

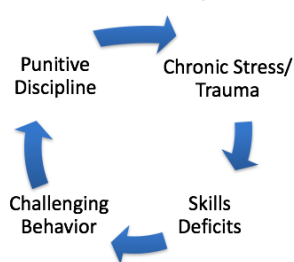
## **Behaviourist approaches:** Why consequences can be ineffective and inappropriate

It can be wrongly assumed that 'rewards' and 'sanctions' are the best ways to promote positive behaviour. However, research highlights that reactive punitive measures to 'manage' behaviour (e.g. consequences, behaviour points, removal of preferred activities, time-out, detentions, isolations, exclusions etc) are often ineffective. They are also often inappropriate for children with additional emotional needs or those with trauma histories, and can increase the likelihood of behaviours that challenge. This is because approaches:

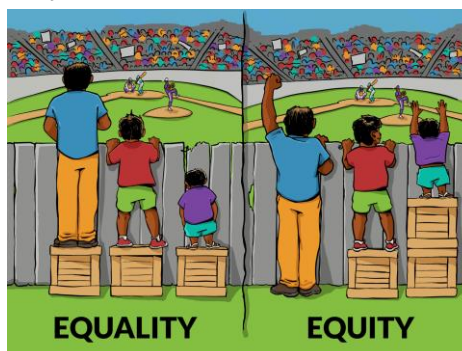
- Do not meet the underlying reasons for the behaviours.
- Do not address what children/young people are communicating with their behaviours.
- Do not address the unmet needs driving the behaviours.
- Just target the symptoms not the causes.
- Do not teach children/young people the skills to emotionally/behaviourally regulate.
- Can further exacerbate the emotional needs that are driving (/the cause of) the behaviours. For example, triggering a sense of shame and rejection, which can impact on self-esteem, as well as sense of belonging to school, and therefore behaviour (becoming a vicious cycle).
- Promote extrinsic (reliance on external factors) rather than intrinsic (personal) motivation.
- May not promote generalisation of behaviour change to other settings, people and places long-term, and may just repress inappropriate behaviours in the short-term.
- Takes control away from the young person, which can lead them to make further efforts to meet their need for a sense of control (in order to feel safe) through their behaviour.
- Can create a power imbalance, which impacts on relationships.
- Can lead to resentment, which can damage relationships that promote healing (Perry: *"Relationships are the agents of change and the most powerful therapy is human love."*).
- Are too future-oriented. Often children's brains are in survival mode during behaviour incidents, and for a while after, and consequently children are unable to make connections between the behaviour and consequence, nor reflect on their behaviour.
- Does not take into account neurobiology, and address the impact of trauma on the brain and executive functioning skills in leading to emotional and behavioural dysregulation.
- Can discriminate on the basis of the young person's emotional needs, as children/young people who have experienced trauma often have less control over their emotional/behavioural regulation skills or may not have yet learnt these skills.
- Can reinforce these behaviours for children who self-sabotage in order to receive the punitive strategies they are so familiar with and which fit with their negative sense of self.
- For children who have experienced trauma such as domestic violence, authoritative approaches can trigger their prior experiences, leading to escalation and being further retraumatised.

Punitive discipline only serves to lead to more stress/trauma, becoming a vicious cycle. If a school's behaviour policy is not working for all children/young people, then we must differentiate that policy (we differentiate for learning needs, so we need to differentiate for emotional needs), or we need to change the policy to be more inclusive for all students.

Cycle of Chronic Stress/ Trauma  
and Punitive Discipline



Adapted from Ablon and Pollastri, The School Discipline Fix, 2018



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