

Learner Discipline in Crisis: Can Schools Overcome the Problem?

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ABSTRACT Discipline problems do exist in South African schools and the situation is getting worse and even out of hand-including bullying behaviour. Schools should have management policies in place for this kind of behaviour. Traditional behaviour-management practices, including corporal punishment, are prohibited in South African schools. Contemporary practices should centre on management supportive school programmes, including appropriate curricula and school-support structures. An area of concern is whether learner discipline policies and procedures are equitable, fair, and effective. It is the schools' role to ensure that all learners are aware of the reality that while have rights, they also have corresponding responsibilities. Learners' legal rights in disciplinary matters are delineated as a context for examining the implication of discipline policies. Substantial litigation has established that disciplinary actions must be accompanied by procedural protections that assure the rudiments of fundamental fairness to prevent mistakes in the disciplinary process. If the discipline problems in schools are not going to be managed, discipline problems in schools will put our education system in a crisis.

INTRODUCTION

Discipline problems do exist in South African schools and other countries and the situation is getting worse and even out of hand – including bullying behaviour. Schools should have management policies for this kind of behaviour. Traditional behavioural-management practices, including corporal punishment, are prohibited in South African schools.

Contemporary practices should centre on management through supportive school programmes, including appropriate curricula and school-support structures. An area of concern is whether learner discipline policies and procedures are equitable, fair, and effective. It is the schools' role to ensure that all learners are aware of the reality that while they have rights, they also have corresponding responsibilities. Learners' legal rights in disciplinary matters are delineated as a contest for examining the implication of discipline policies.

Substantial litigation has established that disciplinary actions must be accompanied by procedural protections that assure the rudiments of fundamental fairness to prevent mistakes in the disciplinary process. The awareness is more likely to be achieved in a supportive school culture where each learner is recognized as having unique qualities that can mature and grow in an environment which is conducive for learning.

If the discipline problems in schools are not going to be managed, discipline problems in schools will put our education system in a crisis.

Definition of Discipline

Discipline means a code of conduct prescribed for the highest welfare of the individual and the society in which the individual lives and it is a personal system of organized behaviour designed to promote self-interest while contributing to the welfare of others. Discipline is necessary for the good functioning of a school. Indiscipline not only disrupts teaching and learning but can also endanger learners and educators.

The term refers to students complying with a code of behaviour often known as the school rules. Among other things these may set out the expected standards of clothing, timekeeping, social behaviour and work ethic. The term may also be applied to the punishment that is the consequence of transgression of the code of behaviour. For this reason the usage of *school discipline* sometimes means *punishment for breaking school rules* rather than behaving within the schools rules.

Generally, the aim of school discipline is (theory at least) to create a safe and happy learning environment in the classroom. A classroom where a teacher is unable to maintain order and discipline can lead to lower achievement by some students and unhappy students.

Historical Attitudes to School Discipline

Throughout the history of education the most common form of school discipline was corporal punishment. Whilst a child was in school, a teacher was expected to act as a substitute parent, with all the normal forms of parental discipline open to them. In practice this meant that children were commonly punished with the birch or cane.

However, corporal punishment was often problematic. Unless strictly monitored it could be open to abuse and there was a growing opposition to any use of physical force in discipline in individuals from the late eighteenth century onwards. A further complicating matter was the rise of compulsory education, as parents might be compelled to send their children to schools in which the disciplinary regime was at odds with parental view on punishment. Corporal punishment was consequently abolished in many countries and replaced by positive reinforcements of behaviour, in addition to forms of discipline more agreeable to parental tastes, such as the detention of students.

Most modern educationalists advocates a disciplinary policy focused on positive reinforcement, with praise, merit marks, house points and the like playing a central role in maintaining behaviour. When positive reinforcement does not work teachers adopt a variety of punishments including detentions, suspensions and ultimately expulsion of the student from the school.

Current theories and Practices

There are a number of theories to form a comprehensive discipline strategy for an entire school or a particular class. Consequently, the following theories may be of use to superintendents, principals, deans of discipline, and instructors: reality therapy, positive

approach, effectiveness training, transactional analysis, assertive discipline, and Adlerian approaches.

William Glasser's Reality Therapy (William Glasser Institute, 2005) involves teachers helping students make positive choices by making clear the connection between student behaviour and consequences. Class meetings, clearly communicated rules, and the use of plans and contracts are featured. Researches (Emmer and Aussiker, Gottfredson, Hyman and Lally) have noted modest improvement as the result of this approach.

Positive Approach is based on Glasser's Reality Therapy and is grounded in teacher's respect for students and instilling in them a sense of responsibility. Program components include developing and sharing clear rules, providing daily opportunities for success, and administering in school suspension for noncompliant students.

