



# Positive Discipline:

## Alternatives to Corporal Punishment

Creating a Good School without  
Corporal Punishment



## Positive Discipline:

### Creating A Good School Without Corporal Punishment

By Dipak Naker and Deborah Sekitoleko

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**POSITIVE DISCIPLINE:  
CREATING A GOOD SCHOOL WITHOUT  
CORPORAL PUNISHMENT**



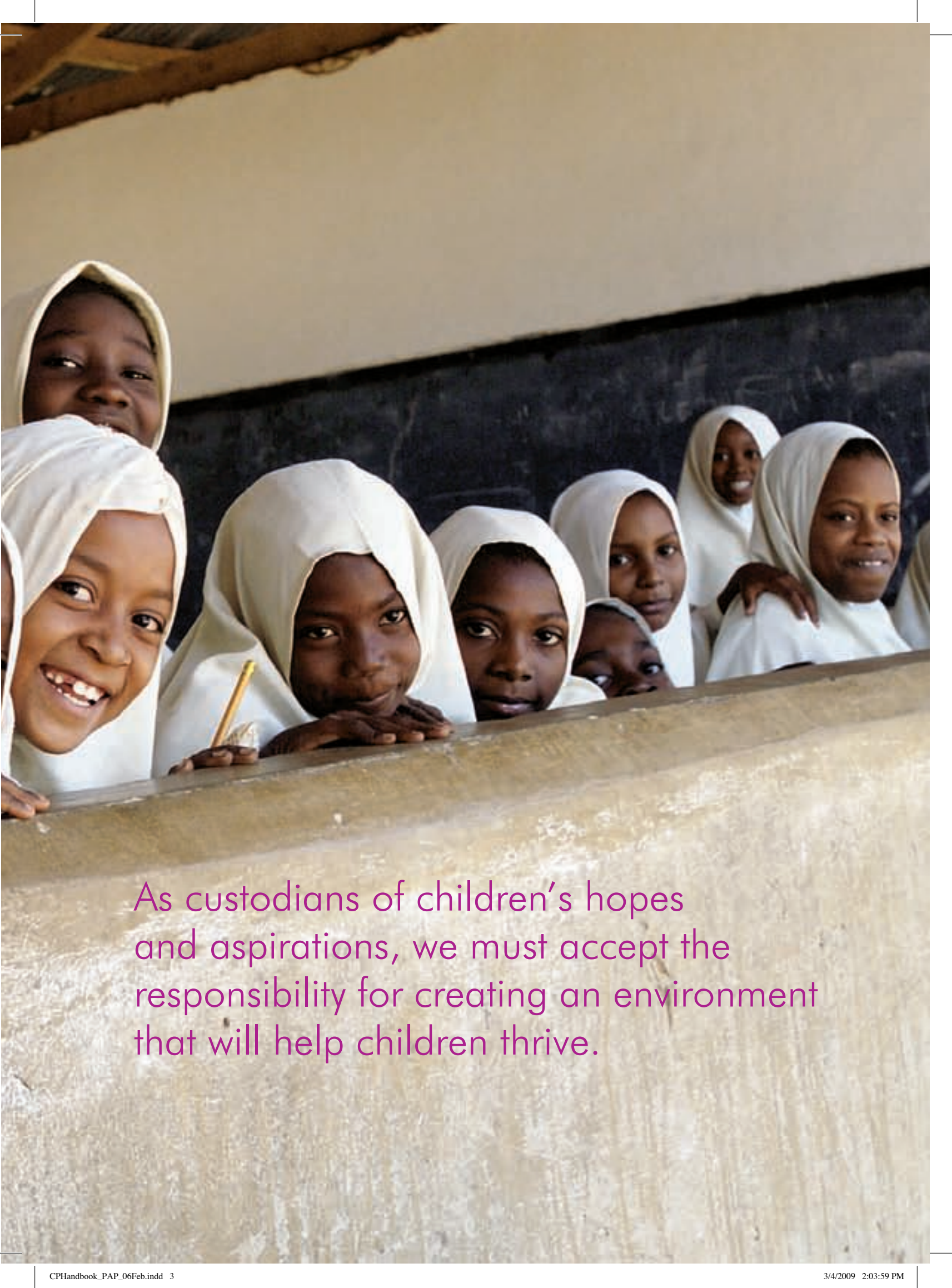
We have all experienced corporal punishment at school or at home, perhaps in the form of caning, slapping, pinching, being made to kneel in the sun or generally being humiliated. We have all grown up witnessing its regular use, and as a result, we have come to think of corporal punishment as normal. Because our parents and teachers used it, we have come to understand corporal punishment as an acceptable way to relate with children. We may even have come to think of it as necessary, because people who loved us and cared about us used it.

However, times change, and with change we gain new knowledge. As custodians of children's hopes and aspirations, we must accept the responsibility for creating an environment that will help children thrive. There is now a widespread understanding that corporal punishment is unlawful child abuse and harmful. It no longer has a place in the education system. This handbook introduces the knowledge and skills that are needed to create good schools in Uganda as a measure to promote learning, growth and development of children.









As custodians of children's hopes and aspirations, we must accept the responsibility for creating an environment that will help children thrive.

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# Who Is This Handbook For?

This handbook is for anyone involved in designing or delivering education within Ugandan schools, including headteachers, teachers, school governing committees, students, parents, public officials implementing education policy and anyone who wants to get involved in creating good schools. This handbook will guide you in thinking about alternatives to corporal punishment and how to put these alternatives into practice at the schools in your community.

## Using This Handbook

1. Read this handbook once to familiarise yourself with the concepts.
2. Read this handbook a second time while considering the following questions: What do you think about the ideas being proposed? How do they compare with your experience of education? Would these ideas help create better schools? If so, how could you act on these ideas at your school? Make notes in the margins or in a separate notebook as you think of the answers to these questions.
3. Gather a small group of friends or colleagues and discuss the ideas in each chapter.
4. Ask the teachers in your school to read a different chapter of this handbook each week and to discuss it at their weekly staff meetings, paying particular attention to how the ideas could strengthen the school's discipline practices.
5. Engage teachers and other school members in developing a written plan for how these ideas could be implemented to replace or strengthen existing disciplinary practices.
6. Share this plan with key stakeholders.
7. Put the plan into ACTION!



*Corporal punishment is so common it has almost become invisible.*

## Chapter 1 | Understanding Corporal Punishment

Chapter one explains the diverse perspectives on corporal punishment, the reasons why people continue to use it and the need to find alternatives. It aims to help you understand what corporal punishment is, its consequences for children and the Government's stance on the issue.

This chapter answers the following questions:

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## What is the definition of corporal punishment?

The following definition, by the Committee on the Rights of the Child, is the most widely accepted understanding of what we mean by corporal punishment:

“Any punishment in which physical force is used and intended to cause some degree of pain or discomfort, however light. Most involves hitting (smacking, slapping, spanking) children with the hand or with an implement—whip, stick, belt, shoe, wooden spoon, etc. But it can also involve, for example, kicking, shaking or throwing children, scratching, pinching, burning, scalding, or forced ingestion (for example, washing children’s mouths out with soap or forcing them to swallow hot spices). In addition, there are other non-physical forms of punishment which are also cruel and degrading and thus incompatible with the Convention. These include, for example, punishment which belittles, humiliates, denigrates, scapegoats, threatens, scares or ridicules the child.”<sup>2</sup>

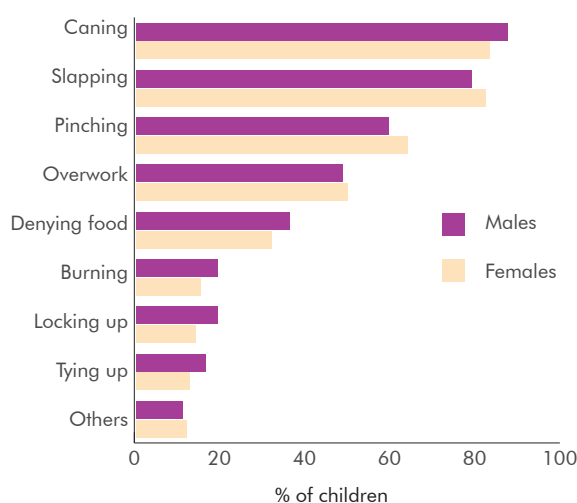
*Corporal punishment is always  
degrading and has no place in the  
home or our schools.  
UN Committee on the Rights of the Child*

## Is corporal punishment common?

In a recent study in Uganda,<sup>3</sup> over 1 400 children and almost 1 100 adults were surveyed about their experiences with violence, punishment and discipline. The survey results indicated that corporal punishment was indeed a common practice.

More than 98 percent of the children surveyed reported experiencing corporal punishment. More than a third of these children said they experienced it at least once a week; 20 percent said they had been burnt as a form of punishment; and more than 60 percent of the children said they experienced corporal punishment at school regularly. One out of every seven children said they experienced it everyday. Caning was the most popular form of corporal punishment, followed closely by slapping and pinching.

Forms of physical violence experienced by children



*It [corporal punishment] is too much and happens every day and no one cares about it.*

14-year-old boy

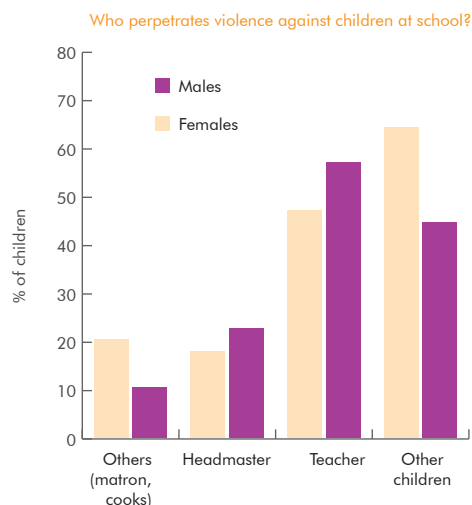
Corporal punishment is so common it has almost become invisible. Many adults hardly notice themselves or others using violence to interact with children. In the same study cited above, when responses from adults and children were compared regarding use of physical punishment, adults consistently underestimated how often they used physical violence against children.

