

Punishment and learning

Psychology



Punishment and Learning: Two Opposing Sides and My Personal Viewpoint

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The path to learning is hard, but for some, it is also painful. Corporal punishment continues to be debated in courts, Congress, schools, communities, and homes. Those who support corporal punishment believe that it can effectively contribute to learning new knowledge or good behaviors through its solid, unpleasant, and quick nature, while those who are against corporal punishment assert that it is not effective in promoting learning because it promotes violence instead, it is ineffective because the conditions that can make it effective are unattainable all the time for all students, and it causes psychological and physical harm that derail learning. I believe that it is not an effective form of teaching because it can be abusive and it does not relate to learning needs and motivations.

Those who support corporal punishment assert that it can effectively contribute to learning new knowledge or good behaviors through its concrete, unpleasant, and quick nature. One of the pros of corporal punishment is that it is concrete. In schools and homes where corporal punishment is not applied, children do not know what to expect if they misbehave (Vockell, 1991, p. 279). Corporal punishment, however, tells them what exactly they will get if they misbehave so this can improve the chances of learning or changing bad behaviors. Moreover, corporal punishment is a quick form of intervention. A punishment that takes too long, such as detention or grounding at home, may lose its effectiveness because of its duration (Vockell, 1991, p. 279). Corporal punishment attacks the problem of bad behavior or poor learning immediately, thereby possibly changing it

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quickly too (Vockell, 1991, p. 279). In addition, corporal punishment is unpleasant. Many children dislike corporal punishment because it is painful and embarrassing (Vockell, 1991, p. 279). The painful and discomforting nature of corporal punishment can impact behaviors more easily than other punishment that are not as hurting and uncomfortable (Vockell, 1991, p. 279). These arguments assert that children learn faster when punishment is tangible, horrible, and swift.

Those who are against corporal punishment assert that it is not effective in promoting learning because it promotes violence instead, it is ineffective because the conditions that can make it effective are unattainable all the time for all students, and it causes psychological and physical harm that derail learning. Corporal punishment is violent and it models violent behaviors (Vockell, 1991, p. 279). Children will also learn that they must hurt others to make them obey or to change their behaviors. In addition, corporal punishment is ineffective because it is hard to attain conditions that can make it effective are unattainable all the time for all students. Holden (2002) talked about Domjan's study in 2002. Findings showed that punishment is only effective if it happens after every bad behavior, it is immediate, it is intense enough for the first behavior, and it does not have any discriminative stimulus (Holden, 2002, p. 591). Other studies showed that parents and teachers find it difficult to meet all conditions for all students (Holden, 2002, p. 591). Moreover, corporal punishment causes psychological and physical harm that disrupt learning. Instead of learning, children may feel the pain more and that they were embarrassed (Holden, 2002, p. 593). They might also feel the lasting psychological effects of poor self-esteem and development of violent tendencies (Johns & MacNaughton, 1990, p. 391).

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Corporal punishment cannot lead to learning if it hurts people instead, physically and emotionally.

I personally believe that punishment is not effective in facilitating learning because it can lead to abuse and it does not connect to the motivators and needs of learning. I agree with Johns and MacNaughton (1990) that corporal punishment is a slippery slope that can lead to physical and psychological abuse (p. 391). It is hard to know when enough is enough and it is also uncertain how painful the punishment is to the child. For instance, my uncle says he is already tired of spanking because it does not work anymore. His children have been immune to his spansks and he does not think it is right to increase the intensity. Punishment is hard to measure and it is hard to prove that it works. More importantly, I do not think that learning has anything to do with punishment because learning is more on motivation based on interests and needs. Punishment does not connect to motivations and may only be an illogical detriment to learning. Vockell (1991) stated that corporal punishment is artificial because it is irrational when some behaviors being punished are not punished all the time, such as daydreaming or being rude. Punishment does not have anything to do in motivating children to learn. I know that the Bible says that it is alright to punish and to not spoil children. Proverbs 13: 24 states: “Whoever spares the rod hates their children, but the one who loves their children is careful to discipline them.” However, God gives alternatives. He wants us to discipline our children, not necessarily spank them. This is because learning is a process that does not require corporal punishment.

I disagree that corporal punishment is needed to help people learn. There are non-violent alternatives to it and these alternatives can even be

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customized to fit the motivations of learners. Corporal punishment may be quick to use and concrete, but it cannot assure learning. Instead, it only assures hurt feelings that can last for a lifetime.

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