The Teacher Effectiveness Training philosophy differentiates between teacher-owned and student-owned problems and proposes different strategies for dealing with each. Students are taught problem-solving and negotiation techniques. Researches (e.g. Emmer and Aussiker) find that teachers like the program and that their behaviour is influenced by it, but effects on student behaviour are unclear (Cotton, 2001).

Regardless of the specific strategy used, all strategies are dependent upon clear lines of communication. Many of the strategies are best used between educators who have a working relationship with the subject. This being the case, many schools are moving to build educational systems that require relationship-building. The small school movement and the rigor, relevance, and relationship construct utilise relationships as a fundamental, tenant, thereby demonstrating the validity of requiring healthy relationships within educational systems.

Modern Examples of School Discipline

A modern example of school discipline relies upon the idea of an assertive teacher who is prepared to impose their will upon the class. Positive reinforcement is balanced with immediate and fair punishment for misbehaviour and firm, clear boundaries define what appropriate and inappropriate behaviour is. Teachers are expected to respect their students,

and sarcasm and attempts to humiliate pupils are seen as falling outside of what constitutes reasonable discipline.

Whilst this is the consensus viewpoint amongst the majority of academics, some teachers and parents advocate a more assertive and confrontational style of discipline. Such individuals claim that many problems with modern schooling stem from the weakness in school discipline and if teachers exercised firm control over the classroom they will be able to teach more efficiently. This viewpoint is supported by the educational attainment of countries that combine strict discipline with high standards of education.

In January 2005, the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) in collaboration with RAPCAN and Save the Children Sweden hosted a Roundtable discussion entitled “Appropriate Discipline in a Constitutional South Africa.” The Roundtable seeks to engage key policy makers on legal options to ensure that children are free from violence in the home, and that parents and caregivers are supported to use appropriate forms of discipline.

In December 2005, Parliament passed the section 75 Children’s Bill. It was anticipated by many that this Bill would seek to prohibit the use of all forms of physical punishment in the home – it did not. Since 1994, South Africa has progressively banned all forms of corporal punishment in the public domain. Corporal punishment within the private domain of the home is, however, legally tolerated provided that it does not exceed the boundaries of moderate chastisement.

At an international level, children participating in the United Nations Study on Violence against Children have overwhelmingly called for the prohibitions of all forms of physical punishment in all spheres of life. South Africa is a country that suffers from endemic violence. Abolishing all forms of corporal punishment and using appropriate forms of discipline in the home would bring our society closer to ensuring our constitutional values of human dignity and equality are realised.

It is not clear, however, that this stereotypical view reflects the reality of classrooms or that educational goals in countries are commensurable with those in other countries. In Japan, for example, although average attainment on standardised tests may exceed those in Western countries, classroom discipline and behaviour is slightly problematic. Although, officially,

schools have extremely rigid codes of behaviour, in practice many teachers find the students unmanageable and do not enforce discipline at all, whilst others impose brutal standards of discipline, backed up with beatings and whippings.

Remembering that typical class sizes are 40 to 50 students, maintaining classroom order under these conditions can take so much effort that there is simply no time for learning, so it is common for teachers to simply ignore disruptive students and concentrate their attention to motivated students. The result of this is that motivated students, who must pass extremely difficult university entrance exams, receive disproportionate resources, whilst the rest of the students are allowed, perhaps expected, to fail. Given that perceptions of school quality are heavily weighed towards the proportion of students passing university entrance exams, this approach diverts resources to where they are most efficient from the perspective of administrators.

The problem, however, is that many students graduate high-school with very unrealistic expectations and little in the way of useful skills, leaving it up to employers or vocational colleagues to teach the basic social expectations needed for employment or higher educations. Frequent complaints of teachers at the university and college level are that students lack the concept of punctuality, consider that attendance to class is sufficient for a passing grade so use class time to catch up on sleep or email, and lack the self-discipline and motivation needed for effective study. Students frequently refuse to complete homework or classwork, on the assumption that high-school standards of behaviour will be accepted and that an automatic pass grade will be awarded provided they do not actively disrupt classes. University administrators frequently pressure teachers to issue passing grades despite poor achievement due to constraints imposed by the ministry of education in relation to funding.

Problems

Methods of maintaining discipline in schools are not always successful. The misbehaviour of children is commonly in all schools, although most schools manage to keep this in tolerable limits. Occasionally, however, poor disciplinary management within school can cause a more general breakdown in order.

In modern years this has been popularly characterised by violence against teachers and other children. Even low levels of indiscipline at school can result in a detrimental working environment for children and good teaching will often depend on good school discipline.

Effective discipline requires the consent, either explicit or tacit, of parents and pupils. Whilst few children will enjoy punishment, most will submit to it providing it is perceived as being equitable.