With regard to experiences at school, younger children reported the highest amount of ad hoc physical punishment, while older children reported being harassed or humiliated by teachers. Girls reported a considerable amount of sexual harassment, and one in five girls reported being forced to have sex. A lot of the bullying, teasing and humiliation of girls revolved around their sexuality. Older boys reported the most severe incidents of physical beating, probably due to the prevailing gender stereotypes of physical resilience and notions of tough masculinity.

Many older children seemed to mimic the behaviour of adults, and as a result, they victimised younger children. Bullying was reported as a major problem, especially as an experience of girls and younger children.

*When children grow up they keep what was done to them in mind, and in the end they also do the same to those younger than them, especially at school.*

14-year-old boy



It is clear from this study that we are tolerating a considerable amount of violence in our schools. A school that allows corporal punishment to continue fosters a belief in all its members that other forms of violence will also be tolerated.

*A good school declares a zero tolerance of all forms of violence.*



When teachers and administrators were asked about the consequences of corporal punishment, they provided the following examples:

Corporal punishment can lead to lifelong psychological damage, such as depression, inhibition, rigidity, heightened anxiety and suicidal thoughts.

Corporal punishment causes children to lose interest in learning. Children resent the learning experience and, as a result, do not value education.

Children learn to hate a subject or teacher. Education doesn't thrive when children live in fear of those who teach them.

School absenteeism and dropout increase. Children lose interest and develop a negative attitude toward schools and learning.

Corporal punishment breeds cruelty and violence. Violence breeds more violence. It is common knowledge that a significant number of people who commit crime and violence were physically punished when they were children.

Corporal punishment tarnishes the school's image. Some parents do not take their children to schools known for degrading and humiliating children.

It costs money to treat injured children. When children are injured from corporal punishment, the school must take responsibility for paying the medical expenses.

## What is wrong with corporal punishment?

Most adults do not want to harm children. They use corporal punishment because they experienced it during their childhoods. As a result, they trust that corporal punishment will teach children how to behave. Often, adults do not realise the damage they cause when they use it.

Consider the following consequences of corporal punishment:

1. **Corporal punishment has physical consequences.** Many children suffer physical injury as a result of corporal punishment, such as broken bones, infections and physical illness. These physical consequences can be painful for children and costly for families. Injuries can affect children's physical development and can have an economic impact on the entire community.

*Teachers beat us badly when we are late, and yet we come from far. My friend has scars where the teacher hit her so hard.*

*10-year-old girl*

2. **Corporal punishment has emotional and psychological consequences.** When children are beaten, they often feel anger and shame at the same time, which leads to a feeling of humiliation. When we force children to tolerate an injustice, we damage their sense of dignity and self-confidence. Children may also stop trusting adults who repeatedly use corporal punishment against them. These negative experiences can lead children to depression, thoughts of suicide, desires for revenge and aggression toward others.

*What is left for me here? No one cares about me. They torture me with words, and my heart is sick. It is better that I die than live this way.*

*15-year-old girl*

3. **Corporal punishment has behavioural consequences.** Many children who experience corporal punishment bully other children, or as adults, use domestic violence. Corporal punishment teaches children that violence is an acceptable way of imposing their views on someone less powerful than themselves.

*I become violent and beat other small children.*

16-year-old boy

*I feel so ashamed, shy, and feel lonely.*

17-year-old girl

4. **Corporal punishment has developmental consequences.** Many children who experience corporal punishment on a regular basis live with slowed or interrupted cognitive and emotional development. They become withdrawn and fearful of trying new things. They feel ashamed of themselves due to regular humiliation. They need more time to learn social and academic skills. Their performance at school deteriorates, and their ability to form healthy, satisfying relationships can be severely affected.

*I don't settle when I think they are going to beat me. My brain closes. I just be as if I do not have life and quake with fear a lot.*

12-year-old boy

Because of these consequences, corporal punishment is counterproductive. It brings harm to children rather than success. It does not help children learn what was wrong with their behaviour. It undermines their confidence and contributes toward children trusting adults less. If you are interested in helping children learn, corporal punishment will not assist you in achieving that aim.

**Most adults do not want to harm children.**



## Why do adults use corporal punishment?

Most educators enter their profession because they want to help students learn. They do not intend to harm children by administering corporal punishment. Given the harmful effects of corporal punishment, why then do so many educators continue to use it? The answer to this question is not simple. Educators aim to fulfil their responsibilities according to beliefs that are common in their communities. Until now, much of our society and culture has encouraged educators and all adults to hold the following types of beliefs:

### 1. *Spare the rod and spoil the child.*

Some adults believe that if children do not fear them, they will disrespect their elders and behave in a way that is contrary to Ugandan culture and tradition. These adults believe that by instilling fear in children, they can mould children's value systems and teach children to appreciate their heritage.

*Yes. I beat them. How else will they learn respect for elders?*

*female parent*

However, you cannot force somebody to respect you or the ideas you represent. Respect is earned by giving respect, role modelling and helping children see for themselves the wisdom of respecting those around them. Furthermore, if we want children to respect culture and tradition, we have to help children understand how culture and tradition enrich our lives; we need to teach children about their heritage in a manner that respects their dignity.



## 2. *Without pain there is no gain.*

Many adults have been told throughout their lives that learning occurs when associated with pain. Our own schooling taught us to believe that without the threat of the stick or a public rebuke, we will become lazy and not exert the effort required to learn new things.

*There are as many ways to punish a child as there are children.  
What is important is that the child experiences pain and remembers  
the pain or else they will not learn.*

*male community leader*

However, we now know that positive reinforcement and compassion are more powerful motivators for children (and adults!) than pain. Pain motivates a behaviour aimed at avoiding pain. It does not teach children how to learn from their mistakes. When forced to learn under the threat of a stick, children often memorise the correct answers instead of internalising the deeper logic about what makes those answers correct. Over time, these children become poorer learners than children who grasp the underlying principles. Deeper learning requires effort and safety, not the threat of physical pain.



3. *Good teachers are always in control of their students.*

We have all learned from our environment that the only acceptable way of relating to children is to exercise power over them, to control them and make them comply with our wishes.

*I do beat. It is my duty to make sure children behave well. If I don't punish they will get out of control.*

*female community leader*

We must ask ourselves, is our main goal to control children or to guide them on how to behave and learn from their mistakes? If we threaten them, they may comply due to fear of the punishment, but as soon as we remove the threat, they will likely revert back to the original behaviour. Helpful teachers do not try to control children by beating or shouting. Instead they strive to show children the error in their behaviours and create an environment within which children can learn from their mistakes.

4. *I was beaten and I learned how to behave better.*

Many adults argue that they were beaten and humiliated as children, and it did them no harm. Furthermore, they argue that it helped them learn right from wrong, and it showed that the adult who punished them loved and cared for them.

*My father beat me all the time because he cared about me.*

*female teacher*

As adults, we need to consider why we hold this belief. Often, when experiencing abuse of power, people focus only on avoiding pain and humiliation. They stop thinking for themselves and they learn to conform—to agree with the reasons they are given for the abusive behaviour. If you were beaten as a child, you were probably told repeatedly that it was for your own good and that it would make you a better person. If a person is abused regularly, it is natural for that person to think that abuse is normal.

### 5. *I only use corporal punishment sparingly.*

Many adults say that a light slap or a few canes are useful ways to quickly resolve a conflict and to show children they made a mistake. As long as the punishment does not cause physical injury, many adults see nothing wrong with it.

*Yes, I slap her once in a while. It puts her right quickly.*

*female parent*

However, most of the damage of corporal punishment is emotional and psychological. It is not about what you do, but how the child experiences it. Even single slaps humiliate children and insult their right to physical integrity. Imagine if you were at work and your supervisor slapped you as a way of correcting your mistake. The humiliation you would feel with one slap would be just as damaging as five slaps. Although we cannot see emotional injury, it often has more serious long-term consequences than physical injury. Also, many adults underestimate the frequency and severity of their punishments. It is hard to maintain clarity when you are angry, to maintain awareness of whether you used a gentle slap or a hard one.

With an impulsive slap, adults do not guide children to learn from their mistakes. Most of the time children simply link the behaviour to the pain, and do not understand why the behaviour was wrong.

### 6. *I only use corporal punishment as a last resort.*

Some adults argue that it is important to retain corporal punishment as a last resort. They say it serves as a powerful deterrent and allows a way out of a conflict when all else has failed.

*When nothing else works, a stick is necessary.*

*male teacher*

However, far too often in normal day-to-day interactions, adults use physical violence against children when other options have not been exhausted. Furthermore, we undermine efforts to develop nonviolent forms of discipline if, as adults, we retain the authority to infringe on a person's dignity whenever it suits our needs.

## Can we imagine schools without corporal punishment?

Corporal punishment has become common in our schools and a part of how we educate our children. Many parents feel that teachers have a responsibility to control children and need to beat children to teach them discipline. Some teachers feel they need corporal punishment to produce disciplined children who perform well academically.

Many teachers and adults within the community, who have emerged from similar schools, may well ask: What is wrong with teaching children to fear adults and with shaming them into choosing better behaviour? Do we not value children learning to obey and comply with what is expected of them? Isn't it our role as adults to teach children how to behave as members of their community?

These are important questions that require debate and reflection. We hope that as you read the different ideas presented in the following pages you will see how the world is changing around us and how we must respond to these changes. We have to build skills and capabilities in our children to succeed in the global environment, and recognise that our current approaches are not working. Humiliating children with the aim of educating them is counterproductive. Humiliation debilitates children more than it helps them learn.

