

Die Kinderversorger



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Journal of the
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International Network Affiliate

CWLA

Child Welfare League of America

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The National Association of Child Care Workers is an independent, non-racial organisation which provides the professional training and infrastructure to improve standards of care and treatment for children in residential settings.

Die Nasionale Vereniging van Kinder-versorgers is 'n onafhanklike, nie-rassige organisasie wat professionele opleiding en infrastruktuur verskaf om versorging en behandeling standaard te verbeter in residensiële omgewings te verbeter.

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GUEST EDITORIAL

Some Questions of Training

The advent of the Ethelbert Training Centre for prospective child care workers, poses some interesting questions for the profession as a whole.

This programme is the first of its kind in South Africa where fee-paying students offer themselves for comprehensive training *before* entering the profession. During the two-year course, students will be covering a wide range of topics which will give them a thorough knowledge of child care work. They will have had theoretical and practical training in preparation for their entry into the field.

What advantages does this course hold for the profession?

It will create, for the very first time, a pool of trained workers from whom prospective employers may recruit staff.

Employers very seldom have an opportunity of interviewing a number of candidates all of whom are either trained or experienced. The Ethelbert students will in future provide such a resource.

The employment of trained junior staff will allow organisations to promote existing experienced staff into middle management positions. These promotions in turn will lend depth to staff teams and contribute towards staff stability.

The training course naturally also creates an opportunity for the many young people wanting to enter the residential child care profession to acquire training before taking up full-time employment. Children's institutions are generally reluctant to employ young workers because of their need for "mature, responsible staff". The cost involved in having a trainee on the full-time staff team is a luxury few homes can afford.

These students will enter the field knowing what to do and what is expected of them. This means that after a brief period of orientation at their new place of employment, they will be fully productive members of staff.

What threats do these students pose for the profession?

Many child care workers, social workers and principals have for too long been contented with the status quo. Training of staff and the acquisition of new knowledge is a very neglected component in many children's institutions.

The availability of a group of young, trained workers will no doubt be viewed with scepticism by such persons. Those who have been content to stagnate and view their work as "looking after

children", will find it difficult to accept trained professionals into the field. Organisations which have not developed treatment programmes and those which resist parental involvement, will be equally threatened by the enquiring minds of these students.

How ready are organisations to employ trained staff?

The spontaneous answer would be "We'll welcome the opportunity". However, the answer is not that simple. Institutions wishing to employ persons who have spent a lot of money and two years of their lives in training will have to offer a remuneration and working conditions package which makes it attractive enough for future employees to work within their institution. Trained students will also want to know what career opportunities are available to them. This will include opportunities for promotion into senior posts. Management teams will be required to plan ahead and for some this may involve taking risks.

Where are the male child care workers?

Is child care seen purely as 'women's work'? If so, this short-changes the children who benefit from both men and women as adult figures in their lives. In fact it is not universally seen as women's work: male child care workers are well represented in the field, and are even in the majority, in overseas countries. Are men absent in their capacity as breadwinners? On the one hand, many of our female workers are breadwinners; on the other, child care *ought* to offer a viable career choice for those who will be breadwinners. Perhaps this new course will contribute to this.

What benefits are likely to flow from this course?

The entry of trained child care workers will do much to enhance the state of the profession. These students will have the knowledge and insight necessary to ensure that standards of practice are improved and the quality of care and treatment of children enhanced. Their employment will also reduce the need for institutions to spend up to two years training and orientating new staff. Most institutions spend hundreds of hours in "crash course" in-house training to prepare inexperienced and untrained staff for their tasks as child care workers.

The opening of the Ethelbert Training Centre heralds an exciting breakthrough in child care in South Africa. The first steps have been taken; the success of this programme and the ultimate benefits to the children depend upon the rest of the child care community sharing in this vision.

Parents do it naturally. Child care workers who deal with other people's children need to consider carefully the meaning and methods of punishment in institutions

When We Punish

Michael Bryan

How to punish children? — a question that must have exercised the prejudices, if not the minds, of parents since time began and will continue to do so for evermore.