Moreover, to be effective, punishment should never appear arbitrary. School hierarchies award teachers great power over their students and the perceived abuse of this power to punish children in arbitrary ways can be the source of much resentment and hostility.

Problems with school discipline has also led to a reduction in the number of people willing to become teachers, especially in high schools or schools regarded as being difficult. Student's misbehaviour and rudeness is the leading cause of teacher resignations. In some areas and countries, this has led to severe teacher shortage, with classes either not taught, or taught by an unqualified person. In some schools, a senior class, for example, may have up to a dozen different teachers in a single year, as the replacement decide to leave rather than deal with student behaviour. Many countries are now trying to offer incentives to new teachers to remain in such schools, but with very limited success.

The effects of classroom discipline can be compared to emotional abuse, the teacher in the role of abuser and students in the role of unwanted victimisation. Merely a game of power and domination.

Do We Need Zero Tolerance

Zero tolerance refers to the practice of automatic expulsion of students for violating of safety rules. In recent years anxious educators relied increasingly on zero tolerance policies as a simple, albeit draconian response to students' threats of poor discipline and violence, which relieved them of the need to exercise judgement and make reasoned decisions to student behaviour.

Zero tolerance has become a philosophy, which permeated our schools; it employs a brutally strict disciplinary model that embraces harsh punishment on students. A concern raised was

that zero tolerance policies were resulting in high levels of suspension and expulsion under majority of students.

An article in the American Bar Association Journal (Jebo, 2000) sharply criticised zero tolerance policies as “zero sense”. The central problem with zero tolerance policies is that all threats of violence are treated as equally dangerous and deserving of the same consequences.

The rights of students are well established in the Constitution and in the South African Schools Act. The rights of students are important and schools should act in the best interest of the child. Nowhere there is a reference to zero tolerance in the Act and Constitution, although there are clear steps that should be taken and criteria to be met when a student is suspended from school. Timeliness, appeals and procedures are all discussed. Zero tolerance is not discussed. Commins (1998) has expressed concern that zero tolerance policies have increased the number of expelled and suspended students and that the policy may be counterproductive. Students that are expelled or suspended are not provided with alternative education or support services. Keleher (2000) indicated that zero tolerance policies and suspensions may disfavour minority students.

Limited or no case law or legal advice can be found that indicate the rights of students where abrogated under zero tolerance policies. However, from a lay persons’ perspective it seems that natural justice principals imply that each case should be judged on its own merits, including assigning a punishment commensurate with the offence and individual circumstances. More attention needs to be paid to ensure an active adult presence in the school and in encouraging students to report their concerns. More tolerance policies are resulting in inappropriate sanctions for some students.

Disciplining students, particularly those with chronic or serious behaviour problems, is a long-standing challenge for educators. They must balance the needs of the school community and those of the individual student. At the heart of this challenge is the use of punitive versus supportive disciplinary practices. Though increasingly common in recent years, reliance on punitive approaches to discipline, such as ‘zero tolerance’ policies, has proven largely ineffective, even counterproductive. This holds true for general education students and those with disabilities. Current research and legislation offer alternative ‘best practice’ strategies that support the safe education of *all* students. Such effective discipline practices ensure the

safety and dignity of students and staff, preserve the integrity of the learning environment, and addresses the causes of a student's misbehaviour in order to improve positive behavioural skills and long-term outcomes.

Punished-Based Discipline Does not improve School safety, Learning or Behaviour

In recent years many schools have adopted a zero tolerance approach to school discipline that usually entails the expulsion or suspension of students as an automatic consequence of serious acts of misconduct, particularly the possession of weapons and drugs. Unfortunately, an increasing number of schools apply a zero tolerance approach to behaviours that do not necessarily threaten the safety or welfare of others. Furthermore, harsh consequences are invoked automatically, irrespective of the severity of the misbehaviour or the circumstance involved, and without consideration of the negative impact of these consequences of the welfare of the offending student or on the overall climate of the school.

Research repeatedly has demonstrated that suspension, expulsion, and other punitive consequences are not the solutions to dangerous and disruptive student behaviours. In fact, evidence indicates that dangerous students do not become less dangerous to others when they are excluded for appropriate school settings; quite often they become more so. Youth who are not in school or not in the labour force are at exceedingly high risk of delinquency and crime. Each year's class of dropouts drains the nation of more than 200 billion in lost of earnings and taxes every year. Billions more are spent on welfare, healthcare and other social services.

Zero tolerance policies as usually implemented:

- Do not increase school safety.
- Rely too heavily on suspension and expulsion, practices that neither improve school climate nor address the source of student alienation.
- Are related to a number of negative consequences, including increased rates of school drop out and discriminatory application of school discipline.

