

ABUSE IN SCHOOLS IS OUT! By Jordan Riak 1998

Abusive treatment of schoolchildren, often misrepresented as discipline, punishment or chastisement, is wrong and dangerous. Informed and responsible educators have known for a long time that both physical and non-physical mistreatment of children by their teachers is unprofessional behavior; that it can destroy children's enthusiasm for learning and set the stage for serious emotional and behavioral problems. For that reason, no college or university teacher-training program instructs undergraduates how to frighten, hit, manhandle, scream at, berate, humiliate or otherwise hurt children.

The large majority of teachers are competent and caring professionals who do not mistreat children physically or emotionally, and most school administrators set high standards for teacher behavior within their schools. Sadly, however, in some schools there are teachers who are unsuited to their profession and who habitually hurt children, and some school administrators who lack the will or ability to maintain high professional standards in their schools. Some administrators are themselves abusive toward children and therefore are incapable of setting a good standard for teachers.

Parents and Teachers Against Violence in Education (PTAVE) continually receives complaints about abuse to schoolchildren and the list that follows has been compiled from those complaints.

Variety of mistreatment of schoolchildren

- Paddling
- Spanking
- Slapping
- Cuffing
- Grabbing
- Shaking
- Dragging
- Shoving
- Pinching
- Pulling a child's hair or ear
- Finger jabbing a child's face or ribs
- Squeezing a child's cheeks
- Lifting a child up by the clothing or by the neck
- Banging a child against the wall
- Hurling objects at a child
- Striking a desk top with a book or ruler in order to startle children
- Shutting a child in a box or closet

- Forcing noxious substances into a child's mouth
- Forcing a child to remain motionless or maintain a stress position for an extended period of time
- Denying the child the use of the lavatory
- Allowing or encouraging bullies to torment a child
- Turning a blind eye to hazing
- Delegating the right to a student, sometimes called a "prefect" or "captain," to physically punish other students
- Provoking, taunting or challenging a child to violence
- Taping a child's mouth shut
- Tying a child to the desk
- Forcing a child to do push-ups or run laps
- Denying adequate free time for recess or lunch
- Threatening, cursing or screaming at a child or at a group of children
- Using fear of punishment to motivate a child to complete tasks
- Insulting a child about poor performance, appearance, choice of friends, etc.
- Confiscating or damaging a child's personal property
- Labeling or spreading malicious gossip about a child or a child's family
- Proclaiming to the whole class that a particular child is headed for no good—that he or she will become a delinquent or a failure
- Setting unrealistic standards of performance in order to guarantee a child's failure
- Deliberately ignoring a child who needs help
- Refusing to acknowledge or reward a child's improvement
- Using sarcasm and put-downs when addressing a child
- Badgering or taunting a child to the point of an outburst and then punishing the child for loss of control
- Punishing a group of children for the misbehavior of an individual
- Punishing an individual as an example to the group
- Causing a child to be humiliated in front of peers
- Calling into question a boy's masculinity because of late development, lack of interest or ability in sports, reluctance to fight with other boys
- Calling into question a girl's morals because of early development

Continued on reverse

Continuation

- Impugning a girl's femininity because she excels at traditionally male activities
- Leading a child into inappropriately intimate or sexually suggestive conversation or acts
- Setting up a child to be scapegoated
- Making a child the butt of the teacher's humor
- Pitting child against child, group against group
- Having children spy on each other
- Isolating a child from the group for a protracted period
- Undermining a child's social status and encouraging the group to ostracize the child
- Undermining trust and communication between child and parent(s)
- Misrepresenting a child's learning disability as a "discipline problem"
- Blaming a child's family situation for school-caused emotional problems
- Persuading a family to administer personality-altering drugs to the child so as to make the child more placid and tractable while at school
- Retaliating against a child because of a dispute with the parent(s)
- Creating a dossier or "criminal record" of a child in order to undermine the child's credibility or to hold over the child's head as a threat or bargaining chip
- Coercing a child to make false statements about others or remain silent about witnessed events
- Coercing a child to make a written confession
- Preventing a child who is in a state of distress from telephoning home

The preceding is by no means a complete list.

It is important for all parents to know that they have a fundamental right—a moral obligation, in fact—to protect their children from mistreatment by anybody. Let your child's teachers and your school principal know that no one has your permission, nor the moral right, to hit, threaten, humiliate, degrade or otherwise abuse your child. Instruct your child never to submit to any act of aggression by any adult. Your failure to ensure a safe, nurturing, joyful environment for your schoolchild, particularly in the earliest years, may have painful and costly consequences later.

If your child is physically abused by any adult, including a school principal, teacher, coach, bus driver or ANYBODY, immediately remove the child from the abusive environment, assure the child of your full support and seek medical

treatment for any bruise or injury even if it appears minor. Obtain a copy of the examining physician's report. You have a right to it. Report the incident to the appropriate public health authority and to the police. Injuries that are visible should be professionally photographed without delay and the prints kept by you for future possible legal action.

If the abuse is non-physical, have the child assessed by a psychologist who is qualified in matters of child abuse, but NOT one who is associated with your school district or has been recommended by the school.

When you discuss these matters with the child, listen closely and patiently to what the child says. Your trust in your child will inspire openness and frankness from your child. Do not be surprised if the school's account of events differs from the child's. Do not be surprised if the school seems more intent on shielding an abusive, incompetent teacher than in protecting children who are under the control of that teacher. Do not allow yourself to be worn down by bureaucratic stalling or to be derailed by diversionary tactics. If you are told that you are the only parent who ever complained about that teacher, or that your child is "making it up," don't accept that. Keep focused on these three points: 1) your child was mistreated, 2) your child should not have been mistreated and 3) you absolutely will not permit your child to be mistreated again. Period. End of discussion.

One day, all schools in the United States will be places in which children thrive and develop in safety and all teachers will adhere to high standards of professional conduct. No pupil will be mistreated. You can help make that day come sooner. Share copies of this publication with other concerned people in your community. Spread the word: ABUSE IN SCHOOLS IS OUT!

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