

Current Landscape

Never before in human history have people been so disconnected with their families and communities. And, that disconnect, unfortunately, extends among cultures. We are far from being culturally inclusive and celebratory of diversity... an open society. In the last several decades we have also become increasingly mobile. One hundred years ago it was very rare for people to leave the communities in which they were born. Now it is the norm...

Most of us can remember growing up in neighborhoods where it was accepted – and even encouraged for ANY adult to ‘parent’ the children in the neighborhood. This has all changed, resulting in an unprecedented loss in social capital.

We are more disconnected than we have ever been before...a paradox because we are ‘connected’ electronically 24/7. Our communities may be changing or we may not be connected to the communities we have. Think about your meaningful connections with your neighbors...your school community...your faith community. Knowing people casually and *being in community* with people is different.

Additionally, over the past couple of generations, schools have become singularly focused on academics and the ‘whole child’ focus has been grossly diminished. This is why we are experiencing a targeted focus on Social Emotional Learning (SEL). Children are suffering because they are thinking, feeling and relational beings, and the years of treating them as though school should focus exclusively on their academic development has taken a drastically negative toll.

Play and socializing is a Childs’ work, and that has gotten lost in this transition. During this same period there has often become a palatable division between perspectives and values of school and home. No longer can there be an expectation that parents/guardians will support educators when it comes to behavior, relationships and values. Consequently, even though ‘*punishing*’ children *never* worked to change behavior, it was far more likely that meting out exclusionary discipline (punishment) would result in behavior changes. This was only true for those children who tested limits and only needed to be ***shamed and cornered once***. It worked because parents/guardians supported teachers’ and administrators’ decisions and consequences unconditionally. Children are ‘hard-wired’ to please those they look up to and care about. There was no other place to go when both school and home agreed. However, exclusionary discipline (punishment) never worked for children that needed to be punished repeatedly. Since there is no longer a unified front between school and home, we are seeing vividly the truth about the success of exclusionary discipline/punishment. ***It does not work, and never has.***

Behavior, exactly like academics, is skill based and if a child does not have the skills, they need to be taught. Punishing a child is absurd when they lack the skills to add, read, solve problems, etc. We teach and provide support; over and over and over until they acquire the necessary skills to be able to add, read and solve problems. It is no different with behavior. We need to teach and provide support; over and over and over until they acquire the necessary skills to be able to share, speak appropriately, keep their hands to themselves, etc.