- Negative impact minority students and students with disabilities to a greater degree than other students – students have shown that these students constitute a disproportionately large percentage of expulsions and suspension.
- Restrict access to appropriate education, often exacerbating the problems of students with disabilities and achievement difficulties, and thereby increasing the probability that these students will not complete high school.
- Under these policies, students who commit relatively minor infractions – talking back to teachers, writing graffiti, etc. – are often suspended or even prosecuted in court instead of receiving in-school punishment.

Positive Discipline Strategies improve Safety and Outcomes for All Students

Positive discipline strategies are research-based procedures that can focus on increasing desirable behaviours instead of simply decreasing undesirable behaviours through punishment. They emphasise the importance of making positive changes in the child's environment in order to improve the child's behaviour. Such changes may entail the use of positive reinforcement, modelling, supportive teacher-student relations, family support and assistance from a variety of educational and mental health specialists.

Research has proven that *positive discipline strategies benefit all students* because:

- Opportunities to forge relationships with caring adults, coupled with engaging curriculum, prevent discipline problems.
- Discipline that is fair, corrective and includes therapeutic group relationship-building activities with children reduces the likelihood of further problems.
- Strategies that effectively maintain appropriate social behaviour make schools safer. Safer schools are more effective learning environments.
- Positive solutions address student needs, environmental conditions, teacher interactions and matching students with curriculum.
- Reducing student alienation through 'schools-with-a-school' and other peer relationship can dramatically reduce acting out in schools, especially in large settings.
- When students are given an appropriate education in a conducive environment, they improve behaviour and performance.

- Appropriately implemented, proactive behaviour support systems can lead to dramatic improvements that have long-term effects on the lifestyle, functional communication skills and problem behaviour in individuals with disabilities or at risk for negative adult outcome.

Research indicates that effective implementation of proactive behavioural supports includes:

- Culturally competent, family-friendly behaviour support.
- A focus both on prevention of problem behaviours and early access to effective behaviour support.
- Implementation with sufficient intensity and scope to produce gains that have a significant and durable impact on behaviour.
- For individual students, as assessment, including a Functional Behaviour Assessment, conducted when the problem behaviour is first observed or as a proactive activity.

Examples of effective proactive behavioural strategies. There are a number of research-based approaches to providing proactive systems of behavioural support in schools, including Positive Behaviour Support (PBS), violence prevention programmes, social skills instruction and school-based mental health services. These strategies include:

- **Violence prevention:** The most frequent components of a violence prevention program include a prevention curriculum; services from schools psychologists, counsellors or social workers; family and community involvement; and implementation of effective school-wide discipline practices.
- **Positive behavioural support and social skills training:** Interventions that help students with emotional/ behavioural disorders and social skills deficits have potential to significantly improve school-wide behaviour and safety. Effective programmes include: Stop and Think and Positive Behavioural Interventions and Support.
- **Early intervention:** Interventions that target low levels of inappropriate behaviour before they escalate into violence can significantly reduce the need to harsh consequences later. Examples of proven practices include First step to Success (kindergarten) and Positive Adolescent Choices Training (developed for African American youth).

- ***In-school suspension:*** When focused on continuing the curriculum, while therapeutically debriefing to identify and eliminate the root of cause of acting-out episode, provides an alternative to exclusion.
- ***Adult mentors:*** Who work with students to help to improve self-concept and motivation to engage in appropriate behaviour.
- ***Teacher support teams:*** (Or “Intervention Assistance Teams”) evaluate both class climate and student needs, and provide support and strategies to engage difficult students as a prevention effort.

Characteristics of effective alternative programmes, identifies through research, include:

- Low staff to student ratio with highly trained, culturally diverse staff
- Strong component of parent and community agency involvement
- Use of non-traditional instruction, adapted curriculum and flexible staff roles
- Sufficient funding and resources to implement program
- Sensitivity to individual and cultural differences
- Clear program and student goals
- Onsite counselling services
- Multidisciplinary case management
- Research-based interventions
- Formative and **summative** program evaluation

All over the world countries, like South Africa, are facing a school discipline crisis. It is understandable that parents and educators would turn to harsher disciplinary practices and other strategies like metal detections, police, cameras, dogs and school lockdown in an effort to protect our children. But we have done very little to examine the school policy code of conduct, role of parents and educators, not to mention the cost of these measures (**Dohrn, 2004**).

In South Africa we had many cases of violence and discipline problems in schools the past 3 years. To many cases, a blind eye was given. If we want to avoid a serious discipline crisis

in our schools, we need to focus on how parents and educators can advocate for alternative research-based discipline strategies that can be more effective in stemming violence and creating a suitable learning environment. We can no longer afford to turn a blind eye to the destructive consequences of zero tolerance discipline policies on our children.

Balanced and rational steps for improving the safety and crisis preparedness of all school environments can and should be taken in the development of safety related school policies and a code of conduct for students, the training of educators on discipline and safety strategies and train educators on crisis preparedness guidelines for dealing with any discipline and safety issues at school as well as prevention strategies of indiscipline.

