

# BASIC FACTS ABOUT CORPORAL PUNISHMENT



# FACT SHEET

Gender Research & Advocacy Project  
**LEGAL ASSISTANCE CENTRE**  
Windhoek, Namibia

## What is corporal punishment?

Corporal punishment is when a person in authority uses physical force with the intention of causing pain for disciplinary purposes. Corporal punishment of children usually includes things like smacking, slapping, spanking or beating with the hand or with some implement (like a stick or a belt). It can also involve other things, like kicking, shaking, pinching or burning.

Discipline is meant to teach a person the difference between right and wrong, not to cause injury. There is no need to inflict pain to discipline a child. There are many other forms of discipline which are much more effective.

The use of corporal punishment is not permitted in Namibian schools, although some instances of it are still reported. The Namibian Supreme Court ruled that corporal punishment in schools is a violation of children's constitutional right to human dignity.

Corporal punishment is used in many homes. There have been cases in Namibia where excessive physical force has been used against children in the home. There are cases where children have been seriously injured or burned. Some children have even been beaten to death.

## Why is corporal punishment a problem?

- Corporal punishment can turn into serious physical abuse.
- Corporal punishment teaches children that violence is an acceptable way of dealing with issues.
- Corporal punishment teaches children that it is okay to use violence against someone you love.
- Corporal punishment makes children more aggressive towards other children.
- Children who are exposed to violence are more likely to be violent as adults.
- Corporal punishment does not teach children the reason why their behaviour was wrong.
- Corporal punishment can affect self-esteem by making the victim feel scared, sad, ashamed or worthless.
- Corporal punishment can destroy the relationship between a child and the child's parents or caregiver.

**Child discipline is very important – without it, society would have many problems. The question is WHAT KIND of child discipline is most effective.**

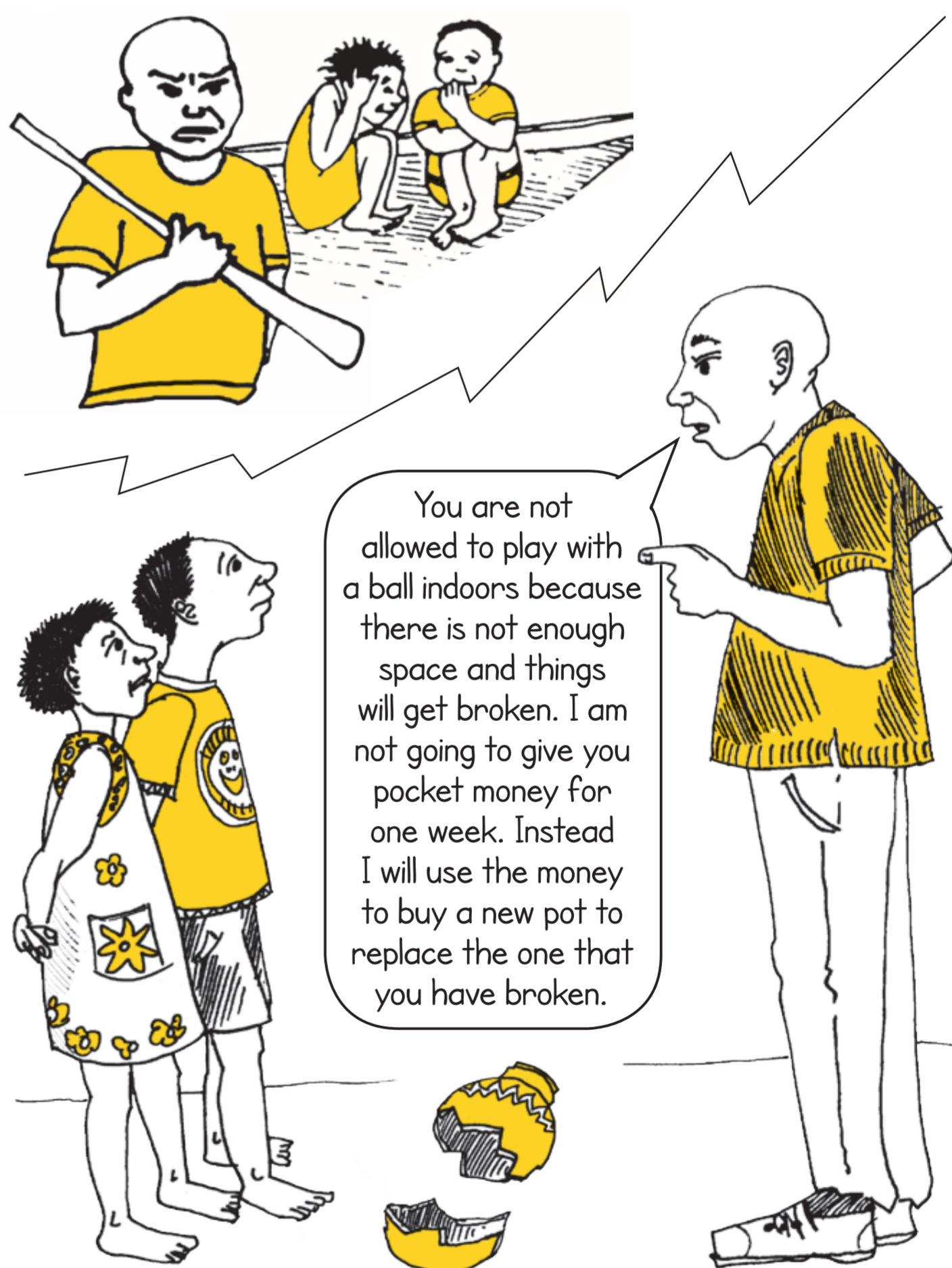
## Rights that are affected by corporal punishment

- right not to be subjected to torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment
- right to be protected from violence and abuse
- right to development, including the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health
- right to dignity and bodily integrity.

## Alternatives to corporal punishment

There are many other ways that children can be punished. Here are four examples:

- (1) **Explain the problem.**
- (2) **Make children take responsibility for their actions:** For example, if the child breaks something, he or she must fix it.
- (3) **“Time out”:** Sometimes children become overexcited and this can lead to bad behaviour. It can be effective to take the child out of the room to calm down, sit quietly and think about what he or she has done wrong.
- (4) **Take away privileges:** The punishment could be not watching television, not being allowed to visit friends or not receiving pocket money.



The Legal Assistance Centre has also produced a movie on alternatives to corporal punishment: **“A Betta Way”**.

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