

The School Counselor and Corporal Punishment

(Adopted 1995, Revised 2000, 2006, 2012, 2019)

American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Position

School counselors oppose the use of corporal punishment and advocate for trauma-sensitive discipline policies and procedures.

The Rationale

Even though corporal punishment has been on a steady decline since the 1970s and has notable negative effects, it is still legal and used in several of the United States (Gershoff & Font, 2016). School counselors recognize the use of corporal punishment is likely to teach children that violence is an acceptable way to resolve differences. Research shows physical punishment to be ineffective in teaching new behaviors, and it is detrimental in teaching problem-solving skills. Corporal punishment is not considered a trauma-sensitive approach to discipline in schools (Afifi et al., 2017) and can have negative effects for students including:

- Increased antisocial behavior such as lying, stealing, cheating, bullying, assaulting a sibling or peers and lack of remorse for wrongdoing
- Increased risk of child abuse
- Erosion of trust between an adult and child
- Adverse effects on cognitive development
- Increased likelihood of suffering from depression and other negative social and mental health outcomes.

The School Counselor's Role

School counselors have a responsibility to protect students and to promote healthy student development using multitiered systems of support that incorporate evidence-based practices and strategies in administering discipline and teaching new behaviors promoting positive social/emotional development (Cowan, Vaillancourt, Rossen & Pollitt, 2013). Recognizing culture influences on views of corporal punishment, the school counselor serves as a resource to school personnel and families for the use of effective intervention and alternative discipline strategies. School counselors encourage public awareness of the consequences of corporal punishment, provide strategies on alternatives to corporal punishment and encourage legislation prohibiting the continued use of corporal punishment.

School counselors collaborate with families and school staff to build positive relationships between students and adults with effective alternatives to corporal punishment including but not limited to:

- using behavioral contracts
- setting realistic expectations
- enforcing rules consistently
- creating appropriate and logical consequences for inappropriate behavior
- conferencing with students and/or families with school personnel for planning and reinforcing acceptable behavior
- emphasizing students' positive behaviors
- teaching pro-social, mediation and resolution skills as methods of problem solving
- providing information on parenting programs
- promoting emotional regulation
- teaching and implementing mindfulness practices

Summary

Research shows corporal punishment increases students' anti-social behavior, adversely affects cognitive development and erodes the trust between children and adults. It is ineffective in teaching new and positive behaviors and is detrimental in teaching appropriate problem-solving methods. School counselors adamantly oppose the use of corporal punishment and advocate for its elimination.

References

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