Characteristics of a School That Is safe and Responsive to All children

Well functioning schools foster learning, safety, and socially appropriate behaviours. They have a strong academic focus and support students in achieving high standards, foster positive relationships in schools staff and students, and promote meaningful parental and community involvement. Most prevention programmes in effective schools address multiple factors and recognise that safety and order are related to children's social, emotional, and academic development.

Effective prevention, intervention, and crisis response strategies operate best in school communities that:

- **Focus on academic achievement.** Effective schools convey the attitude that all children can achieve academically and behave appropriately, while at the same time appreciating individual differences. Adequate resources and programmes help ensure that expectations are met. Expectations are communicated clearly, with the understanding that meeting such expectations is a responsibility of the student, the school, and the home. Students who do not receive the support they need are less likely to behave in socially desirable ways.
- **Involve families in meaningful ways.** Students whose families are involved in their growth in and outside of school are more likely to experience school success and less likely to become involved in antisocial activities. School communities must make parents feel

welcome in school, address barriers to their participation, and keep families positively engaged in their children's education. Effective schools also support families in expressing concerns about their children-and they support families in getting the help they need to address behaviours that cause concern.

- **Develop links to the community.** Everyone must be committed to improving schools. Schools that have close ties to families, support services, community police, the faith-based community, and the community at large can benefit from many valuable resources. When these links are weak, the risk of school violence is heightened and the opportunity to serve children who are at risk for violence and who may be affected by it is increased.
- **Emphasise positive relationships among students and staff.** Research shows that a positive relationship with an adult who is available to provide support when needed is one of the most critical factors in preventing student violence. Students often look to adults in the school community for guidance, support, and direction. Some children need help overcoming feelings of isolation and support in developing connections to others. Effective schools make sure that opportunities exist for adults to spend quality, personal time with children. Effective schools also foster positive student interpersonal relations – they encourage students to help each other and to feel comfortable assisting other in getting help when needed.
- **Discuss safety issues openly.** Children come to school with many different perceptions – and misconceptions – about death, violence, and the use of weapons. Schools can reduce the risk of violence by teaching children the dangers about firearms, as well as appropriate strategies for dealing with feelings, expressing anger in appropriate ways, and resolving conflicts. Schools also should teach children that they are responsible for their actions and that the choices they make have consequences for which they will be held accountable.
- **Treat students with equal respect.** A major source of conflict in schools is the perceived or real problem of bias and unfair treatment of students because of ethnicity, gender, race, social class, religion, disability, nationality, sexual orientation, physical

appearance, or some other factor – both by staff and by peers. Students who have been treated unfairly may become scapegoats and/ or targets of violence. In some cases, victims might react in aggressive ways. Effective schools communicate to students and the greater community that all children are valued and respected. There is a deliberate and systematic effort – for example, displaying children’s artwork, posting academic work prominently throughout the building, respecting students’ diversity – to establish a climate that demonstrates care and a sense of community.

- **Create ways for students to share their concerns.** It has been found that peers often are the most likely group to know in advance about potential school violence. Schools must create ways for students to safely report such troubling behaviours that may lead to dangerous situations. And students who report potential school violence must be protected. It is important for schools to support and foster positive relationships between students and adults so students will feel safe providing information about a potentially dangerous situation.
- **Help children feel safe expressing their feelings.** It is very important that children feel safe when expressing their needs, fears, and anxieties to school staff. When they do not have access to caring adults, feelings of isolation, rejection, and disappointment are more likely to occur, increasing the probability of acting-out behaviours.
- **Have in place a system for referring children who are suspected of being abused or neglected.** The referral system must be appropriate and reflect federal and state guidelines.
- **Offer extended day programmes for children.** School-based before- and after-school programmes can be effective in reducing violence. Effective programmes are well supervised and provide children with a support and a range of options, such as counselling, tutoring, mentoring, cultural arts, community service, clubs, access to computers, and help with homework.
- **Promote good citizenship and character.** In addition to their academic mission, schools must help students become good citizens. First, schools stand for the civic values set forth in our Constitution and Bill of Rights (patriotism; freedom of religion, speech, and

press; equal protection/ non-discrimination; and due process/ fairness). Schools also reinforce and promote the shared value of their local communities, such as honesty, kindness, responsibility, and respect for others. Schools should acknowledge that parents are the primary moral educators of their children and work in partnership with them.