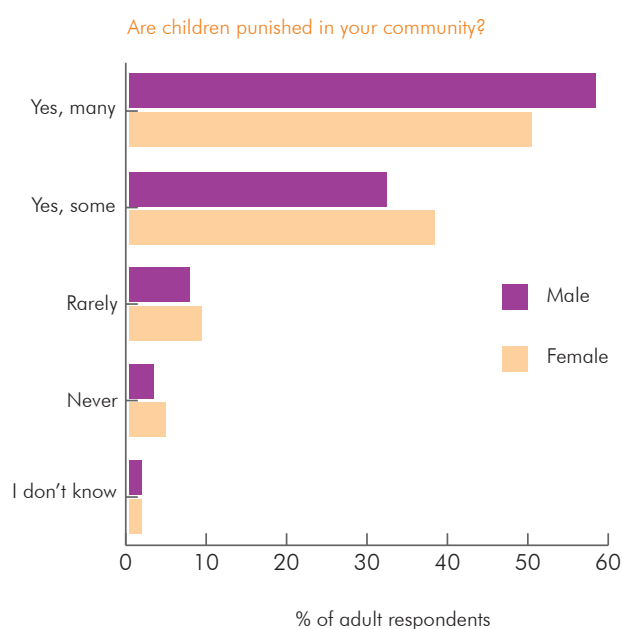
Think back to your own experience of school. How many times a week did you experience corporal punishment? How many times a day? If you explore your own experiences or speak with today's students, you will realise that all corporal punishment does is make children fearful and ashamed. It does not teach them what is wrong with their behaviour. It does not instil in them the joy of learning and the ability to apply their skills to new situations. Imagine what your education would have been like if your school had provided these experiences?

*We hope that as you read the different ideas presented in the following pages you will see how the world is changing around us and how we must respond to these changes.*



## Why should we expect our schools to change?

It is sometimes argued that schools reflect the norms of our communities. If more than 90 percent of adults say that in their community children are beaten, shouted at and denied food or other basic needs as a form of punishment, is it any surprise that corporal punishment is widely practiced in the schools of those communities? Why do we have a higher expectation of schools, given the prevailing norms?



The answer is simple.

As a society, we expect our schools to be places where new ideas emerge. We expect our schools to nurture our best minds and to develop new directions for the progress of society. Our schools should be places where we learn to think critically, evaluate ideas, develop new ways of relating with each other and develop the skills that will help us progress as a nation. That is why we have high expectations for the values our schools should embody. That is why

we invest our hope in creating good schools—schools that will help our children achieve their aspirations. That is why good schools are crucial to the development of Uganda.

*As a society, we expect  
our schools to be places  
where new ideas emerge.*

## What is the Government's position on corporal punishment?

Due to the negative consequences of violence against children and the challenges of adopting a nonviolent approach, the Ministry of Education and Sports has taken a clear stance against corporal punishment in Ugandan schools. We have expressed this policy position through three circulars as well as other guidelines that have been widely disseminated.

### *Key communications from the MoES*

10 June 1997: **The first circular** was issued by the Commissioner for Education and copied to all district education officers, inspectors of schools, headteachers and principals to communicate a temporary ban on the use of corporal punishment in schools and colleges (see Appendix 1).

9 September 1998: **The Guidelines on Policy, Roles and Responsibilities of Stakeholders** was issued for implementing Universal Primary Education, and in Clause 3.4 (iii) it explicitly forbids use of corporal punishment in schools.

10 September 2001: **The second circular** was issued by the Permanent Secretary and copied to headteachers of government-aided secondary schools to communicate guidelines for handling of discipline in secondary schools (see Appendix 2).

7 August 2006: **The third circular** was issued by the Director of Education and copied to primary schools, post-primary institutions, tertiary institutions, colleges and polytechnics to expressly forbid corporal punishment in any school in Uganda. This circular requires each school's Management Committee or Board of Governors to approve a school disciplinary policy. It further requires that any incident of punishment must be recorded in a specific punishment book maintained by the school. The circular clearly states that anyone ignoring these guidelines would be committing an offence and would be held responsible in the courts of law (see Appendix 3).

## Sample of other national policy that supports Uganda's policy against corporal punishment in schools

### The Constitution of Uganda

The Constitution protects the dignity and the safety of every Ugandan, including children. Article 24 of the 1995 Constitution protects every person, including children, from torturous, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Article 44 under section (a) makes the provisions under Article 24 nonderogable, meaning there can be no justification for contravening these rights. These provisions ensure that our children have a constitutional right to be educated without humiliating and degrading treatment.

### Children Act Cap 59

Section 5 explicitly states that anyone entrusted with the care of a child has a duty to maintain that child and to provide for her or his basic rights. Under section 5 (2) the Act emphasises the responsibility of the same duty-bearers to protect children from discrimination, violence, abuse or neglect. This means that parents, community members and teachers have a responsibility to ensure that when children are in their care, their safety is protected. In schools this means teachers have a responsibility to prevent violence against children, such as in the form of corporal punishment or bullying.

### The Penal Code Act Cap 106

Section 221 explicitly states that any person who causes harm to another by an act of omission or commission is guilty of misdemeanour and liable to imprisonment for up to six months. Under section 81 and 228, the Act states that any person who threatens or assaults another person causing actual bodily harm is guilty of misdemeanour and is liable to imprisonment for up to five years.

### The Education Act 1970

Under *Government Standing Orders*, chapter 127, the Act explains that the Director of Education shall, on advice from the Education Service Commission or on her or his own motion, remove from the teachers register the name of any teacher who is convicted of a criminal offence involving amoral behaviour or who has been found guilty of misconduct, which in the opinion of the Education Service Commission or Director of Education renders the individual an unsuitable person for employment as a teacher.

These as well as many other policy commitments are intended to ensure that children's rights are protected, particularly children's right to access an education in a safe environment.

The Teacher's Professional Code of Conduct provides guidelines for governing behaviour regarding the teacher-learner relationship, including the following:

Teachers must ensure that a learner develops as an integral whole (body, mind, soul, character and personality).

Teachers must refrain from any kind of misconduct that will harm the physical, mental and moral welfare of a learner.

Teachers should not have any sexual relationship with a learner.

Teachers should not use a learner's labour for private or personal gain.

### *Sample of regional policy that supports Uganda's policy against corporal punishment in schools*

#### **African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child**

Article 11 of this document requires taking "all appropriate measures to ensure that a child who is subjected to school or parental discipline shall be treated with humanity and with respect for the inherent dignity of the child and in conformity with the present Charter" (see also Articles 16, 17 and 20).

#### **African Charter of Human and People's Rights**

This document declares that every individual, including children, is inviolable (Article 3), is entitled to respect for life and the integrity of person (Article 4) and has a right to be protected from degrading punishment (Article 5).

### *International agreements with Uganda's legal commitment*

#### **The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights**

Both of these agreements declare the right to human dignity and physical integrity including that of children.

### The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

Article 19 explicitly requires the Government to ensure that children are protected from all forms of violence. Article 28 specifically says that the discipline administered in school must be consistent with human dignity. Article 37 requires the state to ensure that children are not subjected to cruel or inhuman treatment. As a result of these provisions, the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the body mandated to provide official interpretation of the Convention, has consistently interpreted the CRC to require a complete prohibition of corporal punishment.

### *Uganda and the global movement to prevent violence against children*

In December 2005, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution that called for the elimination of all forms of corporal punishment against children in schools and detention facilities. Also, the Secretary General of the United Nations published a multi-country study in 2006 that unequivocally supports the policy stance taken by the Government of Uganda. The report of the independent expert who coordinated the study states:

*“The study marks a turning point—an end to adult violence against children, whether accepted as ‘tradition’ or disguised as ‘discipline’. There can be no compromise in challenging violence against children.”<sup>4</sup>*

At the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal (2000), representatives including those from Uganda committed to act on the basis of six collectively identified Education for All (EFA) goals. Three of the EFA goals (Goals 2, 5 and 6) are explicitly linked to quality of education and commit governments to invest in creating safe, healthy, inclusive and equitably resourced educational environments.

At a global level, more and more countries are introducing legislation to protect children from corporal punishment. Ugandan children are amongst the 42 percent of the world’s child population who are legally protected from corporal punishment at school.<sup>5</sup> Our challenge is to ensure that all our children enjoy this protection in reality, rather than just on paper.





*The first step in finding alternatives to corporal punishment is to understand the factors influencing children's behaviours.*

## Chapter 2 | Alternatives to Corporal Punishment: Positive Discipline within Good Schools

In chapter one, we discussed corporal punishment and why it does not enable children to learn. In chapter two, we acknowledge that prohibiting a common response to children's misbehaviour will only succeed if schools are given workable alternatives. In this chapter, we encourage you to reconsider your response when you see children misbehaving, and we present the alternative of using positive discipline in the context of a good school.

This chapter answers the following questions:

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## Why do children behave as they do?

We need to understand what motivates children's behaviour if we want to guide children by using alternatives to corporal punishment.

Just as children have basic physical needs, they also have basic emotional and psychological needs.<sup>6</sup> For children to develop to their full potential, these emotional and psychological needs must be met. These needs include the following:

- The need to belong to the group they find themselves a part of.
- The need to be accepted by people who matter the most to them.
- The need to feel emotionally and physically secure.
- The need to feel respected by their peers.

When these needs are met, children are far more likely to become self-respecting individuals who make positive contributions to their communities. However, if these needs are not met, children will display unhealthy behaviours as they attempt to meet these needs for themselves. Take for example children who are noisy or disrespectful in class. They may be behaving this way because they do not feel accepted by their peers. For some reason, they are feeling vulnerable and insecure in that class and, in turn, are trying to make themselves look brave and strong. Think of other common misbehaviours at your school. Could they be understood as children trying to fill their emotional and psychological needs?

A child's behaviour may also be influenced by the gender roles imposed by the community or the child's social status within the community. For example, girls are often expected to carry a larger burden of the work at home and to be submissive to their male counterparts. This may affect their attendance and participation at school. Children with a disability are often stigmatised and ridiculed within the community. This may affect their ability to respond to the teacher's questions, because they may fear additional ridicule.

