



Videos of teachers hitting children

UNICEF comment
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UNICEF is mandated by the United Nations General Assembly to advocate for the protection of children’s rights, to help meet their basic needs and to expand their opportunities to reach their full potential. We welcome the opportunity to provide input on the Oversight Board’s consideration of two videos depicting teachers violently disciplining children in school settings. We appreciate Meta’s referral of these cases, which raise urgent and important questions about children and their rights.

UNICEF submits that:

- **The circulation of videos depicting teachers violently disciplining children can have serious, and often devastating, consequences – not only for the children featured but also for their families and for children more broadly.**
- **Such content can re-traumatise the child involved, violate their right to privacy, and lead to stigmatisation, bullying, or exploitation. These risks are amplified on platforms like Facebook, where algorithmic and design decisions often incentivise the creation and rapid spread of sensationalist or emotionally charged content. Measures such as blurring faces are not sufficient to protect the identity, dignity, and privacy of a child.**
- **Limiting depictions of child abuse on social media should not be viewed as a barrier to accountability, but rather a necessary safeguard for the rights and well-being of individual children and children at large. Efforts to pursue justice and reform, including through social media, can and must be carried out without sharing content that strips children of their dignity and integrity.**

Violent discipline: A recognised global human rights violation

Every child has the right to be free from all forms of violence, including ‘physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse.’ⁱ

Several provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child directly address violence. These include:



- Article 19: protection from all forms of violence
- Article 28(2): school discipline must be administered consistently with a child's dignity
- Article 37(a): prohibition against torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment
- Article 16: the right to respect privacy, which extends to the protection of a child's bodily integrity, and
- Article 6: the right to survival and development.

Children's right to respect for their human dignity, physical and psychological integrity, and equal protection under the law are also recognised in other international and regional human rights instruments.ⁱⁱ

Like all companies, social media platforms have a responsibility to respect children's rights in relation to the digital environment. The UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights articulate the business responsibility to identify, prevent, and mitigate human rights (including children's rights) related risks of their activities.ⁱⁱⁱ UNICEF has developed numerous resources to guide companies in meeting this responsibility, including a methodology for conducting child rights impact assessments in relation to the digital environment (D-CRIA Toolbox)^{iv} and forthcoming disclosure recommendations to strengthen corporate reporting on these impact areas.^v

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has made it clear that all forms of violence against children, regardless of severity, frequency, or intent, are unacceptable.^{vi} This includes forms of violent discipline, also known as 'corporal punishment'. The Committee defines 'corporal' or 'physical' punishment as:

.... any punishment in which physical force is used and intended to cause some degree of pain or discomfort, however light. Most involves hitting ("smacking", "slapping", "spanking") children, with the hand or with an implement - a whip, stick, belt, shoe, wooden spoon, etc. But it can also involve, for example, kicking, shaking or throwing children, scratching, pinching, biting, pulling hair or boxing ears, forcing children to stay in uncomfortable positions, burning, scalding or forced ingestion (for example, washing children's mouths out with soap or forcing them to swallow hot spices). In the view of the Committee, corporal punishment is invariably degrading. In addition, there are other non-physical forms of punishment that are also cruel and degrading and thus incompatible with the Convention. These include, for example, punishment which belittles, humiliates, denigrates, scapegoats, threatens, scares or ridicules the child.^{vii}

Despite these clear international legal standards, and the well-documented short- and long-term harms of violence against children, including its social and economic costs,^{viii} violent discipline remains widely practiced and accepted by many parents, caregivers, teachers, and others responsible for children's care and protection.

Severe consequences for children, their families, and society

The circulation of videos depicting teachers violently disciplining children can have serious, and often devastating, consequences – not only for the children featured but also for their families and for children more broadly.

For victims, this content captures a moment of abuse that, when shared, can lead to re-traumatisation, public humiliation, and long-term psychological harm. This is particularly concerning given the permanence and potentially viral nature of digital content. The circulation of such content violates children’s dignity and privacy and can expose them to bullying or further victimisation, particularly when they are identifiable, either visually or through contextual clues. Families of victims may also be negatively impacted, facing invasions of privacy, harassment, stigma, or even retaliation. Given the permanence of digital content, these risks are never removed.