I cannot recall having given much thought to the punishment of my own children when they were young. I scolded them when they erred, and in more serious instances (or perhaps when I myself became thoroughly irritated) the scolding might be accompanied by a cuff and/or some deprivation of privileges. I have a vivid recollection of one such occasion when I spanked my younger son as we walked on a busy London pavement, because he had been atrociously rude to his grandmother. I was instantly accosted by a total stranger threatening to report my cruelty. If this paints a picture of inconsistency, I doubt that my approach was any more haphazard than that of most parents. It must be admitted however, that this lack of a planned approach opens doors to children's manipulation of their parents and in my case, as in most I suspect, the father finds himself playing the role of the hawk while the mother undermines his authority by being the dove (a situation that our Victorian forbears would find difficult to comprehend).

On being appointed principal of a children's home my greatest anxiety concerned the why, when and how of punishment. Thus my outlook had undergone a complete change. Punishment had been transformed from the realms of reflex reactions to intolerable behaviour — to a matter that demanded careful investigation of allegations and a considered response. The only memorable advice that I received came from two sources. A bishop on my committee said in a delightfully ingenuous way that I should love the boys. My elder son, a most gentle and sensitive creature, commented that I must be firm with them. Their advice amounts to an oft repeated ideal, which most would accept without question, that in dealing with children one should be "firm but fair". Another axiom is that one must be "consistent", so I will endeavour to amplify the meaning of these terms in relation to the treatment of children in a 'home'.

Firmness

Firmness in regard to the maintenance of good order and discipline at a children's home has, for me, a very different meaning from *strictness*. The latter term implies a dogmatic, rigid and authoritarian application of rules, whereas firmness re-



RONALD SEARLE

Your psycho-analyst may say one thing, Blatworthy, but I say another. And my treatment is *firm*.

quires the intelligent upholding of principles governing a social structure such that those principles will not be breached; for when a principle is breached on only a few occasions it ceases to remain a principle. I like the concept of "rubber walls" as expressed by Dr Masud Houghugi when lecturing on *The Problem Child*, for this implies a flexibility built into the boundaries of a social structure in which the elasticity will always return them to their original position after having been stretched — but not breached.

Fairness

Fairness is synonymous with *justice*, but needs expansion in the sense of fairness to whom? When punishing one's own children, the punishment should be acknowledged as being deserved and fair by the child, its siblings and the person meting it out. In a children's home, mem-

bers of staff will often bring offenders before the principal for punishment. Thus, it becomes necessary for punishment to be seen to be deserved and fair by the offender, the member of staff, the other children and the principal. A failure to satisfy this test of fairness can sew the seeds of trouble in the future.

Consistency

This is the least straightforward condition. Who would deny that punishment should be inflicted with consistency, but consistency with what? Some appear to think that this should be taken to mean that punishments should be consistent with one another, but this simplistic approach lacks dynamism by denying the prospect of new and more constructive punishment, and it fails to take into account the varying circumstances surrounding similar offences. It may be interesting to note that in a military service in which punishment is an integral part of the way of life, the only offence which attracts a standard scale of punishment is absence without official leave. All other offences are dealt with through investigation of their individual merits. What is important is the consistent application of the principles governing the structure of the institution. Hence apparently similar offences may attract quite different punishments because no two offenders are the same and no two offences will have been committed under precisely the same circumstances. For this kind of approach to consistency to be wholly successful, punishments must be seen to be fair.

Importance of philosophies and principles

Given the desirability of consistency in punishing in the terms just described it becomes important to define the philosophies and principles by which a children's home is to be governed, because they will determine what customs and code of conduct should prevail. If it is desired, for example, to maintain the tight control that prevailed in Dickens' time, then a multiplicity of rules strictly applied will be the order of the day. Whether such a system would survive today is very doubtful. Children in care are exposed to all kinds of outside influences, particularly at school. English-speaking society no longer expects institutions to be ruled by martinets wielding rods of iron, and children no longer respect authoritarianism even as they did as little as a generation ago. Times have indeed changed, and any organisation attempting to emulate this old style of management would be courting rebellion, anarchy and disaster — to say nothing of a very bad press.

In the home where I have served, as in most, an important objective has been to make it as little like an institution as possible and as much like a normal and good family home as the setting permits. We believe that a good homely environment best serves the desire to develop the children's individual abilities and potential to the full.