When teachers understand children's behaviour in this way, they will find it easier to determine nonviolent responses that will benefit everyone. They will discover new ways of guiding children's behaviour. Sometimes a teacher will realize that the behaviour is not the child's fault and that the child needs support rather than punishment. At other times a disciplinary consequence will be necessary. Many times, a teacher will find effective and creative ways to respond to children's behaviour, without disrupting the class with disciplinary action.

## What is positive discipline?

Positive discipline is a different way of guiding children. It is about guiding children's behaviour by paying attention to their emotional and psychological needs. It aims to help children take responsibility for making good decisions and understand why those decisions were in their best interests. Positive discipline helps children learn self-discipline without fear. It involves giving children clear guidelines for what behaviour is acceptable and then supporting them as they learn to abide by these guidelines.

When necessary, positive discipline includes nonviolent consequences for poor behaviour. It uses consequences that replace the experience of humiliation with the following:

- Considering the effects of one's behaviour
- Identifying alternative and preferred behaviours
- Demonstrating understanding of why a preferred behaviour is important
- Making amends for harm done to others or the environment

This approach may require students to engage in writing essays, making apologies or performing chores in the classroom—any activities that make them stop, think and demonstrate their intention to act differently in the future. Positive discipline does not reward children for poor behaviour. It provides children with an opportunity to grow as individuals by understanding their mistakes and appreciating how appropriate behaviour can bring them positive experiences and opportunities.

A positive discipline approach is child-centric, placing at the heart of every interaction the best interests of the child. *Central to this approach is the relationship between teacher and child—its tone, its nature and the compassion and respect within it.* Teachers create these relationships based on basic knowledge of children's developmental needs and frame their responses to children with the aim of helping them learn and grow.

Positive discipline depends on the teacher's role as mentor and guide. It involves providing positive reinforcement for good choices as well as consequences for poor choices. A positive discipline approach rejects the use of violence as a tool for teaching. It's about making a long-term investment in a child's development, rather than grasping for immediate compliance.

In chapter three, you will find more detailed information about how to use positive discipline.

*Positive discipline helps children learn self-discipline without fear.*



**When teachers and administrators were asked why we should use a positive discipline approach, they shared the following thoughts:**

Corporal punishment is ineffective as a means of discipline. There are positive ways to teach, correct or discipline children that do not include physical and humiliating punishments. These methods improve children's development and their relationships with their parents and community.

If we legitimise physical and humiliating punishments through our actions, it becomes difficult to protect children. We must show through our leadership that there are no acceptable forms of violence against children.

Physical and humiliating punishments increase the use of violence in society and make violence acceptable in the eyes of subsequent generations.

A commitment to positive discipline teaches children that violence is an unacceptable and inappropriate strategy for resolving conflicts or getting people to do what you want.

## How does positive discipline create successful individuals?

Experiencing positive discipline instils a desire to possess and demonstrate self-discipline. People who learn through positive discipline show its positive effects in their personalities.

- They have clear goals.
- They believe in themselves.
- They are self-motivated.
- They are willing to work hard for their goals.
- They trust their own judgement.
- They think of new ways to solve old problems.
- They are persistent.

Their self-discipline comes from within, because they feel positive about themselves and the people around them. They respect themselves and recognise that each person has a meaningful contribution to make to our collective development. Through many different experiences, they realise that their decisions and actions determine whether or not they will succeed. They learn to accept responsibility for their fate.

Think of your school as a child. Did it help you develop this strong self-confidence and desire to succeed? Unfortunately, as educators we have inherited the idea that we should intimidate the students in our classrooms instead of cultivating their confidence. We beat children and humiliate them with the aim of creating obedient students. We even refer to this process as imposing discipline. However, by intimidating children, we are not equipping them to respond to the challenges of life. The children we are educating today will need a wide range of skills and abilities to compete for jobs and make wise decisions. We need to help them develop self-discipline by allowing them to experience positive discipline.

*People who learn through positive discipline show its positive effects in their personalities.*

## How does positive discipline lead to better schools?

By using positive discipline we change what we know as education. Instead of children coming to school to obey rules and memorise information, they experience school as a place where they discover and define the kind of person they want to be. Inspired by the outcomes of positive discipline, schools around the world are now supporting all aspects of children's growth, rather than just giving children information.

This is a life-changing opportunity for many children, but they will only take advantage of it if they feel physically and emotionally safe. Positive discipline helps children feel safe and supported, but this sense of safety must extend beyond the classroom. We must ensure that everything about a school makes children feel as safe and supported as possible in all areas of their development, in all aspects of growing up. This new kind of school is what we call a "good school."



A good school ensures that its structures and policies respect children's rights, include children as valued stakeholders and support children in growing their skills as leaders and thinkers. A positive discipline approach succeeds when implemented within a good school, because a good school demonstrates the same investment in children's development. Without this schoolwide consistency, children will

lack trust in the system and positive discipline will fail. Positive discipline, therefore, inspires us and requires us to develop good schools.

*A positive discipline approach succeeds when implemented within a good school.*

## What is a good school?

A good school provides an environment, relationships and governance structures that enable children to grow to their full potential. A good school enables children to become compassionate, responsible, creative and thoughtful individuals. Consider the following features of a good school:

### 1. *A good school educates the whole child.*

A good school helps children build courage and confidence in all three areas of their development: cognitive development (how children think), social development (how children interact with others) and ethical development (how children become responsible citizens).

#### Cognitive development

A good school goes beyond teaching children to memorise information. It helps children feel safe experimenting with the information they learn. It helps them gain the courage and skills to examine the information presented to them, to ask questions about the information and to try using it outside the classroom.

#### Social development

A good school goes beyond the elimination of corporal punishment. It makes children feel accepted and valued as members of their community. It develops children's self-confidence and ability to trust their own judgement. It provides children an opportunity to build strong relationships with others and understand how to positively contribute to those relationships.

#### Ethical development

A good school goes beyond asking children to follow traditional values. It makes children feel safe asking questions about values and about their responsibilities as citizens. It engages children in democratic school processes and in the creation of progressive school policies. The adults at a good school role model clear ethical standards and guide children in developing a lifelong value system.

## 2. *A good school uses positive discipline.*

A good school has a zero tolerance policy toward corporal punishment and uses a positive discipline approach. It provides students with a system that helps them succeed and grow as they learn healthy and acceptable social behaviours. This system is informed by compassion and derives its vision from the belief that children need guidance, not retribution. In this system, mistakes are an opportunity to teach rather than humiliate.

A good school helps children develop self-discipline by providing children with mentoring, clear guidelines and ongoing support. Through positive discipline, a good school helps children develop clear goals for themselves and helps them build the skills and character to achieve those goals. It inspires children to be persistent and recognise that achieving worthy goals takes hard work.

## 3. *A good school serves all children equally.*

A good school is sensitive to the varying needs of children. Girls may need special protection from sexual violence, including harassment from teachers and older boys. They may have specific needs relating to their reproductive health, such as during menstruation. A good school meets the needs of children with disabilities by equally including them in the learning process and ensuring their participation is not undermined by bullying and stigma.



## Why should we create good schools?

A good school provides the following benefits:

### 1. *Better behaviour in the classroom*

Once you invest in creating helpful relationships with children, and present the work in the classroom as a collaboration between the teacher and the students, the classroom environment will likely change. Once students realise that their views and opinions matter and that you take them seriously, they may invest in contributing more positively rather than focussing on disrupting the class or misbehaving to gain attention. As a result, their behaviour in the classroom will improve.

### 2. *Increased teacher satisfaction*

When you have a class full of students who are interested in what you have to teach, instead of feeling intimidated by your presence, teaching can become more fulfilling. The satisfaction of seeing students fully attentive and excited about learning is what makes teaching a meaningful activity.

### 3. *Improved classroom learning*

When students are encouraged to explore ideas and ask questions, they learn more efficiently. They are better able to remember the information and apply it to new situations. You may also see better academic performance on tests and exams.

### 4. *Better school reputation*

Enthusiastic students are great ambassadors for schools. As they share their pride in their school with their family and community, the school will gain a reputation for being outstanding. In their direct and indirect representation of the school, you will see the positive effects of implementing alternatives to corporal punishment.

### 5. *Greater contribution to communities and the nation*

Creative, bright students who can apply their knowledge and skills are not only good for our schools but also for our communities and country. They will become the problem solvers of the future. They will become active participants in our economy and the leaders of our nation.

6. *Shared confidence in doing the right thing*

Contributing to children's holistic development is the right thing to do. Ultimately, the health of our nation will be judged by the way we treat and educate our children. By getting that right, we can make a substantial contribution to everyone's future.



## Whose responsibility is it to create good schools?

Everyone has the responsibility to insist on good schools in our communities. Governments have the responsibility to develop policy guidelines and laws that help educators create good schools. Educators—such as headteachers, teachers, school governors and the public officials involved in education—have the responsibility to turn their schools into good schools and to engage all stakeholders, including children, in that process.

If you are reading this, then at some point in your life you likely went to school. But what kind of a school was it? Did the school teach you skills that you could use to keep growing as a person? Beyond teaching you reading, writing and basic arithmetic, did your school teach you the life skills you needed to become successful? Did your school allow you to participate in making decisions that affected you? Were you taught in an environment and with methods that made you feel excited about learning and confident that your teachers were interested in helping you learn? Did your school build your confidence to make a positive contribution to your family, community and country?

Think back to your experience and answer these questions honestly. If you answered “no” to any of these questions, you are not alone. You may have found a way to manage with the opportunities you were given, but imagine what your possibilities might have been. We can do so much more for the children in our schools today. We can prepare our children to compete in the global economy by improving our style of education along with the rest of the world. We can update our professional skills and methods so that children are excited about leading our nation rather than intimidated into following our commands. We need to create good schools to ensure our nation’s success.

It is clear that children who are taught in an encouraging environment, in which they feel respected and valued, get more out of their school experience—more skills to apply to their daily lives, more experiences for improving their minds and more opportunities to learn leadership and self-discipline. Everyone wants to give children better opportunities than they themselves had. You are in a position to make this possible. Imagine the effect you could have on the lives of children if you took the steps to create a different kind of school.

