



## *Negotiating Trust and Power Parenting in the Context of Conflict Resolution*

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Author : Elizabeth Protacio-De Castro, Ph.D.  
Convenor, Psychosocial Trauma and Human Rights Program  
Center of Integrative and Development Studies  
University of the Philippines

Associate Professor, Department of Psychology  
College of Social Sciences and Philosophy  
University of the Philippines

Project manager : Dominique Pierre Plateau  
Graphic Design : Kittinart Malithong

Save the Children Sweden  
Regional Office for Southeast Asia and the Pacific  
Bangkok, Thailand  
Tel: +66 2 684 1046  
Fax: +66 2 684 1048  
Website: <http://seap.savethechildren.se>  
Email: [scs@seap.savethechildren.se](mailto:scs@seap.savethechildren.se)

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# Executive Summary

Conflict is an issue that occurs in everyday life and in different contexts. Learning how to effectively deal with conflict is an important step in addressing the physical punishment and emotional abuse of children. Conflict is a power relationship, and punishment is the assertion of that power. Society gives adults power over children on the assumption that they love them and have their best interests in mind.

Conflict resolution refers to settling a specific problem occurring at a specific time, in the quickest and most efficient way possible. Conflict management, on the other hand recognizes that conflict is an on-going process that has to be dealt with daily in our lives. Conflict transformation acknowledges that conflict changes everything (ourselves, feelings, relationships, ideas etc.) and seeks to know and identify patterns produced by the conflict. It includes both conflict resolution and management.

Part of finding solutions to physical punishment and emotional abuse requires teachers and parents to examine those things that they are already good or successful at, and using that to solve problematic situations with children. They need to look at alternative methods for problem solving by working with children rather than simply punishing them. The words ‘punishment’ and ‘discipline’ are often used interchangeably; but they are very different and represent distinct views on how to raise children. Punishment teaches children to be afraid of and resent authority, how to lie, and how to do things without getting caught. True discipline teaches children to be responsible and holds them accountable for their actions.

Part of the problem lies in the way that adults think about children and childhood. Childhood is a concept that is not properly understood by many cultures, and in particular the Asian culture. Children are assumed to be incomplete human beings without a mind of their own. They are thought to be weak and vulnerable with little competence to manage on their own. Childhood is also not appreciated and is considered to simply be a preparation for adulthood, which is the final destination.

The ideas that the family is inviolate and adults know best dominate the notion of family in Asian societies. Children are mistreated not only because they are physically smaller, but also because they are given a low status by society due to age, gender, birth status and birth order.

## *Punishment and Discipline*

The words punishment and discipline are used all the time often interchangeably; although, they represent two very distinct beliefs about how to raise children. In a study done by De la Cruz, et.al. (2001) on the evolving definitions of child abuse from the eyes of children and their parents, it was found that parents and other members of the extended family equated parenting (raising children) with discipline. It was also found that punitive measures accounted for majority of their child rearing strategies. The child who has done something wrong is punished in the hope that the behavior will not be repeated. The belief is that pain must be felt for learning to take place. The child may learn to fear getting caught and to avoid repeating the same behavior if the punishment is severe. Thus for punishment to be effective, it must be severe and the severity must increase with subsequent infractions.

Punishment (generally implies corporal punishment) is seldom directly related to the perceived offense. Regardless of the misbehavior, the punishment remains the same (e.g. spanking, hitting and other similar physical forms of punishment is the standard response for every undesirable behavior). The child learns nothing of real life consequences and grows up without the ability for self-discipline. Punishment teaches the child several things: 1) to be afraid of authority, 2) to resent authority, 3) how to lie and 4) how to do things without getting caught.

In the De la Cruz, et.al. (2001) study, majority of parents said that corporal punishment is necessary and this was done to instill obedience. For them a disobedient child is a “bad” child. Corporal punishment is also more frequently used on certain children: boys, children with disabilities and minority children. It was noted that the emphasis on corporal punishment as discipline increased and justified the abuse of children.

