

## Corporal punishment is no way to treat a child in or outside the classroom

The horrific video of a teacher repeatedly slapping a Class 3 student has brought the issue of corporal punishment back to the limelight. The problem of teachers (and indeed parents) beating their children with the intention of “disciplining” them is an old one; and the law has laid down strict guidelines to discourage the practice. Under the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009, ‘physical punishment’ and ‘mental harassment’ are prohibited under Section 17(1); and are both punishable offences under Section 17(2). In Delhi, corporal punishment in schools has been banned by the Delhi High Court since 2001 for undermining the dignity of the student. The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) has issued guidelines for eliminating corporal punishment in schools.

In spite of this, there is widespread belief among teachers and caregivers that hitting or insulting a child is the best way to ensure obedience and discipline. Several psychological studies have shown that beating or otherwise assaulting a child is extremely deleterious to their mental health, and teaches them that hitting is an acceptable means of dealing with conflict. The NCPCR draft guidelines even go so far as to say that corporal punishment can lead to several adverse physical, psychological and educational outcomes in students – including an increase in aggressive and destructive behaviour, poor attention spans, school phobia, low self esteem, anxiety, depression, and even suicide. Such abuse in early childhood has the potential to scar children for life.

That some progress in the area has been made is visible in the outrage seen on social media and news in response to the video. It is heartening to see that many people see this as unacceptable and cruel. But as is also evident from the presence of the video in the first place that there is yet a long way to go in training teachers in schools to be sensitive to the emotional and mental needs of children. Since schools are the first spaces in which children learn about power structures and social relations, society owes it to its children to provide an environment that can effectively protect and nurture them

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