Imagine a school in which children feel safe to learn. Imagine a school in which children are active participants. Imagine a school in which children not only learn all the basic skills but also explore new ways of thinking—so that they can succeed in changing the world around them. If you do that, you will have imagined a good school.<sup>7</sup> It is all of our responsibility to make good schools a reality.

*Everyone has the responsibility  
to insist on good schools in our  
communities.*



*Positive discipline guides children in understanding their misbehaviour and in building a personal desire to make better choices in the future.*

## Chapter 3 | Positive Discipline and Good schools in Action

In chapter one, we discussed corporal punishment and why it does not enable children to learn. In chapter two, we introduced the concept of positive discipline and how, in the context of a good school, it can be a more effective way of inspiring children to realise their full potential. In chapter three, we provide tips and tools for taking the first steps toward creating a good school and implementing a positive discipline approach.

This chapter answers the following questions:

What are the first steps for creating a good school?	40
How do I know if I'm using positive discipline?	44
How do I respond to misbehaviour using positive discipline?	46
How do I create a positive classroom environment?	50
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## What are the first steps for creating a good school?

Creating a good school requires a schoolwide commitment. It will require the school's administration and teachers to learn new skills and collectively reflect on the school's methods. If you want to create a good school, consider starting with the following steps:

### 1. *Educate yourself.*

**Do some background reading.** Read this publication carefully as well as some of the recommended reading listed at the end of this handbook.

**Get in touch with other schools** that have already begun this process and learn about their approaches, including what worked and what didn't, what was easy and what was challenging.

**Get an exercise book** for writing down your ideas and thoughts and for charting out what actions you will take.

### 2. *Create a shared vision.*

If you want to create a good school, you must ensure that all stakeholders get involved. It will take everyone's time, effort and patience to create a good school. Stakeholders are more likely to remain committed if you engage them in creating a shared vision. As a group answer the following questions:

- Why does our school exist? Does it exist to produce outstanding learners who will become creative, thoughtful and disciplined members of the community? Or does it exist simply to contain children in a classroom?
- Will we be satisfied if children emerge with basic skills? Or do we want to provide a higher standard of education?
- What kind of individuals do we want to have graduate from our school? And what kind of educational environment do we want them to graduate from?
- What kind of school do we want five years from now?



**3. Share ideas and generate interest.**

**Share your ideas with potential supporters**, such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that may be interested in influencing the quality of education at your school, as well as local district officials in your area.

**Discuss the ideas in this handbook with the school governing body.** For their next meeting, create a short presentation on good schools and how they benefit everyone in the community.

**Ask for a special meeting with teachers**, including the headteacher, to discuss how these approaches could help the school achieve better results. Discuss how these approaches could be implemented and who would lead the school through this process. Emphasise that creating a good school may seem hard at first but is in the best interests of everyone concerned.

**Design special lessons and classroom discussions** about positive discipline and why your school is choosing to apply it. Explain carefully what it is and what it isn't. For example, emphasise that with positive discipline teachers still have a responsibility to guide children and may still give consequences for children's poor behaviour.

**Organise an open day for parents.** Explain how your school is improving their children's education. Encourage parents to get involved and apply the positive discipline ideas at home.

**4. Create written policies.**

**Develop a written policy on positive discipline at school.** This document should include a basic explanation of positive discipline and the responsibilities of teachers and students in applying it. Once finalised, launch the policy publicly with the support and involvement of students, governing bodies, teachers, parents and community leaders.

**Write a Code of Conduct** that specifically tells teachers what they can and can't do when they discipline at school. This document should clearly outline consequences for the breach of school standards. It should also describe what support the school is willing to offer teachers to help them fulfil their role professionally.

**Develop a written action plan** for how you will create a good school, and review the plan once a month to monitor progress. Ensure that this plan takes into account the varying needs of children in your school. Think about the special needs girls may have based on the beliefs and stereotypes in your community. Consider the gender norms that may influence how teachers discipline boys differently from girls. Think about children who have a disability and how you will ensure that they are not excluded from participating in school activities.

**Ensure that the entire community is aware** of the school's transformation and is committed to the process. If appropriate, you could engage community members, including community leaders, in signing a community-wide agreement that supports and promotes the new policies and plans.

5. **Create structures that will keep all stakeholders engaged.**  
**Establish an elected student's body** that has a clear say in all of the above decisions.

**Establish a teachers committee** that, together with the student's body, has the day-to-day responsibility to spearhead the process of creating a good school.

**Create a regular forum for teachers and students** through which they can share their ideas and experiences of creating a good school. It could be a schoolwide essay writing competition, picture drawing competition, suggestion boxes, school assembly presentations, dramas and short stories or any other method through which ideas can be shared. Sharing ideas and experiences can also take place through formal class projects or peer education projects.



6. *Build teachers' and administrators' ability to successfully use positive discipline.*

Positive discipline is a critical component of good schools. Provide training and resources for teachers and administrators on how to use positive discipline. Begin by studying the remaining sections in this chapter.

*Creating a good school requires a schoolwide commitment.*

## How do I know if I am using positive discipline?

The following table will help you analyse your current approach to teaching. Read through the table and compare the two columns. Consider how you would rate yourself based on the guide provided. Assess yourself by circling a number for each row (rows A to F). Be as honest as possible, since this activity is entirely for your own learning.

### Choosing a number

- 1 means your approach is completely described by the positive discipline column.
- 2 means your approach is mostly described by the positive discipline column, although you have some doubts.
- 3 means you are not sure. You agree with parts of the descriptions in both columns.
- 4 means your approach is mostly described by the corporal punishment column, although you have some doubts.
- 5 means your approach is completely described by the corporal punishment column.

### Interpreting your score

Once you have circled a number for each row, add up the circled numbers to determine your score.

**A total score of 6 to 14** means you are already practicing the ideas of positive discipline. You could be a valuable role model for other teachers in your school and could take a leadership role in creating a good school for your community.

**A total score of 15 to 21** means you agree with some ideas of positive discipline and would also gain from building your understanding and skills. Review the contents of this handbook and meet with your colleagues to discuss the ideas presented. Through discussions with colleagues you can advance your skills and knowledge with greater ease and support.

**A total score of 22 to 30** means you approach education using the ideas of corporal punishment. We hope you will choose to engage with some of the ideas in this handbook and begin to think about the effectiveness of using a positive discipline approach.

**Take a few days to reflect on your results.** Then repeat the questionnaire, except this time choose numbers based on what kind of an educator you aspire to be. Compare your two scores. As you improve your knowledge and skills for using positive discipline, continue to re-evaluate yourself. Aim to decrease the difference between the two scores.

Positive Discipline			Corporal Punishment		
	<b>Motivates.</b> You never use violence and instead role model values and behaviours that children aspire to acquire. While doing so, you provide a clear indication of rewards and consequences for choices.		<b>Punishes.</b> You use fear or shame to ensure that children think or behave in a prescribed way. You use such punishments as beating, insulting and humiliating.		
A	1	2	3	4	5
	<b>Aims to empower children.</b> You help children take responsibility for making good decisions by providing them with the skills and environment to freely explore ideas.		<b>Aims to create obedient children.</b> You create a classroom environment in which children learn to obey what they are told instead of think for themselves.		
B	1	2	3	4	5
	<b>Child-centric.</b> You consider all issues from a child's perspective and calculate all your responses based on how they will help children learn from their mistakes.		<b>Teacher-centric.</b> Your priorities prevail in all considerations and your point of view determines the right course of action.		
C	1	2	3	4	5
	<b>Democratic.</b> You tolerate different ideas and even mistakes if they may lead to constructive learning. Your aim is to create workable rules that are mutually beneficial.		<b>Authoritarian.</b> You tell children what to do and punish them if they choose another course of action.		
D	1	2	3	4	5
	<b>Values and respects individuality.</b> You accept that all of us are individuals with a variety of views and priorities. You welcome these differences.		<b>Values conformity.</b> You reward those who behave and think like you do and punish those who do not.		
E	1	2	3	4	5
	<b>Long-term development.</b> Your approach is based on nurturing the development of the whole child over a long period of time.		<b>Short-term compliance.</b> Your approach aims to create obedience in a specific situation. It only gives secondary and indirect consideration to the long-term development of the child.		
F	1	2	3	4	5

## How do I respond to misbehaviour using positive discipline?

Many teachers agree that when they discuss or read about positive discipline it makes sense, but when they attempt to practice positive discipline on a day-to-day basis it becomes harder to understand. They are able to eliminate physical violence from their responses, such as no longer using a cane, but still feel dependent on other equally humiliating punishments.

We understand that changing to a positive discipline approach is not easy. The process requires patience and persistence. In collaboration with your colleagues, you will need to build your understanding of the principles of positive discipline and learn practical positive discipline techniques.

### *The four principles of positive discipline*

In a positive discipline approach, a disciplinary response should be:

1. Relevant to the misbehaviour
2. Proportional to the offence
3. Focused on correcting the behaviour not humiliating the student
4. Aimed at rehabilitation (learning from mistakes) not retribution (payback)

However, your first action when using positive discipline is not to apply these four principles in your disciplinary response but rather to decide if discipline is even appropriate. When it seems a student has misbehaved, your first challenge is to ensure you understand the reasons for the child's behaviour and to evaluate whether the behaviour actually deserves a disciplinary response.

Often poor behaviour results from factors outside a child's control and, therefore, disciplining the child will not eliminate the behaviour. Instead, other interventions and support for the child are required. For example, sometimes children come late to school because they were sent by parents to run errands.

Other times, however, children make poor choices based on flawed beliefs. For example, sometimes children make no effort to arrive on time for school because they do not believe that punctuality is important. These types of beliefs should be corrected through a disciplinary response—they are correctable beliefs.

Once you have established that the behaviour is based on a correctable belief, as opposed to circumstances beyond the child's control, you can begin to respond with disciplinary measures that adhere to the four principles of positive discipline.