However, punishment is very different from discipline. The word “discipline” means “to teach” and the person who learns is a disciple of a loving authority. Discipline creates positive learning experiences. True discipline teaches children to be responsible for their actions and that they are held accountable for their choices. While punishment requires an angry parent and produces hostile and rebellious children; discipline requires

thinking and sensitive parent and produces cooperative and responsible children (Gibson, E. 2002).

The children, in the study (De la Cruz, et. al. 2001) had varied coping responses to the punitive measures inflicted on them. Some fought back, reasoned out and told their parents that what they did was wrong. They sought help from their teachers, the police or the child abuse hotline. But majority of them had “flight” reactions (run away from home and take to the streets). In the street they sought support from peer group or looked for role models outside the family. Children also coped by finding humor even the most damaging experiences. When one child said his father threw a hammer at him, the other child commented that he probably mistook the child’s head for a nail. Another said he simply focused on studying harder so that he will have a future despite their bleak situation and the rest said they simply endured the pain or kept their angry feelings to themselves. Generally children were resilient and able to cope with the situation

## *Notions of Family and Children in Asian Societies*

Two ideas dominate the notion of family in most Asian societies: 1) the family is inviolate and 2) parents and adult members of the extended family know best. The family as the basic unit of society is the most important institution and is considered sacred. Thus, families jealously guard the family name and protect its sanctity at all costs. Parents find it difficult to deal with a situation where their authority is undermined. Children learn that if they behave poorly, they shame the whole family. Family problems must be hidden and kept secret and no person outside the extended family system is allowed to intervene.

There are also several assumptions about childhood and growing up in Asian societies that we need to look at. It is assumed that children do not have a mind of their own and therefore cannot think for themselves. Parents, as adults, have a better perspective and wider experience and therefore know what is best for their children. Thus, Asian cultures don’t usually encourage discussing personal problems. Children are socialized into thinking

that parents express their love through hard work and sacrifice and do not need to be vocal nor expressive about their affection towards their children.

Parents look at children as incomplete persons because they lack certain faculties necessary to be considered adult. Therefore children are weak and vulnerable and need a lot of protection and guidance from adults. A child does not become an adult until he/she is taught or trained to become one. Childhood is therefore just a preparation for adulthood, so the whole notion of parenting is a process of shaping children to become proper adults. Thus parenting or raising children is a matter of implementing do's and don't's based on what's right or wrong according to cultural standards. It is not common for parents to consult children in matters affecting them because of the prevailing belief that no parent wishes harm on their children.

Yet adults exercise power over children in many ways that are often harmful. The most obvious is the physical advantage they have over children (they are bigger and stronger) thus it is so easy to inflict corporal punishment. But this strength is beyond the physical because they have the power to command, decide and judge all facets of children's lives. The adults' unquestioned authority is sanctioned by society's norms that older persons should be respected by younger persons no matter what and that men/boys are superior over women/girls. To respect has also meant to obey, to conform and not to contradict. Thus adults have the final say on practically everything.

Two elements come into play in the discussion of corporal punishment and discipline in families: trust and power. Both elements characterize the relationship between the child and the adult. Society gives the adult the power and authority over children on the assumption that they love children and have only their best interests in mind. Thus, being punished by a person one trusts or love presents conflicting feelings for the child and hurts deeply because a child's sense of safety and security is lost. The confidence that he/she will be protected, loved and cared for by the significant adult is shattered. Sometimes there is a sense of betrayal especially if other adults in the extended family support or condone this arrangement.

It is said that children are maltreated not because they are children but because they are accorded a lowly status by society because of their age, gender, size, status and even birth order. Children's rights are considered more as privileges by most parents. The adults' power over children are reinforced and perpetuated not only by culturally acceptable child rearing practices but is also legitimized by the state. Thus in an attempt to get out of this bind, both parties have to constantly negotiate this relationship of trust and power, preferably supported by protective state mechanisms.