Beyond individual cases, the widespread sharing of such content can harm children collectively by inadvertently reinforcing harmful social norms like violent discipline. Research shows that publicising the prevalence of a harmful practice can normalise it, increasing its acceptance rather than deterring it.^{ix} This risk is especially acute when public opinion is divided, making the potential harm of releasing such content into the public domain significant.

Finally, there are serious implications for other children using Meta’s platforms. Although Meta sets a minimum age of 13 in most jurisdictions, it is well known that younger children also access its platforms. For any child under 18, exposure to violent content involving peers can be deeply distressing and may reinforce feelings of fear, shame, or powerlessness.

Social media companies must not allow content that shows children being abused

While some may argue that sharing such content serves a public interest, by exposing systemic abuse and prompting accountability or institutional reform, this potential benefit must never come at the cost of a child’s right to dignity and integrity. Even if well-intentioned, such content can re-traumatise the child involved, violate their right to privacy, and lead to stigmatisation, bullying, or exploitation. These risks are amplified on platforms like Facebook, where algorithmic and design decisions often incentivise the creation and rapid spread of sensationalist or emotionally charged content. Moreover, as noted, literature on social norms cautions against highlighting negative behaviours, such as violent discipline, as this can unintentionally normalise them.

Children must never be instrumentalised for broader social goals, no matter how urgent or well-intentioned. The individual child and their rights must be at the centre of any decision about how their experiences are represented. The harm caused to the child in the video, as well as by the video being permanently shared online, cannot be ‘offset’ by changes in institutions, policies, or laws. The individual child is still being harmed, making this a form of further exploitation. In line with article 3(1) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the ‘best interests’ of the child must be a primary consideration in all actions concerning them.^x The child’s best interests must be



interpreted in light of the Convention on the Rights of the Child as a whole and cannot be used to justify practices that undermine a child's dignity or physical integrity.^{xi}

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child emphasises that when the best interests of an individual child appear to conflict with those of a group, or with the rights of others, such conflicts must be resolved on a case-by-case basis, through careful balancing and prioritisation.^{xii} While compromise may sometimes be necessary, the child's best interests must carry greater weight than other considerations. Importantly, determining a child's best interests requires taking their views into account and giving them due weight in accordance with their age and maturity.^{xiii}

Even when a caregiver or advocate seeks to share such content in the name of accountability, the power imbalance between adults and children may prevent the child's views from being fully considered. Meta's systems are not equipped to assess whether such content has been shared with valid, informed consent, and there is no way to retract consent if a child's perspective changes over time.

Limiting depictions of child abuse on social media should not be viewed as a barrier to accountability, but rather a necessary safeguard for the rights and well-being of individual children and children at large. Efforts to pursue justice and reform, including through social media, can and must be carried out without sharing content that strips children of their dignity and integrity.

Blurring of faces is not sufficient to protect the identity, dignity, and privacy of the child

International guidance emphasises that reporting on child victims of abuse must prioritise dignity and integrity, privacy, and protection from harm. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child highlights the importance of developing media guidelines that abolish stigmatising language, prevent re-victimisation, and promote respectful reporting practices.^{xiv} It has called for professional codes of conduct within the media that ensure evidence-based reporting does not reveal the identities of child victims or survivors and is in accordance with international human rights standards.^{xv} UNICEF's principles for responsible reporting on children and young people offer practical guidance and serve as a useful reference.^{xvi}

While measures such as blurring faces are commonly used to protect children's identities in the media, they are not sufficient on their own. Children can still be identified through contextual details. Moreover, this practice does not reduce the risk of harm for other children who may view this content online, nor does it address the broader risk of promoting negative practices.

ⁱ United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted 20 November 1989, entered into force 2 September 1990, 1577 UNTS, article 19.

