

## **Extract from On Education - Punishment**

By Bertrand Russell

In former days, and until very recently, the punishment of children and boys and girls was taken as a matter of course, and was universally regarded as indispensable in education...Nowadays, few people would advocate such methods, even in Tennessee. But there is considerable divergence of opinion as to what should take their place. Some people still advocate a fair amount of punishment, while others consider that it is possible to dispense with punishment altogether. There is room for many shades between these two extremes.

For my part, I believe that punishment has a certain very minor place in education; but I doubt whether it need ever be severe. I include speaking sharply or reprovably among punishments. The most severe punishment that ought ever to be necessary is the natural spontaneous expression of indignation...I believe that reasonable parents create reasonable children. The children must feel their parent's affection - not duty and responsibility, for which no child is grateful, but warm love, which feels delight in the child's presence and ways. And except when it is quite impossible, a prohibition must be explained carefully and truthfully. Small misfortunes, such as bruises and slight cuts, should sometimes be allowed to happen rather than interfere with rash games; a little experience of this kind makes children more willing to believe that a prohibition may be wise. Where these conditions are present from the first I believe children will seldom do anything deserving of serious punishment.

When a child persistently interferes with other children, or spoils their pleasures, the obvious penalty is banishment. It is imperatively necessary to take steps of some kind, because it would be most unfair to let other children suffer. But there is no use in making the refractory child feel guilty, it is much more to the purpose to make him feel that his is missing pleasures which the others are enjoying.

It seems a simple principle that a punishment should be something you wish the culprit to dislike, not something you wish him to like...Mild punishments have their utility for dealing with mild offences, especially such as are concerned with manners. Praise and blame are an important form of rewards and punishments for young children, and also for older boys and girls if conferred by a person who inspires respect. I do not believe it possible to conduct education without praise and blame, but in regard to both a certain degree of caution is necessary.

Grave faults of character, such as cruelty, can seldom be dealt with by means of punishment. Of rather, punishment should be a very small part of the treatment. Or rather, punishment should be a very small part of the treatment. Cruelty to animals is more or less natural to boys, and requires for its prevention an education ad hoc. It is a very bad plan to wait until you find your boy torturing an animal, and then proceed to torture the boy. This only makes him wish he had not been caught.

All moral instruction must be immediate and concrete: it must arise out of a situation which has grown up naturally, and must go beyond what ought to be done in this particular instance. The child himself will apply the moral in other similar cases...If in spite of all your efforts, grave cruelty develops at a later age, the matter must be taken very seriously, and dealt with like an illness. The boy should be punished in the sense that unpleasant things should happen to him, just as they do when he has measles, but not in the sense that he should be made to feel wicked. He should be isolated for a while from other children and from animals, and it should be explained to him that it is not safe to let him associate with them. He should be made to realise, as far as possible, how he would suffer if he were cruelly treated. He should be made to feel that a great misfortune had befallen him in the shape of an impulse to cruelty, and that his elders were endeavouring to shield him from such a similar misfortune in the future. I believe that such methods would be completely successful in all except a few pathological cases.

Physical punishment I believe to be never right. In mild forms it does little harm, though no good; in severe forms I am convinced that it generates cruelty and brutality....it accustoms them to the idea that it may be right and proper to inflict physical pain for the purpose of maintaining authority - a peculiarly dangerous lesson to teach to those who are likely to acquire positions of power. And it destroys that relation of open confidence which ought to exist between parents and children, as well as between teachers and pupils.

To win the genuine affection of children is a joy as great as any that life has to offer. Our grandfathers did not know of this joy, and therefore did not know that they were missing it. They taught children that it was their duty to love their parents, and proceeded to make this duty almost impossible of performance...So long as people persisted in the notion that love could be commanded as a duty they did nothing to win it as a genuine emotion. Consequently human relations remained stark and harsh and cruel. Punishment was part of this whole conception...Mercifully, a better conception of the relations of parents and children has gradually won its way during the last hundred years, and with it the whole theory of punishment has been transformed. I hope that the enlightened ideas which begin to prevail in education will gradually spread to other human relations as well: for they are needed there just as much as in our dealings with our children.