- **Identify problems and assess progress towards solution.** Schools must openly and subjectively examine circumstances that are potentially dangerous for students and staff and situations where members of the school community feel threatened or intimidated. Safe schools continually assess progress by identifying problems and collecting information regarding progress towards solutions. Moreover, effective schools share this information with students, families, and the community at large.
- **Support students in making the transition to adult life and the workplace.** Youth need assistance in planning their future and in developing skills that will result in success. For example, schools can provide students with community service opportunities, work-study programmes, and apprenticeships that help connect them to caring adults in the community. These relationships, when established early, foster in youth a sense of hope and security for the future.

Research has demonstrated repeatedly that school communities can do a great deal to prevent violence. Having in place a safe and responsive foundation helps all children and it enables school communities to provide more efficient and effective services to students who need more support. Therefore schools must have effective school policies in place.

Code of Conduct

The objective of the School Discipline Policy is to establish positive learning communities which increase student responsibility and student learning. Each school will need to consider the objective and outcomes in relations to its current stage of development and to consider what will therefore be realistic and achievable targets. Schools will need to develop them further in order to determine the most appropriate manner of implementation. Schools should also develop performance indicators related to their implementation strategies in order to monitor their progress towards their achieving the stated outcomes.

Larson (1998) suggests that these codes or discipline policies be judicious in their approach with students actively engaged in discussing their rights and responsibilities. Thompson (1994) suggests that these policies and code of conduct need to address issues that are relevant to the school as well as combine content (the rules) and process (whereby students, parents, and teachers become engaged in the rules).

Each school will develop a behaviour code in partnership with its community and will manage student behaviour in a partnership between students, their families and school staff. Schools are part of the communities in which they operate, and have a responsibility to work collaboratively at a local level. In order to develop collaborative partnerships:

- Schools will develop decision-making policies which encourage inclusive participation of the school community.
- Schools will consult their communities and give them the opportunity to be involved in developing the behaviour code and to be involved in implementing and reviewing it.
- Students, families, school staff and services will work together to negotiate student development plans to support student learning and behaviour change and manage seriously or persistently irresponsible behaviour.

Behaviour codes and student development plans are essential elements of effective partnerships. A behaviour code is a statement of a school community's values and its expectations relating to the student behaviour and the school's management of student behaviour. It:

- Expands the School Discipline Policy into specific expectations and consequences which accommodate local circumstances.
- Involves staff, students and their families in decisions about how student behaviour will be managed.
- Stated expectations in term's of individual rights and social responsibilities, as well as the consequences of both responsible and irresponsible behaviours.
- Describes grievance procedures available to any member of the school community who believes behaviour codes are not being supported or enforced appropriately.

- Is developed, implemented and reviewed as part of the school planning process.
- Is negotiated with and supported by the school council.
- Acknowledges other relevant policies and legal obligations.

Schools may ensure that parents and students understand the school's expectations through:

- Holding ongoing discussions with the school community to clarify values and expectations.
- Conducting ongoing consultations with parents and students on the school's behaviour code.
- Regularly communication information about the school's behaviour code.

Behaviour codes need to be explicit. Consequences for behaviour must be non-violent, and reflect the policies of the Department for education and Children's Services and the expectations of the wider community. Non-violent consequences are responses which do not involve any form of physical punishment, emotional hurt or verbal harassment.

All individuals and groups within society must be valued and treated with respect. The diversity within a school community must be acknowledged in school responses to student behaviour. Schools must acknowledge that students have different levels of ability to learn and cooperate with other people. They need to take into account these when formulating appropriate responses to irresponsible behaviour. Most irresponsible or withdrawn behaviour indicate that students need more learning, practice, support, or counselling. Schools need to explore the possible causes and to implement strategies for behaviour change in order to increase the level of successful learning. Strategies may include reviewing and reforming schools structures, classroom practice or curriculum and involving DECS and interagency. In order to achieve this, stakeholders have specific responsibilities.

Responsibilities of Stakeholders

Directors, district superintendents of education, principals and school-based staff, including teachers, are accountable to the Chief Executive, Department for Education and Children's Services, (DECS) for implementing the School Discipline Policy.

Responsibilities of directors

DECS directors will:

- Provide and coordinate services for students experiencing behavioural difficulties and their schools.
- Engage in appropriate interagency agreements in order to streamline the provision of services to support students with social and behavioural problems.
- Provide examples of curriculum review and reform which addresses behaviour issues.
- Provide appropriate professional development opportunities for staff.
- Provide information to parents on DECS policy.

Responsibilities of district superintendents

District superintendents will:

- Support principals in ensuring that the school planning addresses the implementation of the School Discipline Policy
- Support principals in ensuring that each school's behaviour code and other behaviour management procedures address needs specific to the community.
- Work in cooperation with DECS regional services and interagency services to ensure appropriate service delivery to school communities.
- Work with principals and DECS regional services to ensure that mechanisms are developed at a local level to provide appropriate placements for students requiring temporary alternative placements.
- Support principals and other school personnel to manage critical incidents relating to student behaviour or the aggressive behaviour of community members, and facilitate mediation with community members when necessary.