*Changing to a positive discipline approach is not easy. The process requires patience and persistence.*



## The four categories of positive discipline responses

In order to follow the four principles of positive discipline you will need to customise your disciplinary response for each child and each misbehaviour. This process will become easier with practice. Within the following four categories of positive discipline responses you will find a variety of practical ideas for responding to varying degrees of misbehaviour. These ideas can be applied alone or in combination. The four categories of responses are *Reflection, Penalty, Reparation and Last Resort*.

### 1. *Reflection*

For minor day-to-day problems, such as coming late to school or being disruptive in class, a teacher could ask children to think about their misbehaviour by using one of the following techniques:

- Imposing a time-out. This would involve asking children to either leave the class or sit in a quiet place for 10 minutes to think about their behaviour. To be released they have to articulate what they did wrong and how they will avoid repeating the mistake. This should be done firmly, but without humiliating the child.
- Letter writing. This could involve asking children to write a letter or even an essay on why they behaved in a certain way and what they will do to avoid repeating the mistake. If appropriate the writing should include an apology.
- Oral apology. This involves asking children to apologise to the wronged person and to ask for forgiveness.

### 2. *Penalty*

For offences that are persistent and detrimental for all concerned, such as continually coming late without an adequate explanation, missing school without an adequate explanation or insulting other students, a teacher could impose an appropriate penalty. Penalties within a positive discipline approach include the following:

- Physical work, such as children slashing grass or cleaning the school compound in a designated area.
- Withdrawal of privileges, such as children not being allowed to go out during recess or to play games during school.
- Additional time at school (detention), such as children remaining for an extra half hour after school to reflect on what they did wrong.

Care must be taken to ensure that the penalty meets the principles of positive discipline. The penalty should also provide children with an opportunity to think about their behaviour and to think of an alternative behaviour for future similar circumstances. At the end of a penalty, teachers should help children learn what was wrong with their behaviour and how not to repeat the same mistake.

### 3. *Reparation*

For offences that cause damage to a third party, such as hitting other students, bullying younger children, damaging property, or fighting and causing general disorder in school, a teacher could insist that a child undertake public reparation, such as the following:

- The child apologises in the assembly to the entire school.
- If feasible, the child contributes toward replacing or repairing the damage, such as erecting a fence, chopping wood or repainting a wall (based on the capacity of the child).
- The child receives a written notice in the school disciplinary record and commits to reform.
- The school involves parents in preventing a repeat of the behaviour.

### 4. *Last resort*

For persistent and serious offences, such as violating other children or serious damage to the school property or reputation, the headteacher could take action as a last resort, using interventions such as the following:

- Summon and discuss with parents the possible next steps, as a warning to the child.
- Implement a time-limited suspension (e.g., one week) with a written warning and referral to a counsellor or probation officer.
- As a very last resort, refer the case to the Director of Education with a specific recommendation for expulsion from school, including the involvement of a probation officer and an action plan for next steps to help the child.

## How do I create a positive classroom environment?

Positive discipline guides children in understanding their misbehaviour and in building a personal desire to make better choices in the future. However, it is far more than just responses to misbehaviour. It combines nonviolent disciplinary action with a positive classroom environment, an environment that encourages students to get involved in defining the conditions for success.

This approach involves establishing a different kind of relationship with students and new methods for engaging and supporting them over the long-term. In the beginning it may be difficult, as you get used to a new way of doing things. However, over a period of time, it will become easier and you will notice positive changes in your students' behaviours, both inside and outside the classroom.

Here are a few ideas for getting started. All of these activities aim to share decision-making power with students and create an environment in which students can feel invested in their school. These activities are part of a positive discipline approach, because they encourage students to identify themselves as key stakeholders in their school and, as a result, feel more accountable for their behaviour.

### 1. *Set shared ground rules for learning.*

Engage students in jointly developing class ground rules for learning. Explain that you want to involve the class in creating a new way of learning together and provide them with some examples of possible class ground rules.

Examples of rules could include any of the following:

- Everyone must come on time.
- The lesson will start and finish on time.
- Questions are encouraged.
- Only one person can speak at a time.
- We will listen to everyone's ideas with respect.
- Everyone is responsible for her or his own learning. This means if you don't understand, you will ask questions.
- Students will pay attention when the teacher is talking.
- The class will decide what to do when someone breaks a rule, based on guidelines discussed earlier by the class.
- Teachers and students will both give and get respect.

Write the rules on paper or cardboard and tape them on the wall for the class to refer to on an ongoing basis. Be aware that at first the class may find it difficult to stick to the rules, but over a period of time they will get used to it. Be patient, but remain consistent and firm in applying the rules.

## 2. *Engage students in classroom management.*

Establish an elected student committee that is responsible for representing students' views in the class. This committee could also serve as a peer disciplinary committee that responds to anyone who breaks the class rules persistently. However, these students must receive and follow guidelines regarding positive discipline so that they do not abuse fellow students.

At the beginning of each term, call a class meeting and explain the work that needs to be covered during that term. Make a plan as a class for how the work will be accomplished and identify the students responsible for monitoring progress.

Keep track of each disciplinary incident and monitor the overall trend. Motivate the class to improve performance by setting targets (e.g., next month we will reduce disciplinary incidents by 20 percent). Make a chart that tracks progress and rewards the class for outstanding achievements.

Introduce a classroom-based or schoolwide forum for discussing how the school could serve its students better. Encourage constructive ideas and ensure that practical ones are put into action. For example, if students prioritised access to drinking water or sanitary supplies, then the school could try to prioritise these in its budget.

## 3. *Create opportunities to celebrate success.*

Create "Student of the Month" and "Teacher of the Month" programmes that ask each student every month to nominate one child and one teacher as potential candidates. Announce clear qualifying criteria, such as timeliness, helpfulness to others, good performance in class and acting as a role model to students. Announce the winners at the school assembly.

Introduce a "School Pride Day" for which students can share and implement ideas that involve everyone taking pride in their school. Some ideas could include cleaning the school compound, planting trees, appreciating a helpful teacher in assembly or helping someone with homework.

## What are some examples of positive discipline in action?

You have now learned how a positive discipline approach combines nonviolent disciplinary action with a positive classroom environment. Through practice you will begin to witness how these two ideas support one another. You can also build this understanding by reading, analysing and discussing the following skill-building scenarios.

The following five scenarios involve common perceived misbehaviours for which adults often use corporal punishment. For each scenario, try to identify alternatives to corporal punishment and then read the alternatives provided.

Remember, it is crucial that you begin by understanding the reasons for the child's behaviour. Sometimes there may be a justifiable explanation, and in that case, it is far more useful to help the child find a solution to the situation than to enforce a punishment.

### Scenario 1: *Arriving late to school*

**Sabina:** I live two kilometres from my school. In the morning sometimes I have to fetch water and sweep the compound around our house before I can go to school. Most of the time I walk, because I do not have money to take the bus. I know that being beaten is just the way things are at our school. Sometimes, because I am tired, I take it easy. I will just take the three canes. I try to hide in the bush until the teacher leaves, but most of the time there is no escape. I just have to take the beating.

**Sabina's teacher:** I have to make sure the children understand that coming late to school is not acceptable. They have to know that there are consequences for their lateness. I always give them three canes. Some of them are even used to it. They just offer themselves up because they know I don't listen to any excuses.

### *What are positive discipline alternatives?*

In this situation, beating Sabina does not teach her what is wrong with coming late to school. It just teaches her that she will experience pain. She may get used to it and, therefore, never learn from her mistake. After all, if beatings taught her what was wrong with arriving late, she would try to arrive on time. Consider the following alternatives:

- a) The teacher could begin by trying to understand why Sabina comes late. The

teacher could get in touch with her parents to see if together they could help Sabina get to school on time.

- b) The teacher could hold discussions in class about the importance of being on time and the values behind punctuality. The class could make a list of reasons for being on time, such as:
- The lessons can start and finish on time.
  - You will not miss part of the lesson because you are late.
  - It shows respect for your fellow students, teachers and school.
  - It shows that you take pride in your conduct and enjoy being at school.
- c) Sabina could be offered counselling on how to ensure that she is on time. This approach would involve listening to her reasons for being late and taking into consideration her situation. It may involve getting her to write a letter to explain why she comes late or asking her to apologise to her class for arriving late. It may involve sending a note home to her parents or, if it is a small community, arranging personal communication with her parents to explain why Sabina needs to arrive at school on time.
- d) If Sabina is persistently late, the teacher could tell her that she is not allowed to enter the classroom late and, therefore, not able to join the first class. This will cause her performance in this class to suffer, and she will see how her behaviour has consequences. She will learn that she has the power to change her own situation by coming on time. However, it is important that other options have been tried before this one is exercised.

### Scenario 2: *Making noise in class and disruptive behaviour*

**James:** I was feeling good today. I was telling funny stories and everyone was laughing. The teacher tried to tell me to stop talking, but I wanted to show everyone that I was not afraid. I am tough and can't be bossed around by a teacher.

**James' teacher:** I have to ensure that they fear me in this class. Otherwise, they will just get out of control and I will not be able to teach. The students will take over and other teachers will laugh at me. I will put James in his place by embarrassing him publicly and beating him. I will make an example out of James so that students will not dare to show disrespect by making noise in my class.

### *What are positive discipline alternatives?*

In this case, James may be trying to get some attention and praise rather than wanting to be disruptive for the sake of it. Consider the following alternatives:

- a) The teacher could begin the term by developing class ground rules. The class would agree on these rules together. These rules could include:
  - No side talking during the lessons.
  - All the lessons will start and finish on time.
  - The teacher will not humiliate students if they don't know the answer to a question.
  - Students will take responsibility for trying hard by asking questions when they don't understand.
  - Everyone will respect each other in class.
  - If a person breaks any of the rules, the teacher will take an appropriate action already discussed with the class.
  - In the case of persistent offenders, the class disciplinary committee will follow pre-written guidelines to determine the appropriate discipline.
- b) The teacher could get James to write a letter to the class regarding his behaviour and what effect he thinks it has on the class.
- c) The teacher could exclude James from the class for 10 minutes to help him reflect on his actions.