## *Dealing with Conflict in Families and the Community*

Conflict is a part of everyday family life. Addressing the issue of corporal punishment is learning how to deal with conflict in the family and community. If correctly managed, it can be productive and constructive, helping persons grow, understand each other better and producing genuinely harmonious relationships. It should be our goal to turn conflict situations into opportunities for learning and growth and make these lead to positive changes. Learning how to deal with conflict in non-violent ways is a mark of good parenting and presents a long-term solution to the problem of corporal punishment. It must be emphasized that a necessary prerequisite for this process is the participation and involvement of children in assessing the problem and proposing the solutions.

Conflict resolution means settling specific problems at hand in the most efficient way and the soonest time possible. Sometimes, however, this is rather limited in scope because it does not necessarily resolve relationships issues where the root causes of the problem often lie. It creates the impression that a conflict has ended when it was simply abated. There are four main approaches to resolving conflict in a non-violent way. These are: 1) good communication 2) negotiation and mediation and 3) problem solving and decision-making and 4) dialogue

## 1) Communication

Good communication in the family is key to conflict resolution. Young people when referring to problems they have with their parents say there is a communication gap between them. Thus, we must create positive conditions in the family where both parties (parent/significant others and children) are open and willing to hear and talk things out. Certain skills are necessary for this to happen. The following are communication skills that need to be fostered and improved: 1) effective and active listening, 2) observing, 3) appreciative inquiry and 4) non-aggressive telling.

Active listening is the process of understanding what is being communicated. Observing is not only listening but also taking note of non-verbal ways of communicating and checking whether this is consistent with what is being said. In other words one also listens to what is not being said. Appreciative inquiry is asking questions in a sensitive way to allow for better understanding of what is being said and looking for deeper meanings and implications. Non-aggressive telling means saying things in a manner not offensive to the other party.

In the Asian context, indirect and informal ways of communicating are preferred over the more direct, formal and straightforward ways of the West. Casual conversations are better than confrontational ones because generally people do not want to offend. Thus if we are to discipline and help children, we must find more creative ways of bringing both parties to talk things out in a situation where they do not lose face. Children in the Philippine study (Dela Cruz et. al., 2001) said that worst form of punishment was being confronted and shouted at by their parents in public because this humiliated them.

## 2) Negotiation and Mediation

Negotiation is a process by which two parties with opposing needs seek to meet those needs amicably. In family situations where there are conflicting needs, it is important to teach both parents/significant adults, but most especially children, to explain what they want and negotiate their positions in a manner that is understood and accepted by the other party. According to Wardley (2003) parents are less likely to have violent children when they take time to explain and negotiate rules with

them and listen to children's views.

Negotiation skills are crucial in the formulation and implementation of rules of conduct and good behavior within the family so that both sides are part of the process and happy with the results. If this does not happen easily given the difficult situations families are in, mediation can take place.

Mediation is a form of negotiation that involves a neutral third party, who can help opposing parties to focus on the problem, understand each other, communicate effectively and come up with a decision that will benefit both. The third party acts as an intermediary and facilitates communication. The intermediary is usually an older person known and respected by both parties, perceived as fair and unbiased in his/her views and has good facilitation skills. The practice of having intermediaries to help resolve conflicts is very common and found effective in the Asian context. It is also possible that older siblings sometimes share some parenting roles in the family and are expected to intervene and help settle conflicts.

Good negotiation entails focusing on solving the problem, not finding blame; trying to respond to the other's real needs rather than their stated position on the issue; generating as many options as possible for meeting both party's needs. In mediation, the acting mediator should begin by listening to both parties' sides of the story. Both should be given time to speak and to express their feelings about the matter. The next step is to facilitate problem solving.

## 3) Problem-Solving

Collective and consultative decision-making or problem solving is an important tool for conflict resolution. Decisions imposed by persons in authority on children increases the probability of conflict. When parents/significant adults and children come together to talk about the problem, the various options or possible solutions and the pros and cons of each, they are more likely to come up with a choice that is appropriate for the situation and that they can commit to. Thus children should be given more options even the option to choose between two given consequences. Even very young children can be given a choice, while older children could solve the problem with support and guidance from

parents and other significant adults.