A. Each school district shall develop and implement a board approved comprehensive district plan for school discipline. The plan shall include:

1. goals and objectives, giving special emphasis to the teaching and practice of self-discipline, citizenship skills, and social skills;
2. an evaluation process whereby the goals are assessed annually;
3. an ongoing staff development program related to student self-discipline, good citizenship, and social skills;
4. policies and procedures related to the use and abuse of alcohol and controlled substances; and
5. policies to define, prohibit, and intervene in bullying, including the requirements and awareness intervention strategies, including training for social skills, for students and school staff. The policies shall:
 - a. provide training specific to overt aggression that may include physical fighting such as punching, shoving, kicking, and verbal threatening behaviour, such as name calling, or both physical or verbal aggression or threatening behaviour;
 - b. provide training specific to relational aggression or indirect, covert, or social aggression, including rumour spreading, intimidation, enlisting a friend to assault a child, and social isolation;
 - c. provide training specific to cyber bullying, including use of email, web pages, text messaging, instant messaging, three-way calling or massaging or any other electronic means of aggression inside or outside of school;
 - d. provide for student assessment of the prevalence of bullying in schools/ school district, specifically locations where students are unsafe and additional adult supervision may be required, such as playgrounds, hallways, and lunch areas;
 - e. compliment existing safe and drug free school policies and school harassment and hazing policies;
 - f. include strategies for providing students and staff, including aides, paraprofessionals, and coaches, with awareness and intervention skills such as social skills training;
 - g. include strategies to provide for necessary adult supervision;
 - h. be clearly written and consistently enforced;
 - i. include parents, community council and other community members in policy development, training and prevention implementation;

Each school district and school shall develop written standards for behaviour and class and school management, including consequences for appropriate and inappropriate behaviour.

The standards shall be developed by administrating, instruction and support staff, students, parents, and community members in such a manner as to create a widespread understanding and a sense of participation, ownership, support, and responsibility.

All discipline policies and procedures, including notice to parents and students and student due process, shall be in accordance with the law.

Responsibilities of principals

Principals will:

- develop, implement, and regularly review, in consultation with the school community, a school behaviour code which is consistent with the DECS School Discipline Policy.
- ensure that student behaviour is managed through procedures supported by a strong theoretical understanding of how student learning and behaviour are best supported.
- ensure that new staff, students, and their families are aware of the school community's negotiated behaviour code and the decision-making procedures open to them if they wish to influence school practice.
- ensure that parents or caregivers:
 - Have access to DECS School Discipline Policy, support materials and related documents.
 - Are aware of their rights to advocacy and of avenues open to them should they have grievance related to the school's management of student behaviour.
 - Promote structures at class and school levels to:
 - enable students to be involved in the management of their behaviour.
 - support and enable parents or caregivers and teachers to form relationships within which student behaviour may be managed positively.
 - ensure that the school's response to gender, cultural difference, family circumstances or disabilities does not reduce students' learning opportunities.
 - increase students' opportunities to experience intellectual, social and physical success.
 - teach and model decision-making in groups.
- promote opportunities for staff training and development.

- involve student services and personnel and other agencies, when appropriate, to support staff and families in managing student behaviour effectively.
- use system level consequences and interagency support programmes with students who do not respond to class and school consequences.

Parents/ Guardians/ Caregivers

The role of parents in supporting school discipline has been relatively well described in the literature. Those roles can include (U.S. Department of Education, 1996):

- Setting standards of behaviour, limits and clear expectations for their children, in and out of school, as well as, establishing mutually agreed upon rules about homework, extracurricular activities, grades, curfews, chaperoned parties and places that are off limits.
- Teaching and demonstrating standards of right and wrong discussing the school's discipline policies with their child.
- Encouraging their child to talk about school, after school activities and their trips to school.
- Being involved in their child's homework, meeting teachers and attending school functions.
- Building a network of other adults to refer to in the event of discipline problems.
- Volunteering in school activities when possible.
- Monitoring the TV and video games that their children use, encouraging their children to participate in safe, healthy after school activities.
- Working with school parent groups to plan and implement safe school activities.

Barth (1979) and Atkeson & Forehad (1979) report that programmes to involve parents in reinforcing behavioural messages can reduce the number of problems.

All stakeholders should work together to put prevention strategies in place to improve the discipline in schools.

Prevention Strategies

Violence prevention and response plans should consider both prevention and intervention. Plans also should provide all staff with easy access to a team of specialists trained in evaluating serious behavioural and academic concerns. Eligible students should have easy access to special education services, and classroom teachers should be able to consult school psychologists, other mental health specialists, counsellors, reading specialists, and special educators.