**Scenario 3: *Failing a test or giving a wrong answer to a question***

**John:** I am so nervous in class. I am afraid that the teacher is going to pick on me and ask a question when I don't know the answer. Even if the answer is obvious, sometimes when the teacher looks at me, I can't speak. I become scared and just remain quiet. I know everyone is staring at me and laughing, but what can I do. I just can't risk giving the wrong answer. Even in tests, I feel so afraid and always fail, because I don't know how to answer the questions. I just don't understand anything that is being taught, and I don't want to be laughed at. The best thing is to stay quiet or just leave that question blank on the test.

**John's teacher:** This boy is rude and stupid! He is insulting me by not paying attention. How many times have I taught this thing? Is he not listening? I am tired of trying hard when this class just doesn't care. Last week almost everyone failed the test and now they don't even know the answer to this simple question. I am going to teach this class a lesson. I am going to thrash this boy so that everyone will learn that when I teach they have to pay attention. They should know the right answer before I ask the question!

***What are positive discipline alternatives?***

Learning is a delicate process. The ability to learn depends on the emotional and mental state of the learner. Even if the lesson is simple, some learners may still experience difficulty absorbing the information. Consider the following alternatives:

- a) The class could agree to the following rules for learning:
  - The teacher will present the information in many different ways—so that children who can't understand one way have an opportunity to understand another way.
  - The teacher will frequently check to see if children understand what is being taught.
  - The teacher will happily repeat information and will welcome students' questions.
  - The teacher will not punish students for giving wrong answers.

- b) The teacher could adopt practices that support cautious and slower learners, such as the following:
- When possible, the teacher offers extra help after class to children who had difficulty with the lesson.
  - If a child does not know the answer to a question, the teacher moves to another child. The teacher never keeps attention focused on just one or two children.
  - The teacher explains that wrong answers are part of learning and that students should not be afraid of giving a wrong answer.
  - When students try hard but give wrong answers, the teacher congratulates the students for trying and then guides them in understanding the correct answer.

**Scenario 4: *Missing class or being absent without permission***

**Amina:** Sometimes my mother sends me to sell things at the market and I can't go to school. Sometimes I feel bored on the way to school and visit my friend instead of going to school. Sometimes I don't like being in a class where the teacher asks me questions all the time and looks at me in a funny way. I know that I am not going far after primary school ends, so what's the point? I might as well do what I want.

**Headteacher at Amina's school:** We can't have a child missing class whenever she wants. She has to be made an example of so that her behaviour doesn't spread. In the morning assembly, I will single her out, cane her six times and give her a final warning. If she doesn't listen, she is out of this school. We can't have children undermining authority at this school.

***What are positive discipline alternatives?***

Amina needs help to see the value of education and feel hopeful that the school has something important to offer her. She may also need help convincing her family that if she does well at school, she deserves a chance to continue with her studies. Consider the following alternatives:

- a) The headteacher could try to find out why Amina is missing classes and try to convince Amina's parents to prioritise her education.
- b) The headteacher could refer Amina to a counsellor who could help her see that if she invested in her education now, her life could be different.
- c) The headteacher could ask Amina to write a letter regarding what the school means to her.
- d) The headteacher could ask a trusted teacher to encourage and motivate Amina during this difficult time.
- e) The headteacher could pair Amina with another student who could encourage her participation in school.

### Scenario 5: *Bullying other children*

**Peter:** I am the toughest boy in this school. Everyone fears me, and I need to make sure that no one gets away with undermining my status. I keep others' respect by showing them what might happen if they don't fear me. I tease small girls, and sometimes rough-up an annoying boy. Everyone in school knows not to cross me. They know my father is tough at home and I am tough at school.

**Peter's teacher:** This boy is a problem. He is making other children miserable and giving our school a bad name. Today in assembly, I am going to humiliate him. I will slap him a few times and ask another teacher to cane him six times. I will then announce that we don't tolerate such behaviour from anyone. I will warn him publicly that if he persists we will throw him out of this school.

### *What are positive discipline alternatives?*

Peter's behaviour may be motivated by the humiliation he is subjected to at home or elsewhere. Thus, further humiliation at school is unlikely to be helpful. Before taking any firm action, it is important to find out the root cause of his behaviour, through counselling as well as enquiring within the community. However, it is also important to provide immediate protection for other children. Consider the following alternatives:

- a) The school could develop a written policy about zero tolerance for bullying and post it on a public board.
- b) The school could ensure Peter receives counselling for his problem. If the problem persists, the school could involve other community members, such as a parent, relative, religious leader or other community leader. If the problem still persists, the school could consider referring Peter to another school that is able to deal with the problem more effectively.
- c) The school could involve a probation officer or the Secretary for Children's Affairs in the local area.
- d) The headteacher could talk about the incidents during the school assembly and emphasise that violence against children is unacceptable—regardless of whom it comes from. To do so effectively, the headteacher would focus on talking about the behaviour rather than about Peter.

### A Teacher Against Violence

#### A testimony

*"I was born in a village in a family where my father had two wives. He was a respected man because he had land. He provided for both families, but me and my brothers and sisters were afraid of him. He was so harsh. He would beat you for any small mistake.*

*"He beat me and shouted at me all the time. If I didn't do the housework or did not do my homework or did not greet somebody properly, he would beat and he would shout. He was terrible to all my siblings and me. He gave our mother money for food and expenses and said that it was no business of hers how he chose to discipline his children. My mother tried to help us but what can she do?*

*"All through my school years, I feared everyone and remained quiet and obedient. I tried to avoid troubles. I thought men were just like that and there is nothing I can do. But then when I was 22, I met my now husband. He is kind and never shouts. At first I thought he was just trying to tempt me, but till now he has remained like that. Perhaps violence is not about being a man or a woman but what kind of person you are.*

*"We now have two children and at first I used to beat them and shout at them just like my father used to do to me. One day I saw how afraid my daughter was about everything and I thought of how I was when my father used to beat me. I talked to my friend about it and she helped me see what I was doing to my daughter. I felt sorry and apologised to her. Then I attended a workshop about children's rights and learned that it does not have to be like that. My husband and I talked about it and have decided that we will never beat our children the way we were beaten by our parents. I do not want my children to be afraid of everything, the way I was. We even try to help our neighbour's children when they beat them too much.*

*"I don't know if it was the workshop that changed me. I knew in my heart that violence was wrong because I know what it feels like. The workshop helped me understand what was in my heart. Now I work at this school where the headmistress has made a rule that corporal punishment is not allowed. Sometimes it is hard, but I also think it is right. I wish all schools were like ours."*

**female teacher**



*All that remains is for you to take action based on what you know.  
The question is, will you act?*

## Final Word

**T**he case for abandoning corporal punishment is overwhelming. You know that the common reasons given for practising corporal punishment are no longer applicable. You know that the law and government policy condemn it. You know that a large number of teachers are speaking out against it. You know that corporal punishment prevents children from realising their full potential as students and subsequently as members of their communities. Above all, you know that it is not right to continue to violate our children in this way. All that remains is for you to take action based on what you know. The question is, will you act?



# Appendices

## Appendix 1

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION  
P.O.BOX 7063  
KAMPALA.

Ref: CE/C/23

10th June 1997

All District Education Officers  
All Municipal Inspectors of Schools  
All District Inspectors of Schools  
All Head-teachers  
All Principals

### **A TEMPORARY BAN ON THE USE OF CORPORAL PUNISHMENTS IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES**

1. The use of the cane and, in many cases, rampant beating of school children and students under the guise of disciplining them by applying corporal punishments has been discharged without generally agreed guidelines or regulation to restrain its excessive usage. Whereas Corporal punishment is prescribed in the penal code of Uganda Laws, usually accompanied with hard labour, the use of the cane in schools is not equally governed by clearly defined procedures, rules or guidelines to give it a positive and professional value as a deterrent measure in promoting discipline.
2. Over a period of time, professional values traditionally derived from the use of corporal punishments as a deterrent and disciplining measure to be applied on growing children have been eroded through indiscriminate use of the cane. In practice, the use of the cane in schools has deteriorated into random and irresponsible beating of school children by teachers or fellow pupils. This has resulted in untold injuries, physical impairments and, in some cases, actual death. In some cases even the bare hand or use of the nearest hard object has inflicted a disability of one form or another on the victims.

In the absence of clear procedures, rules and guidelines on the application of corporal punishments in schools in general and in view of the seriousness of the uncontrolled use of the cane in particular, it has been found necessary to put a complete stop to the use of the cane in schools and random beating of children by teachers before a policy on this is finally put in place.

3. The following measures therefore take immediate effect:

- i) Random beating of school children and students in schools and colleges by teachers must stop forthwith. This equally applies to meting out any form of punishment or act that may induce or cause injury, damage, defilement or disfigurement to the human body.
- ii) The use of the cane as a disciplining measure shall not be permitted in nursery schools and infant classes at this tender age that ought to be brought up in love and fellowship rather than brutality, violence and sadism.
- iii) Every school should immediately review its school rules and code of punishments with a view to introducing more professional and acceptable sanctions to replace the stereotypes of manual labour and caning. These should be subject to approval by the school management committees or Boards of Governors to ensure that the measures taken do not in any way disguise other forms of brutality.
- iv) In all circumstances, the entire system of punishments in schools and colleges must be approved by the School Management Committees or Boards of Governors as the case may be.
- v) Any punishment incident in future must be recorded in a punishment book, clearly indicating the type of offence, type of punishment, authorisation and the particulars of the offence.
- vi) Those who deem it professionally defensible, justifiable and necessary to introduce use of corporal punishment in schools and colleges must come up with a clearly conceived definition, procedure and prescription of how best to administer the punishment. This then will be a useful basis for generating national debate which may in turn enhance the enactment of an appropriate law.

- vii) Where these guidelines are ignored or abused, the culprits will be criminally held responsible for their actions and will have to face the law including the Professional Code of Conduct.