#### 4) Dialogue

Dialogue allows both parents/significant others and children to reach out to each other with mutual respect despite some differences and misunderstandings. Dialogue requires openness and patience for both parties to be able to go through the process together. It may not immediately solve the problem but it helps make both parties ready and willing to find a solution. Family meetings, group sessions, inter-generational dialogues have proven to be effective in resolving conflicts in families. In the Asian context opportunities for dialogue are present during regular family social gatherings and auspicious occasions. They should not be too formal and contrived but instead more casual and informal.

### *Conflict Management and Transformation*

Conflict management is different from conflict resolution in that it recognizes that conflict is on-going and not a one time event. Therefore, it has to be dealt with as a continuing process in our daily lives. This is based on the assumption that if we can mitigate conflict, then, it can be prevented, avoided or minimized.

Conflict transformation recognizes that conflict changes everything (ourselves, feelings, relationships, ideas, etc.) and seeks to know and identify patterns produced by conflict. It asks why conflict happens, why it appears unavoidable in daily life, and what structures in ourselves, families and the prevailing society makes conflict inevitable. It includes both resolution and management. However, it is focused not only on resolving issues but also on seeking changes at four levels where conflict happens: personal, relational (you and others), structural (family, schools, organizations etc.), and cultural (beliefs, traditions, technology, etc.)

### *Indigenous Models of Conflict Disentanglement*

Sta. Maria (2002) in her study, criticized the above mentioned methods and concepts of conflict resolution and management as being too western and more appropriate for individualist cultures, but not relevant to collectivist cultures in Asia. This means the same conflict situation is interpreted differently by the two cultures. Individualistic cultures tend to view conflict as the result of infringements to a person's self, whether these are material aspects (one's job, money or property) or non-material aspects (e.g. autonomy, freedom of decision, etc.). On the other hand, collectivist cultures tend to view the same conflict as violations that involve a failure to repay one's obligations to others, to protect one's reputation, or as a result of one's efforts to separate one's self from others.

Culture plays an important role in defining conflict situations and resolving it. The collectivist form of resolution is more aptly described as a process of disentanglement rather than resolution or management. The process of moral negotiation is itself seen to be more important than the specific outcomes or decisions. It also suggests that the entanglement blocks productive activity and should thus be addressed by the community before it negatively affects normal social life.

This difference on how conflict is viewed also results in a difference on how conflict is handled. The table below summarizes these differences<sup>1</sup>:

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<sup>1</sup> Table is by Jandt & Pendersen, 1996, taken from Sta. Maria, Madelene (2002) *The Indigenous Psychology of Conflict and Conflict Resolution*.

Individualist	Collectivist
<p>For resolution (i.e. mediation) to begin, individual participants must first accept and acknowledge that there is a conflict.</p> <p>The resolution or mediation process must often be kept private. Meetings for reconciliation will be attended only by those involved in the conflict.</p>	<p>Before resolution (i.e. mediation) to begin, traditional groups must first accept and acknowledge the existence of a conflict. The process of resolution becomes an act of social purification undertaken primarily for the community</p> <p>The conflict must be made public before the resolution process can begin. The process of resolution serves the community's interests rather than the individual's. Importance is given to community meetings where issues are discussed and where individuals voice their concerns publicly.</p>
<p>Conflict management is achieved when individuals are taught skills on how to resolve conflicts effectively. Skills training is important to make conflicting parties equally matched in the resolution process.</p>	<p>Conflict management is done through preventive measures such as monitoring and mediating stress. Focus is given to harmony, community participation, and the reduction of competitive conflict.</p>
<p>Resolution or mediation is defined by the individuals in conflict. The resolution procedures and outcomes are often dictated by the more powerful party.</p>	<p>The conflict and its resolution are defined by the group. An accepted way to deal with conflict is to start with the group with whom the individuals have communal relations, e.g. the family. The group's additional or accepted resolution processes are acknowledged.</p>
<p>Conflict settlements are usually devoid of ritual and spirituality. Resolution involves a transformation in the relationship between the parties.</p>	<p>Conflict settlements are often accompanied by ritual and spirituality. Transformed along with interpersonal relations are relations with a spiritual being or force.</p>
<p>A face-to-face dispute resolution is preferred.</p>	<p>Dispute resolution is preferred to be undertaken through intermediaries.</p>
<p>Court settlements are preferred over traditional or "alternative" dispute resolution procedures.</p>	<p>Relying on courts to resolve or mediate conflict signifies that the conflict resolution attempt has failed.</p>