Home is a place where we can relax, be ourselves and let our hair down from time to time, always provided that we consider others and refrain from behaviour which will infringe upon their freedoms or give offence. Home is not a place where a rule book is brandished whenever anyone goes in the slightest bit astray. Thus, in a children's home attempting to reproduce a truly homely setting, there will be a minimum of rules, because these are usually devised and imposed by those in authority. Instead there will be customs and traditions, some of which will have developed by common consent, and most of which may be termed unwritten laws.

To maintain discipline and good order in this kind of home is not easy. Above all, it demands qualities of leadership from the staff which command respect. Not all will possess these qualities in sufficient measure so that the need for an overlay of an authoritative system (which in effect demands respect for them) will still remain.

The essential difference between the "authoritarian" and "homely" systems described above are that in the former all the inmates are treated as being the same, which some even today will praise as being 'fair'; in the latter, a real attempt is made to acknowledge and develop the individuality of the children.

What is punishment?

Punishment is no more and no less than one of a set of tools with which we attempt to socialise children, to help them become unselfish, responsible and respected adults. It is by no means the only tool, nor even the most effective in our armoury. In fact, its application may often result from a failure to apply other more positive tools to influence children's behaviour for good. Nevertheless, it would seem a feature of our culture that punishment is an automatic retribution for unacceptable behaviour. This is not so for all cultures. In India, for example, children are indulged by their elders and seldom scolded. Who are we to say that the Indians are wrong and we are right?

Very good arguments can be put forward to illustrate that punishment as automatic retribution for wrong-doing is a patently unsound approach to bringing up children. My opinion is that punishment

as automatic retribution for wrong-doing infers prejudice and a lack of thought on the part of those in authority. It denies the prospect of forgiveness, and the concept of *teaching* which is implicit in the Latin root of the word discipline.

Types of punishment

The range of punishments which may be imposed at children's homes is limited. Inevitably, therefore, quite different offences may attract the same or similar

Home is not a place where a rule book is brandished whenever anyone goes in the slightest bit astray.

punishments. The range includes the following:

- Corporal punishment.
- Gating or "grounding"
- Confinement to a specific area (no longer permitted by a strict interpretation of the letter of the Regulations under the Child Care Act, 1983).
- Deprivation of privileges.
- Fining (not recommended in the Manual on Children's Homes distributed by the Department of Health Services and Welfare, but a good choice in some instances, nonetheless).
- Extra work.

Corporal punishment

Probably the oldest form of punishment and still in frequent use at South African schools for boys. The idea of flogging is deep-rooted. From the Bible: "He that spareth the rod hateth his son". An old proverb: "Gold must be beaten and a child scourged". In *Don Juan*, Lord Byron took it for granted:

"O ye who teach ingenuous youth of nations

Holland, France, England, Germany or Spain;

I pray ye flog them upon all occasions,
It mends their morals — never mind the pain".

In Great Britain, which has been one of the models for this country's educational system, it is being phased out. Perhaps the best-known school never to have introduced it is Bryanston, which was founded in 1928. I well recall that as boys we did not consider this as an attractive feature at all; in fact rather the reverse. Another example is Canford founded in 1920, this novel practice being based on ideas of the headmaster of a much older

and better-known public school, Oundle. In my view corporal punishment only has a valid place in the disciplining of young children and perhaps in rare instances for boys at primary school level. For example, a young child which persists in toddling towards the swimming pool will be dealt with more effectively if the scolding is accompanied by a smack. This uses 'fear' in much the same way as we house-train a puppy. Similar treatment for older boys is entirely inappropriate and can even set in train regression to childish patterns of behaviour. Educationist John Holt (*Why Children Fail* and *How Children Learn*) supports this view, referring to very young children's need for "symbolic consequences" where the real consequences would be unrealistic.

There are so many strong arguments against corporal punishment and one of the most compelling is that it affords opportunities for exploitation by the sadistic, and we must not delude ourselves into believing that sadism no longer exists among educationists. A master at my prep school delighted in tweaking the short hairs above pupils' ears if he believed they were not paying attention. One day the strongest 13-year-old in the school punched him in the stomach. The master never again indulged in this or any other cruel habit. One case involved my younger son, who revealed one Sunday morning that a master had picked him up by his head during a P.E. class. On discovering that at least three other boys had been similarly mistreated, I am proud to have initiated action which led to the master being severely reprimanded. One of the victims, the son of a lawyer friend, would develop "symptoms" every Thursday morning to avoid attending swimming classes. It transpired that the master required the class to swim a width of the pool under water. My friend's son's failure to achieve this resulted in the master holding his head under water for several seconds. Believe it or not, at a meeting with the headmasters of both the junior and senior schools the former asked, "Is there really a difference between a boy being hurt on the rugby field or being hurt by a master?"

