PROMOTING POSITIVE DISCIPLINE IN SOUTH AFRICA

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In response to the decision taken in parliament at the end of 2007, on the one hand not to prohibit parental corporal and humiliating punishment in South Africa and on the other to include parenting programmes in the Children’s Amendment Act 41 of 2007, the Working Group on Positive Discipline held a national workshop on 15 April 2008. The objectives of the workshop, attended by a wide range of stakeholders including government departments and institutions, civil society organisations and children and young people, were to strengthen the support base for prohibiting all forms of violence against children in all contexts, particularly the school and the home. Finally, all agreed that the group should meet with the Zambia Civic Education Association after these steps were implemented to discuss and review the resultant successes and challenges.

The workshop commenced with speakers providing information on the human rights framework in relation to corporal punishment, as well as the legal status of corporal punishment globally and in South Africa. Presentations were made regarding key objections that were raised in response to the call for prohibiting corporal punishment. These included a presentation by Rev. Vuyani

The teacher trainers recognised the need for them to help teachers develop their passion for teaching. They strongly agreed that motivated teachers build self-esteem and create interest in the learner.

What next?
The teacher trainers outlined what needed to be done in schools in order to foster positive learning environments through positive discipline. They said a whole paradigm shift needed to take place in schools in Zambia. They agreed that the implementation of positive discipline would be most effective when all the role-players were involved (i.e. the school management, the teachers, the learners and the parents) in creating a child-friendly learning environment focused on ‘the best interests of the child’ and involving ‘child participation’ in all matters that affect children. It should be an environment that not only promotes learners’ rights and responsibilities, but also enhances teacher capacity, morale and commitment. This discussion led to various roles and responsibilities being identified for the school management, teachers, learners and parents, in order to create an environment that embraces the notion of positive discipline.

Let us throw away the sticks!
On the last day in order to reflect the shift in the participants’ perception of corporal punishment, the group threw away sticks as a symbolic gesture acknowledging the effectiveness of positive discipline.

Conclusion
As a way forward, the participants agreed that they would present workshops to staff at their respective colleges either on their own, with support from the Zambia Civic Education Association, or with other participants at nearby colleges. In addition, they would design programmes for their students (teacher trainees) to promote the implementation of positive forms of discipline and advocate for the total prohibition of all forms of violence against children in all contexts, particularly the school and the home. Finally, all agreed that the group should meet with the Zambia Civic Education Association after these steps were implemented to discuss and review the resultant successes and challenges.
Vellum of the South African Council of Churches, addressing objections based on religious grounds, and a presentation by Nokuku Sipuka of the Umtata Child Abuse Resource Centre, addressing objections based on cultural grounds. Links between the history of violence in South Africa and the common use of violent disciplinary measures by parents were also addressed in a thought-provoking paper delivered by Carol Bower.

A major part of the programme focused on implementing parenting programmes in South Africa. Musa Mbere Ngcobo of the Department of Social Development noted the Department’s commitment to increase parenting programmes aimed at the preservation and strengthening of families. She also noted the importance of such programmes as part of prevention and early intervention services within the Children’s Act.

Childline South Africa and the National Association of Child Care Workers highlighted the importance of making quality parenting programmes available that recognise the range of needs of parents, including that parents must be supported in their efforts; that programmes should focus on positive parenting and not only on positive discipline; and that programmes must promote self-awareness in addition to increasing the knowledge and skills of parents.

The meeting discussed various challenges related to upscaling existing good quality parenting programmes to ensure their wider availability. In addition, in order to avoid rolling-out poor quality programmes, it was agreed that minimum standards must be in place and programmes must be research-based. It was suggested that positive parenting must be included in the basic training of all social service professionals. Certain groups, such as single parents, young parents, child-headed and ‘granny’-headed households and foster and adoptive parents, should be prioritised for delivery of programmes of this nature.

A statement was made by the representative from the national Department of Education that they saw no significant role for the Department to play in promoting parenting skills among learners. This was met with great concern by delegates. This has subsequently led to dialogue between the Department and the Working Group on Positive Discipline on the possibility of including a parenting curriculum within the life-skills curriculum at schools.

In conclusion, the discussion at the workshop highlighted key areas for moving forward:

- It was noted that many small, good quality programmes do exist, and that these must be made more accessible and be more widely available. It was also emphasised that poor quality programmes which are ineffective should not be rolled out or continued.
- The need to work with a range of community leaders and the religious sector was identified. This was seen as critical in order to change the mindsets of those who still support the notion of corporal punishment in the home and to equip them with the tools needed to promote positive parenting skills.
- It was recognised that social marketing campaigns have value and therefore should be explored in trying to ensure widespread support for a prohibition on corporal punishment in the home.
- It was agreed that advocacy with the Department of Education should be undertaken in order to include parenting skills in the life-skills curriculum at schools.
- It was thought that the National Prosecuting Authority and the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development must promote access to parenting programmes by means of diversion options for adults charged with assault against their children and through the increased orders available for children’s courts to utilise when children are found in need of care and protection as a result of being physically maltreated by their parents.