

Overview: Discipline and Punishment

Any person, teacher or parent, who has interaction with children over a period of time appreciates that they need a structure within which to live and function. There will be times when every child will want to go beyond that structure and behave in such a way that discipline and sometimes punishment is appropriate.

As adults we rightly accept that we are responsible for establishing the parameters of the structure. It also follows that we are responsible for seeing that the child's behaviour is modified, is taught right and wrong, is disciplined, and if necessary, punished.

A crucial part of the learning process for elementary school children is the relationship they have with their teacher. They naturally look to their teacher as an authoritative figure. If our approach is used the teacher will want to be an authoritative (not authoritarian) person possessing natural authority in the classroom.

Children do not want unlimited freedom nor do they possess sufficient maturity to follow their own inclinations for more than short periods of time. Authority (not authoritarianism) is an integral part of the teaching process. When this type of structure exists children will be happy to learn and, hopefully, discipline problems will occur less frequently than would otherwise be the case.

When discipline is necessary it should arise out of the relationship established between teacher and child. In this context the temperament of the child will determine, to a very great extent, the way the situation, misdemeanour, wrongdoing or whatever is handled. This is even more so in cases where punishment rather than just discipline is appropriate.

The teacher using our approach will have no place for corporal punishment; the real point concerning punishment is that it must not only carry action for the wrongdoing but that it must also be constructive. It must attempt to be therapeutic as well as creating harmony out of disharmony whenever this is possible.

If the teacher decides on a strategy of confrontation with a choleric child he is going to wear himself out as well as making very little headway with the child. There is little point in delaying punishment for the melancholic child or expecting the sanguine to have anything but a somewhat light-hearted attitude to any wrongdoing they have committed. The teacher should give the phlegmatic child time to adjust to the type of punishment that is appropriate.

In all cases however it is far better if the children already know in detail the parameters of acceptable behaviour. All children possess a concept of what is fair and will accept discipline and punishment if they believe it is just; that isn't to say they will like it but they will accept it.

In other cases where there exist deep-seated behavioural problems the teacher can do no more than attempt to bring about some change in behaviour patterns. Part of the general strategy of the teacher using our approach is to develop the affective and imaginative. This strategy through, for example, stories and dramas, can also play an important part in bringing about behavioural changes. The story or drama will also contain in detail the results of the wrongdoing on others. In this way the emphasis is on an appeal made to the child's imagination rather than on direct confrontation; in many cases this strategy is successful.