## ***Parenting Practices that Address the Issue of Corporal Punishment***

### ***Promoting Positive Parenting Skills and Attitudes***

After exploring the complexity of conflict resolution, management and transformation in addressing corporal punishment, it is not easy to give simple statements or

prescriptions of do's and don't's on parenting. No one is ever fully prepared for the job of raising children. However, it is still necessary to take stock of what we know and check our behavior and attitudes toward children in order to identify more positive ways of raising them in non-violent ways at the individual/personal, family and community levels.

In the book "Parenting Towards Solutions", Metcalf (1997) explains how parents can use skills they already have to raise responsible loving kids. For example, parents can mine their own resources by looking at what

they are already good or successful at doing and use that to find solutions to problematic situations with their children. She points out that family members can sometimes also be a good resource because no one knows the family better than the members themselves.

Instead of looking for problems, O'Hanlon and Weiner-Davis (1989) encouraged parents to see problems differently, focusing less on why problems occurred and more on when they did not (e.g. look for the exceptions). Consider statements like "he is always hyperactive or she is constantly angry". These statements are generalizations and do not include exceptions and therefore will not be helpful in providing possible solutions.

Changing the way we describe the problem will also help. Instead of saying the child is failing in school, we rephrase that and say the child is not passing at this time or if the child is disruptive, we say instead the child does not know how to follow the rules yet. If our perception of others can influence how we act towards them, then re-describing their actions may also change our behavior towards them. It is crucial here to step into the child's world view which is often not easy for parents.

On a more practical level, it is good to know how parent/adult can properly deal with anger. It is important for parents/adults to work on and through one's anger. Managing conversations rather than fighting battles often means listening to children and respecting their point of view. Parents/significant others must be careful with words and avoid name-calling and labeling or itemizing past wrongs because it can be humiliating. Children want parents/adults to explain their mistakes to them without getting angry. However, parents/significant others should accept that they may occasionally lose their temper and should be ready to apologize for mistakes. Immediately make children safe by communicating positive feelings and let them to express their fears.

Allow children to be angry as well, but not to hurt themselves or others in the process. Children have to learn how to express their anger in a constructive way by showing them ways to expend their energy (talking, playing, writing, drawing, singing, telling stories, etc...). For children it is necessary that they know that it is okay to speak out and complain or find a mechanism or an intermediary to express these complaints. Open up possibilities for children to negotiate with parents and

other significant adults.

Still the question remains for most parents and significant adults, how do we make/train children to obey or change the undesirable behavior. Trying to make children more responsible, more expressive, more reasonable is an invitation for them to be more obedient to parents' definitions of how they think children should be. But it rarely ever works. The most likely response will be disobedience, an inability to respond at all, anger, withdrawal, failure, resentment. (Cade, 1994).

It should be equally important to ask how we can teach parents to stop using approaches that don't work with children (e.g. corporal punishment) and reflect on their own limitations and shortcomings as parents. Brian Cade (1994) listed some other approaches that do not work:

- 1.) The unsolicited advice or lecture (e.g. nagging, hinting, begging, pleading, repeated appeals to logic or common sense)
- 2.) Taking the moral high ground (e.g. "If you really love me you'll do what I want", "Look how desperate and worried I am about you")
- 3.) Self sacrifice and denial (e.g. constantly trying to please everybody, putting your life permanently on hold, hoping your child will change and overly protecting children from the consequences of their actions)
- 4.) Do it spontaneously please (e.g. "I'd like you to show me more affection but I'll only accept it if you do it because you want to")

Some simple practical suggestions that worked especially for younger children are story telling sessions that promote certain values and build on understanding and empathy or engaging in art activities. For older children, another way was injecting humor in tense situations so that the message comes across in a light and funny way. These usually helped them remember better. For children of all ages, one must provide positive feedback when they've done something right but let them experience the consequences of misbehaving as long as it does not harm on them.