With these restraints, it is expected that most schools will opt for developing more professional and refined methods of guiding and counseling pupils, students, teachers and parents in the use of alternative and more positive training in attitude formation and character building among the youth. Our ultimate goal ought to be minimal administration of punishments in the schools system in preference to a system of getting to know and understand the needs of the youth more intimately.

**Stephen B Maloba**  
**COMMISSIONER FOR EDUCATION**

- c.c. The Permanent Secretary  
Ministry of Education.
- c.c. The Permanent Secretary  
Ministry of Local Government
- c.c. The Commissioner for Education (Inspectorate)
- c.c. All Chief Administrative Officers.

## Appendix 2

10th September 2001

### *CIRCULAR NO. 6/2001*

To: Head-teachers  
Government Grant-aided Secondary Schools

#### **GUIDELINES ON HANDLING OF INDISCIPLINE IN SCHOOLS**

In the recent past there has been a wave of strikes, indiscipline and unrest of students in some schools throughout the country. There are a number of possible reasons to explain the cause of this situation.

The causes range from increasing indiscipline of students to poor methods of school administration characterised by lack of transparency and accountability, and good governance. However, the issue of causes of unrest will be dealt with after thorough investigations have been carried out.

In this communication, I would like to deal with the way indiscipline of students and strikes is handled in schools. In many cases where strikes have occurred it has been discovered that the official procedures are not followed in handling cases of indiscipline.

I wish therefore to reiterate that:

1. Cases of indiscipline of students should be handled by ALL relevant committees in the school system and as stipulated in the Basic Requirements and Minimum Standards Guidelines.
2. According to the Education Act 1970 section 7, subsection 2 and the Education Board of Governors Regulations 1991 part iii-section 9 and 10, the existence, management and administration of any secondary school in Uganda must be guided by a duly appointed and operationally functioning Board of Governors. In the same Regulations part iv, section 14 and 15, a head-teacher cannot effectively run a school without the active involvement of the Board of Governors and their relevant committees.

This is therefore to clarify:

- i) That for suspensions of not more than two (2) weeks, the head-teacher may effect them without the approval of the Director of Education's office but should do so only at the recommendation of the relevant disciplinary committees in the school.
- ii) That from now on, no indefinite suspension of students should be carried out without the approval of the Board of Governors.
- iii) That cases of indefinite suspension should be forwarded, with recommendations of the Board of Governors, to the Director of Education for approval. This process should not take more than one month.

Please note that for major cases of indiscipline, the head-teacher (Secretary of the Board of Governors) should call for a special meeting as is provided for in the Rules and Regulations of the Board of Governors.

May I remind you that it is an abdication of your duties to fail to submit minutes of the Board of Governors' meetings and their relevant committees every term to the Commissioner, Secondary Education for follow up. Any head-teacher who will fail to apply these procedures will be liable for disciplinary action.

**F.X.K. Lubanga**  
**PERMANENT SECRETARY**

C.C. All Chief Administrative Officers  
All District Education Officers  
All Chairpersons of Board of Governors

## Appendix 3

7th August 2006

### *CIRCULAR NO. 15/2006*

To: Heads of Primary Schools  
Heads of Post Primary Institutions  
Heads of Tertiary Institutions  
Heads of Colleges and Polytechnics

#### **Re: BAN ON CORPORAL PUNISHMENTS IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES**

1. The Ministry of Education and Sports has noted with great concern the increasing number of cases whereby teachers have been subjecting students to corporal punishments under the guise of disciplining the students. Whereas corporal punishment is prescribed in the Penal Code of Uganda Laws, and is usually accompanied with hard labour, the use of the cane in educational institutions is not equally governed by any law.
2. Traditional values derived from the use of corporal punishments as a deterrent and disciplining measure to be applied on growing children have been eroded through indiscriminate use of the cane. Moreover, the Children's Rights Act prohibits values and actions that undermine the health and dignity of the children. In practice, the use of the cane has deteriorated into random and irresponsible beating of students by the teachers and fellow students. Consequently, untold injuries, physical impairments and in some cases actual death, have been caused by corporal punishments meted to students. Even the use of bare hands has at times inflicted a disability of one form or the other on the victims.
3. The following measures must be observed by all the educational institutions, be they government-aided or private.
  - a) Corporal punishments for students in schools and colleges must stop forthwith. This applies to meting out any other form of punishment or act that may cause injury, damage, defilement or disfigurement to the human body.

- b) The use of the cane as a disciplining measure shall not be permitted even in Nursery Schools and infant classes. At this tender age, the children ought to be brought up in love and care rather than in brutality, violence and sadism.
- c) Every educational institution should review its rules with a view of introducing more professional and acceptable sanctions to replace manual labour and caning. The Schools/ Colleges' Boards of Governors/ Governing Councils should approve the new rules. However, the measures to be taken should not in any way disguise other forms of brutality.
- d) Any disciplinary action must be recorded in a punishments book, clearly indicating the type of offence, type of punishment, authorisation and the particulars of the person administering the punishment so that a regular system of records is maintained.
- e) Where these guidelines are ignored or abused, the culprits will be held criminally responsible for their actions. They will have to face the law, including the Teachers' Code of Conduct.
- f) It is expected that educational institutions will develop and apply more professional and refined methods of guiding and counseling students, teachers and parents in the use of alternative forms of punishment that are geared towards positive training in attitude formation and character building of the youth. The ultimate goal of the managers of the teaching/ learning process is to mould them into useful citizens.

**Dr. J.G. Mbabazi**  
**For: PERMANENT SECRETARY**

**C.C.** All Chief Administrative Officers  
 All Town Clerks  
 All District Education Officers  
 All Municipal Education Officers  
 All District Inspectors of Schools  
 The Rt. Hon. Prime Minister



All Hon. Members of Parliament  
Head, Public Service/ Secretary to Cabinet  
Deputy Head, Public Service/ Secretary for Administrative Reform  
All Permanent Secretaries  
All Resident District Commissioners  
All Chairmen, Local Council V  
Chairpersons, District Local Council Education Committees  
Secretaries of Education, District Local Councils  
Chairpersons, Schools Management Committees  
Chairpersons, Parents & Teachers Associations

## Notes

1. In 1997, when UPE (Universal Primary Education) was introduced in Uganda, 2,159,850 students enrolled in Primary 1 class. Of these students, only 485,703 completed Primary 7 class in 2003. While retention numbers are difficult to ascertain accurately, these numbers suggest the retention rate of about 23%. The majority of the students who dropped out stated “lack of interest” as their primary reason (46%), family reasons (15%) and sickness (12%). See further discussion of this in *Overseas Development Institute: Universal Primary Education, Uganda* (2006). Available at: [http://www.odi.org.uk/interregional\\_inequality/papers/Policy Brief 10 -Uganda.pdf](http://www.odi.org.uk/interregional_inequality/papers/Policy%20Brief%2010%20Uganda.pdf). Accessed on March 27, 2007.
2. In the 42nd session in June 2006, the Committee on the Rights of the Child adopted General Comment No. 8, which highlights the obligation of all states to prohibit corporal punishment. In paragraph two of that document they offer this definition of corporal punishment. Furthermore, they specifically distinguish between corporal punishment and the legitimate role adults have in guiding children. They reject the former as unacceptable and encourage the latter. UN Committee on the Rights of the Child CRC/C/GC/8 2006 page 10. Available at: [http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/898586b1dc7b4043c1256a450044f331/6545c032cb57bff5c12571fc002e834d/\\$FILE/G0740771.pdf](http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/898586b1dc7b4043c1256a450044f331/6545c032cb57bff5c12571fc002e834d/$FILE/G0740771.pdf). Accessed on March 27, 2007.
3. *Violence Against Children: The Voices of Ugandan Children and Adults*. D. Naker, Raising Voices (2005). Available at [www.raisingvoices.org](http://www.raisingvoices.org). Accessed on March 27, 2007.
4. As a result of the discussions during the United Nations General Assembly’s Special Session (UNGASS) in 2001, the Secretary General of the United Nations (UN) appointed a special rapporteur (Paulo Sergio Pinheiro) to undertake a global study on violence against children. A multi-country study defining and measuring the extent of the problem was published in October 2006 from which this quotation was taken. *World Report on Violence Against Children*. Paulo Sergio Pinheiro. United Nations Study of Violence Against Children (2006). Available at: [www.violencestudy.org](http://www.violencestudy.org). Accessed on March 27, 2007.

5. The Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children has collated useful, comparative information about corporal punishment against children. Available at [www.endcorporalpunishment.org](http://www.endcorporalpunishment.org). Accessed on March 27, 2007.
6. This concept is simplified and adapted from Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, which holds that each individual must navigate eight stages of social development to reach psychosocial maturity and that effective navigation depends on a supportive social environment. These ideas are also supported by the work of Heinz Kohut who held that an individual develops capabilities through empathic social relationships.
7. This emphasis on imagining better schools has been eloquently formulated by Rakesh Rajani of HakiElimu. See [www.hakielimu.org](http://www.hakielimu.org).

## Recommended Reading

1. *World Report on Violence Against Children*. Paulo Sergio Pinheiro. United Nation's study of violence against children (2006). Available at [www.violencestudy.org](http://www.violencestudy.org). Accessed on March 27, 2007. *Chapter 4: Violence Against Children in Schools and Educational Settings* may be of particular interest.
2. *Education for All. A Framework for Action in Sub-Saharan Africa: Education for African Renaissance in the Twenty-First Century*. Available at <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001211/121147e.pdf>. Accessed on March 27, 2007.
3. *What is a Good School? Imagining beyond the limits of today to create a better tomorrow*. D. Naker, Raising Voices (2007). Available at [www.raisingvoices.org](http://www.raisingvoices.org). (Included in this Toolkit)





This handbook is for anyone involved in designing or delivering education within schools, including headteachers, teachers, school governing committees, students, parents, public officials implementing education policy and anyone who wants to get involved in creating good schools. This handbook will guide you in thinking about alternatives to corporal punishment and how to put these alternatives into practice at the schools in your community.



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