Other arguments against corporal punishment include that:

- violence begets violence — today we call this the effect of 'modelling';
- its effectiveness is only based on fear, which according to Kohlberg would maintain a very primitive level of moral growth;
- the receiving of cuts can enhance status. This I know to be so, for I enjoyed considerable renown in my first year as a naval cadet by virtue of receiving more cuts than any other boy. I have ad-

ministered cuts on a small number of occasions, and in retrospect remember just one instance in which I believe my choice of punishment was absolutely right, because the boy's behaviour seemed to have transformed from that moment. That, however, was the exception that proves the rule that corporal punishment is archaic and should have no place in children's homes catering for teenaged boys.

The protagonists of corporal punishment may produce arguments in its favour but the advantages offered amount to little more than quick, visible "results" and hence a lack of inconvenience to those responsible for imposing punishment. If we are seriously and genuinely concerned with the *development* of children in our care, inconvenience to ourselves should be of little or no account.

Gating or "grounding"

This is a punishment detested by children to a degree that adults would think disproportionate. Therein lies its strength, making it suitable for serious offences. It should, of course, be imposed with due discretion if it will prevent a child from visiting his parents.

Confinement to a specific area

Despite the prohibition in the Regulations under the Child Care Act, 1983, this

means of tightening gating is appropriate in certain instances. It affords better control and earlier detection of another offence, and can be used if it is suspected that the offender will attempt to abscond for example. What is today called 'time-out' is similar in that it removes a child from a situation which he is handling poorly, both for his own sake and for that of the group he is disturbing.

Deprivation of privileges

Children today have so many privileges that temporary deprivation of one or more can have little effect. Thus, this punishment is used for relatively minor offences for which being deprived of watching television, for example, can be a suitable inconvenience.

Fining

Although not recommended by the Department, there are institutions in the USA where this is a primary means of punishment. Children in homes do not receive much pocket money, but for some it is supplemented by parents and hosts which negates the effectiveness of fining. Careful consideration must be given to the possibility that fining may cause stealing.

Fining has been a primary means of punishing those who smoke without permission at my home. Smoking is seen as

an anti-social stupidity rather than a crime, and the rationale for fining has been that money which can be burned cannot be needed!

Extra work

This is criticised for the danger that work (which one would like to be highly valued) may become negatively associated with punitive authority, but in my view is without a doubt the finest multi-purpose punishment, which can be applied creatively for the good of the offender and for all who live in the home. The availability of suitable tasks of home husbandry and schoolwork is endless. I suggested this once to the principal of my younger son's high school only ten years ago, when the boy was being caned on average twice a week. His response appalled me: "We can't get the children to do that. The parents would object; that's work for the labourers."

The major disadvantage is that this punishment can inconvenience the supervisor as much as the offender, but this may be offset by selecting the timing to suit the former.

Its benefits can often be increased by the supervisor working alongside the offender, thereby leading by example and affording an opportunity for meaningful interaction. This may detract from its unpleasantness, but there's no harm in even punishment work becoming satisfying.

* * *

In the foregoing I have purposely omitted to mention two methods of 'punishment' to which I wish to draw special emphasis, because I consider them to be among the most powerful and effective of all. I refer to *overlooking* and *admonishing*, both of which depend for their success on influencing and developing the offender's conscience.

Some will argue that children in homes have had their conscience so blunted in their early upbringing that to attempt to appeal to them is like sowing seeds on barren ground. However, if these children are to become mature and responsible adults, I believe it is essential that those caring for them should endeavour constantly to develop their sense of values or whatever the modern equivalent is for "conscience". It is worth mentioning that both of these again imply that a staff member has *earned* the respect of the child, that the child sees the staff member as representing the society of which he or she wishes to be a part.

Overlooking

This could be classed as a non-punishment, but it differs markedly from *ignor-*



MIKE WILLIAMS in PUNCH

"Hello ... Is that Child Welfare? Look here, they've shut me in my room again!"