Finally, it is important for parents/significant adults to model good and non-violent behavior, set the example by practicing what one preaches as well as communicate love and respect to children.

## ***Fostering A Child-centered Environment in Families and Communities***

People and institutions in the child's life, starting with their families, have to be sensitized about children's rights and on ways and approaches in fostering a child-centered environment. But we should not fall into the trap of pitting children against parents if we want to succeed. This can be done through parent education programs that includes values education and also specifically address the issue of corporal punishment. Another way is the promotion of children's participation in all aspects of family life, and seeking solutions through dialogue, listening, and taking into account everyone's views. Celebrating family traditions and rituals have been found to create a positive family atmosphere conducive to dialogue and reconciliation.

However, there are times when a child experiences violence including corporal punishment and discloses this to other family members, friends or neighbors, but the latter are usually reluctant to intervene. Thus, there is a need to ensure that children are able to confide to others about their experiences, and are given appropriate attention especially when dialogue and other intra-family efforts fail. This is a challenge to overcome in any education and awareness-raising efforts, especially in families and communities.

There is a need to put in place at the community level a network of services and programs that offer meaningful help to the children and their families, adequate social and economic support for the family, and legal intervention to hold those responsible for their behavior towards children. Children's emergency support hotlines should be established and made available to children. In places with limited telecommunication facilities, mother's groups and church organizations in the community usually are tapped to handle disclosures, receive and monitor reports of corporal punishment of children in families.

In Asian societies, families confronting domestic violence such as corporal punishment avoid entering the juvenile court systems and usually settle conflicts at the community level. Local leaders who hold the task of being arbiters in conflicts should be trained to uphold

the child's best interest when handling cases, and serve as a tool for promoting peace in communities and families.

Parents and other adult caregivers can be advocates for peace in their families and communities. They can be advocates for less violence in the media, for the inclusion of peace education courses in schools, and training of students in peer mediation. They can lead in the advocacy for cultural practices that build peace – such as *kanduli* (peace ceremony) in the Philippines, in place of *rido* (clan wars) in settling conflicts.

In this task, it is important that elder members of the society, afforded a higher place in the hierarchy of responsibility and authority in Asian societies, are tapped as allies in peace building and advocacy. Children can be partners in peace-building efforts, and their voices against violence in the home and elsewhere can serve as an inspiration for adults.

## ***Nurturing A Culture of Peace in Families and Communities***

In the manual, we, at the UPCIDS-PST developed on "Teaching Peace, Human Rights and Conflict Resolution" (2003), the concept of peace was defined in terms of four components: 1) harmony with oneself, 2) harmony with others, 3) harmony with nature and 4) harmony with a higher being or God. A person in harmony with oneself is stable and integrated in mind, body and spirit. Harmony with others stresses the importance of one's interconnectedness with each other and finding a part of oneself in others in a kind of shared identity. Harmony with nature is simply an extension of our interconnectedness not only with other human beings but with all living and non-living things in our environment. Communing with nature gives the effect of being in a calm and meditative state. Finally, genuine and lasting peace is attained only when we are connected to a higher being or God that gives the ultimate meaning to our existence as human beings.

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**Save the Children**

Save the Children Sweden Regional Office  
for Southeast Asia and the Pacific

Bangkok, Thailand

Tel: +66 2 684 1046

Fax: +66 2 684 1048

Website: <http://seap.savethechildren.se>

Email: [scs@seap.savethechildren.se](mailto:scs@seap.savethechildren.se)