Effective practices for improving the behaviour of troubled children are well documented in the research literature. Research has shown that effective interventions are culturally appropriate, family-supported, individualised, coordinated, and monitored. Further, interventions are more effective when they are designed and implemented consistently over time with input from the child, the family, and the appropriate professionals. Schools also can draw upon the resources of their community, to strengthen and enhance intervention planning.

When drafting a violence prevention and poor discipline plan, it is helpful to consider certain principles that research or expert-based experience show, have a significant impact on success. The principles include:

- **Share responsibility by establishing a partnership with the child, school, home, and community.** Coordinated service systems should be available for children who are at risk for violent behaviour. Effective schools reach out to include families and the entire community in the education of children. In addition, effective schools coordinate and collaborate with child and family service agencies, law enforced and juvenile justice systems, mental health agencies, business, faith, and ethnic leaders, and other community agencies.
- **Inform parents and listen to them when early warning signs are observed.** Parents should be involved as soon as possible. Effective and safe schools make persistent efforts to involve parents by: informing them routinely about school discipline policies, procedures, and rules, about their children's behaviour (both good or bad); involving them and making decisions concerning school-wide disciplinary policies and procedures; and encouraging them to participate in prevention programmes, intervention programmes, and crisis planning. Parents need to know what school-based interventions are being used with their children and how they can support their success.

- **Maintain confidentiality and parents' rights to privacy.** Parental involvement and consent is required before personally identifiable information is shared with other agencies, except in the case of emergencies or suspicion of abuse. Furthermore, parent-approved interagency communication must be kept confidential.
- **Develop the capacity of staff, students, and families to intervene.** Many school staff members are afraid of saying or doing the wrong thing when faced with a potentially violent student. Effective schools provide the entire school community – teachers, students, parents, support staff – with training and support in responding to imminent warning signs, preventing violence, and intervening safely and effectively. Interventions must be monitored by professional who are competent in the approach. According to researchers, programmes do not succeed without the ongoing support of administrators, parents, and community leaders.
- **Support students in being responsible for their actions.** Effective school communities encourage students to see themselves as responsible for their actions, and actively engage them in planning, implementing, and evaluating violence prevention initiatives.
- **Simplify staff requests for urgent assistance.** Many school systems and community agencies have complex legalistic referral systems with timelines and waiting lists. Children who are at risk of endangering themselves or others cannot be placed on waiting lists.
- **Make interventions available as early as possible.** Too frequently, interventions are not made available until the student becomes violent or as adjudicated as a youthful offender. Interventions for children who have reached this stage are both costly, restrictive, and relatively inefficient. Effective schools build mechanisms into their intervention processes to ensure that referrals are addressed promptly, and that feedback is provided to the referring individual.
- **Use sustained, multiple, coordinated interventions.** It is rare that children are violent or disruptive only in school. This, interventions that are most successful are

comprehensive, sustained, and properly implemented. They help families and staff work together to help the child. Coordinated efforts draw resources from community agencies that are respectful of and responsive to the needs of families. Isolated, inconsistent, short term, and fragmented interventions will not be successful-and may actually do harm.

- **Analyse the context in which violent behaviour occurs.** School communities can enhance their effectiveness by conducting a functional analysis of the factors that set off violence and problem behaviour. In determining an appropriate course of action, consider the child's age, cultural background, and family experiences and values. Decisions about interventions should be measured against a standard of reasonableness to ensure the likelihood that they will be implemented effectively.
- **Build upon and coordinate internal school resources.** In developing and implementing violence prevention and response plans, effective schools draw upon the resources of various school-based programmes and staff – such as special education, safe and drug free programmes and pupil services.

Violent behaviour is a problem for everyone. It is a normal response to become angry or even frightened in the presence of a violent child. But, it is essential that these emotional reactions be controlled. The goal must always be to ensure safety and seek help for the child.

A **sound** violence and poor discipline prevention and response plan reflect the common and the unique needs of educators, students, families, and the greater community. The plan outlines how all individuals in the school community will be prepared to spot the behavioural signs and emotional signs that indicate a child is troubled, and what they will need to do. The plan also details how school and community resources can be used to create safe environments and to manage responses to acute threats and incidents of violence. If everybody works together in a school community, we can overcome the discipline crisis that threatens our schools.

Conclusion

Everyone who cares about children cares about ending poor discipline and poor violence. It is time to break the silence that too often characterises even the most well meaning school communities. School discipline and safety is everyone's job. Educators, administrators, parents, community members, and students all must commit to meeting the challenge of getting help for children who shows signs of indiscipline and of being troubled.

Coordinated school efforts can help to overcome the **looming** discipline crisis which schools are facing. Together we must develop solutions, because the solution of the crisis does not just rest in the schools.

If the problem is not going to be a coordinated effort, the constitution which promises safety and security to all will become an empty document.

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