

Human Rights Watch

Children's Rights

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2009/08/11/stop-beating-students-disabilities-schools>

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In the 2006-2007 school year, nearly a quarter of a million school children were subjected to corporal punishment in public schools. [Impairing Education](#), a report released yesterday by the [ACLU](#) and [Human Rights Watch](#), finds that students with disabilities -- who have a right to appropriate, inclusive educational programs that give them the opportunity to thrive -- are nonetheless subjected to this violent discipline at disproportionately high rates.

Corporal punishment -- from paddling to beating to throwing children into walls or floors -- is routine in public schools in many parts of the United States. [Impairing Education](#) documents many such cases. No student should be subjected to these abusive forms of discipline, but students with disabilities, who already face extra challenges, can be particularly vulnerable to physical or psychological harm from these punishments.

Anna M.'s son, who has autism, was seven years old when he was punished in school. She told me about an experience at his elementary school:

I'm in the front office ... They bring [my son] into the room. His nose is beet red. He lifts up his shirt sleeve, I get a glimpse of scratches all up his arm. I got overwhelmed, I couldn't focus ... I wanted to get my son to the doctor. I get him home and I take off his clothes. He was marked, top of his arms, under his arms, down his torso. He had a busted lip, which I hadn't noticed at first. He said, "they made me wash the blood off before I saw you."

Corporal punishment causes pain, humiliation, and in some cases deep bruising or other serious injury; it also can have long-lasting psychological consequences. Students with disabilities may see their underlying conditions worsened as a result. Furthermore, it creates a violent, degrading school environment in which all students -- and particularly students with disabilities -- may struggle to succeed.

Anna M.'s son has changed after he was restrained and beaten. He now struggles with anger, has had nightmares, is reluctant to leave his mother's side and fears running into the person that administered his punishment. Anna said, "I was afraid for his life, to be honest. He was 52 pounds, or maybe even less, at this point."

The use of corporal punishment on children with disabilities violates the right to freedom from cruel, degrading treatment and violence guaranteed to them under international human rights law. Children with disabilities have the right to an inclusive education, yet corporal punishment impinges on this right and creates barriers to their success.

There are positive, nonviolent approaches to school discipline that have been proven to lead to safe environments in which children can learn. Positive behavioral supports teach children why what they did was wrong and gives them the tools necessary to improve their behavior. The staff in our schools must be trained on how to discipline children effectively and humanely.

No child should be hit, especially the most vulnerable.

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