

# 'Use positive ways, not the cane'

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## NOT APPROPRIATE:

Reintroducing caning in schools to cope with unruly students, as suggested by the National Parent-Teacher Association, is an ineffective solution to the problem, child experts tell Suzanna Pillay

SCHOOL administrators and teachers need to embrace positive, non-violent approaches and consistently promote them when dealing with children with disciplinary problems at their institutions.

"Evidence demonstrates that children respond best to respect,



File picture of **students** of a school in Seberang Prai Utara **showing the welt marks they developed after they were caned for smoking in school.** Experts are of the view that **caning is not a positive way** of disciplining children and may leave them **emotionally scarred.**

children respond best to respect, praise and encouragement. There is a pressing need to replace corporal punishment with positive discipline, which encourages children to develop self-control, confidence and respect for others through an ongoing educational process using non-violent approaches," said Phenny Kakama, child protection specialist with Unicef Malaysia, adding that students, teachers and parents alike shared the goal of orderly, disciplined classrooms where students can learn.

A good example of a positive approach, she said, is through student involvement.

"Teachers should spend some time at the beginning of the year to clearly tell students of their rules and expectations. It is useful to involve students in setting the class guidelines, so that they understand the reasoning behind them and are more likely to accept and abide by them."

She said Unicef's experience, coupled with a United Nations World Report on Violence Against Children (2006) highlighted that corporal punishment erodes students' trust in their teachers and their schools and could lead to students feeling disrespectful and angry towards their educators.

"When children are caned and shamed by their teachers, they feel the pain in the present and carry the emotional scars for life. The child experiences total humiliation, while the other children who are watching are subjected to fear. Negative discipline also leads to a future of continued violence.

"Studies have shown that chil-

dren who are physically punished at school may also become less likely than other children to internalise moral values and may become depressed or aggressive. Anti-social, aggressive and depressed children have unforgiving costs to society as they bring about demanding social and health problems well into their adult life."

Earlier this year, the Education Ministry announced that it was aiming to reduce disciplinary cases in schools to 2.04 per cent compared with 2.06 per cent in 2010 and 2.05 per cent last year.

The suggestion to reintroduce caning in schools to quell discipline problems was made by the National Parent-Teacher Association last month in response to this. Public caning in schools in Malaysia was banned in 2004, but currently under the Education Regulations (School Discipline) 1959, caning can be still carried out by the headmaster and authorised teachers.

Deputy Education Minister Dr Puad Zarkashi was quoted by media as saying that the Education Ministry would seriously tackle disciplinary issues like bullying and gangsterism in schools. Truancy is also a cause for concern.

Between 2010 and last year, the ministry reported that more than 16,000 cases had been registered in primary schools while more than 11,000 cases were registered in 2010 and 10,488 cases last year for secondary schools.

Kakama said behaviour and disciplinary issues did not start at school, thus school administrators and educators have to consider the



**Play therapist Datin Elsie Das** says the child who bullies is basically trying to **regain control of his or her life**

wider context. In order to have a better understanding of the underlying and root causes of such behaviour and to effectively respond to such a child, they also have to consider the child's background and home environment.

Play therapist Datin Elsie Das agrees.

"Challenging behaviour like bullying, for example, basically is an 'acting out behaviour' of someone who has grave difficulties in coping with his/her negative life experiences which could include being a victim of abuse, family problems, poverty or domestic violence, etc," said Das, who is also board member and chairman of education at Rumah Ozanam, a shelter home in Selangor.

"The child who bullies is basically trying to regain control of his/her life by the act of bullying



**Play therapist Chris Ng** says advocating a deterrent for disciplinary cases, **however humane, will not work**

the weaker person as it gives them a sense of power and control."

She said it was important to see challenging behaviour as a cry for help to be rescued and instead of corporal punishment, put into place a case management system for each child displaying challenging behaviour.

"Conduct a study of the role of the child's family social support network and how this has resulted or contributed to the child's negative behaviour in school or elsewhere. To be executed by suitably trained personnel, this will give all concerned a better understanding of the child and difficulties he or she faces daily.

"These children would also need appropriate therapy and social problem-solving skills appropriate to their age and respective situation."

To help children solve their problems so they don't act out in school, play therapist Chris Ng said one of the methods that the school could employ was a system where privileges were given or taken away.

"This will work with kids who are self-motivated. For others who perhaps need more reinforcement, communal duties like cleaning and gardening duties will be a good way to reinforce the need to understand rules and regulations — that is, more sustained lessons done over a period of time."

However, Ng said advocating a deterrent for disciplinary cases, however humane the method, would not work if they went back to the same source of problems in the first place.

"Schools need to sort out the root cause of disciplinary cases, rather than just react to the negative behaviour, which is the obvious symptom."

Sometimes, he said, this could be traced back to family problems and bad parenting, which should also be addressed.

"When I did a project interviewing kids in detention or in rehab, one key question that cropped up was *Masalah kita masalah keluarga. Kenapa pulak kita saja yang di kurung? Ibu bapa kita takde tanggungjawab ke?* (If our problems are family problems, why are we the only ones locked up? Aren't our parent's responsible too?)"

**What do you think?**

Send your views to

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