

# Reducing violence against children through using positive discipline in parenting

## Association for Community Development (ACD), Bangladesh

### THE CONTEXT IN BANGLADESH

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- Gender discrimination is widespread and traditional gender stereotypes restrict women and girls' freedoms and opportunities. Women and children face physical abuse and sexual violence because they are not well protected within their homes and families.
- Children's rights are violated not only by outsiders but also by parents, family members and community members. During the pandemic, children in ACD's working area reported feeling increasingly insecure and vulnerable to sexual abuse, trafficking and exploitation.
- COVID-19 exacerbated the already prevalent risk of domestic violence. Families often live in very cramped conditions and school closures meant that children were at home. Most males regularly consume alcohol. These factors led to children being increasingly vulnerable, with rates of violence increasing and children being punished physically and mentally in their homes.

### THE PRACTICE: POSITIVE DISCIPLINE IN EVERYDAY PARENTING (PDEP)

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ACD identified that a behavioural shift in the way that parents interact with children was urgently needed. ACD decided to directly work with parents to help them build good relationships with their children and to prevent the ongoing physical and humiliating punishment being experienced by children on a daily basis.

Until this time, the general attitude of parents in the community was that they were entitled to treat their children in whatever way they wanted. They were punitive and restrictive in their interaction with children, especially while disciplining.

To address this, a change in family dynamics was needed that would ease strains in the parent-child relationship and lead to the development of healthy relationships through self-reflection by parents. Parents needed to be informed and supported about the right way to raise and care for children: this included helping them to improve their understanding of child rights.

Positive discipline is an approach to parenting that teaches children and guides their behaviour, while respecting their rights to healthy development, protection from violence and participation in their learning. It enhances parents' knowledge about identifying long-term child-rearing goals, understanding how children think and feel and problem solving. For parents, it develops a social and emotional connection between themselves and their children.

## HOW THE PRACTICE WAS IMPLEMENTED

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### Assessment and preparation

To understand the extent of the increase in violence during the pandemic and to find out which households were affected, ACD conducted a short survey in the community. Even though staff could not conduct field visits due to COVID-19 restrictions, ACD worked with leaders of both the child rights forum and the youth forum who are well-known figures in the community. Frontline workers from the communities in ACD's operational area kept in close contact with group leaders from both forums who were able to identify cases of violence. The survey results provided ACD with information about the increase in violence and helped identify families it needed to work with.

When restrictions started to ease, staff held managed one-on-one meetings with parents and children to understand the situation of violence in their family settings. ACD then trained its staff on positive discipline as an approach to parenting. Aspects of what constitutes good parenting were covered, including being sensitive to the child's individual needs and temperament. ACD staff were also trained on COVID-19 protection measures, so that they could safely support children and their families in the community by following safety measures – these included protocols such as handwashing, maintaining safe distance and wearing masks at all times.

### Training parents on positive discipline in parenting

ACD staff formed parents' groups – a mixed group with both parents and separate mothers' and fathers' groups with 15-20 members per group. Only those parents whose children experienced or identified having been abused at home were selected for these groups.

Each of the parents' groups took part in eight sessions over eight weeks. The sessions addressed issues such as identifying long-term child-rearing goals, providing warmth and structure, understanding how children think and feel and problem solving. Key areas covered with parents included child rights, child protection, reproductive and sexual rights and the importance of children's education. Parents were made aware about the importance of being sensitive to the needs of the child and of having a child-centred approach in their parenting. They were sensitised about the negative impact of recurrent beating and scolding, which make children feel less respected and influence the development of low self-esteem. ACD focused on improved parenting by building a positive relationship between children and their parents through positive discipline. Sessions were geared towards changing the perception of fathers around their roles in child-rearing, to move away from the mindset that raising children is solely a mother's duty. A session was held on how to seek support from the government for any special schemes or programmes which would benefit the community.

Follow-up was carried out with parents who received training to identify the positive impact of the training; their children were also consulted about how the intervention made a difference in their lives. The whole process was carried out sensitively after building rapport with the children. All sessions were conducted by trained ACD staff.

## Evaluating the effectiveness of the training

A pre-test was conducted before the sessions began. Parents were asked about how children were being treated at home, how they saw their children in the future and what they thought about the parent-child relationship

A post-test was conducted on the day of the last session to identify the changes in the parents after PDEP training. After three weeks, another follow-up was carried out with parents and their children to assess the change with regard to whether children felt they were in safe families with improved family dynamics.

## HOW THE PRACTICE WAS CONDUCTED IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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When COVID-19 restrictions were high, the survey questionnaire at the start of the exercise was carried out using mobile phones. The sessions were conducted in small groups with only four to five children so that social distancing could be practiced. COVID-19 appropriate behaviour was maintained by trainers and the parents who came for the session were also encouraged to adhere to the guidelines to protect themselves and their family. Parents were given helpline numbers to report incidents of violence and child rights violations.

## IMPACT

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- Thirty parents (fathers and mothers) took part in PDEP sessions.
- Children whose parents received the training said that their parents' mindset had changed, that parents now ensure their rights, basic needs, and education. They also reported a day-by-day change in the incidence of violence, which had previously been very frequent.
- Parents agreed during the follow-up that before the training they would frequently become angry. Around 40 to 60 per cent of parents reported a change in their behaviour towards their children as a result of the sessions.
- ACD stayed in touch with the parents and children through regular monitoring, which included assessment of how parents were practicing the positive discipline approach at home.

## WHY THE PRACTICE WAS EFFECTIVE

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The sessions helped parents understand:

- The importance of parenting, and commit to identifying and following child-rearing goals.
- That children's behaviour is a way of communicating their emotions and needs.
- That long-term solutions that develop children's own self-discipline and their life-long skills are based on positive discipline techniques of non-violence, empathy, self-respect, human rights and respect for others.

### VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY



**“From PDEP training I have learned many unknown topics which is very helpful for our children’s growing up. Before PDEP training we never thought parents have something to learn regarding proper caring for children. I thought mother’s role is very important for childcaring. But in the training, I came to know that the father is also equally significant for the well-being of a child.”**

Father, 30 years old