of Social Workers, the National Association of Elementary School Principals, the National Association of Secondary School Principals, and the National Education Association. Three religious denominations in the U.S.—the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church—USA, the United Methodist Church, and the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations—officially oppose the use of corporal punishment in schools. Replacing corporal punishment with effective alternative methods of discipline is crucial to the well-being of schools and the students in them, and approaches such as the school-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports (SWPBIS) and social emotional learning (SEL) have been shown through research to be effective at reducing misbehavior and promoting positive behavior and achievement.

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