- ⁱⁱ United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, General comment No. 13 (2011) The right of the child to freedom from all forms of violence, UN Doc CRC/C/GC/13, 18 April 2011, para 7(c). For instance: League of Nations, Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child (adopted 26 September 1924) ('the child ... must be protected against every form of exploitation'); UNGA, 'Declaration of the Rights of the Child (adopted 20 November 1959 (UNGA Res 1386(XIV) principle 9 ('The child shall be protected against all forms of neglect, cruelty and exploitation'); International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (adopted 16 December 1966, entered into force 23 March 1976) 999 UNTS 171, Art. 24(1) ('Every child shall have ... the right to such measures of protection as are required by his status as a minor'); International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (adopted 16 December 1966, entered into force 3 January 1976) 993 UNTS 3, Art. 10(3) ('Special measures of protection and assistance should be taken on behalf of all children and young persons without any discrimination for reasons of parentage or other conditions. Children and young persons should be protected from economic and social exploitation') and Art. 12 (on the 'right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health' and the 'steps to be taken by the States Parties to the present Covenant to achieve the full realization of this right shall include those necessary for ... the healthy development of the child'); Universal Declaration of Human Rights (adopted 10 December 1948) UNGA Res 217A(III), Art. 25 ('...childhood are entitled to special care and assistance.').
- ⁱⁱⁱ UNICEF, OHCHR, 'Taking a Child Rights-Based Approach to Implementing the UNGPs in the Digital Environment: A contribution to the B-Tech project', 2024 <<https://www.unicef.org/childrightsandbusiness/reports/b-tech-contribution>>.
- ^{iv} The D-CRIA Toolbox is due for release in late May 2025 and will be available on the UNICEF website <<https://www.unicef.org/childrightsandbusiness/workstreams/responsible-technology/D-CRIA>>
- ^v Disclosure recommendations are due to be published in June 2025 on the UNICEF website <<https://www.unicef.org/childrightsandbusiness/workstreams/responsible-technology>>.
- ^{vi} United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, General comment No. 13 (2011) The right of the child to freedom from all forms of violence, UN Doc CRC/C/GC/13, 18 April 2011, para 17.
- ^{vii} United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, GENERAL COMMENT No. 8 (2006) The right of the child to protection from corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading forms of punishment (arts. 19; 28, para. 2; and 37, inter alia), UN Doc CRC/C/GC/8, 2 March 2007, para 11.
- ^{viii} See for example: UNICEF, Office of the Special Representative on Violence against Children, World Vision International, ChildFund Alliance, Plan International, Save the Children International, 'The violence prevention dividend: Why preventing violence against children makes economic sense', July 2022 <<https://www.unicef.org/reports/violence-prevention-dividend>>.
- ^{ix} Cislighi B, Heise L. Theory and practice of social norms interventions: eight common pitfalls. *Global Health*. 2018 Aug 17;14(1):83. doi: 10.1186/s12992-018-0398-x. PMID: 30119638; PMCID: PMC6098623.
- ^x This applies to all actions taken by public or private institutions.
- ^{xi} See: United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, General comment No. 14 (2013) on the right of the child to have his or her best interests taken as a primary consideration (art. 3, para. 1), UN Doc CRC/C/GC/14, 29 May 2013. See also: United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, General comment No. 25 (2021) on children's rights in relation to the digital environment, UN Doc CRC/C/GC/25, 2 March 2021, paras 12-13; United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, GENERAL COMMENT No. 8 (2006) The right of the child to protection from corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading forms of punishment (arts. 19; 28, para. 2; and 37, inter alia), UN Doc CRC/C/GC/8, 2 March 2007, para 26.
- ^{xii} United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, General comment No. 14 (2013) on the right of the child to have his or her best interests taken as a primary consideration (art. 3, para. 1), UN Doc CRC/C/GC/14, 29 May 2013, para 39.
- ^{xiii} United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, General comment No. 14 (2013) on the right of the child to have his or her best interests taken as a primary consideration (art. 3, para. 1), UN Doc CRC/C/GC/14, 29 May 2013, paras 43 and 44.
- ^{xiv} United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, General comment No. 13 (2011) The right of the child to freedom from all forms of violence, UN Doc CRC/C/GC/13, 18 April 2011, para 43(a)(ix).
- ^{xv} United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, General comment No. 25 (2021) on children's rights in relation to the digital environment, UN Doc CRC/C/GC/25, 2 March 2021, para 57.
- ^{xvi} UNICEF, 'Ethical reporting guidelines: Key principles for responsible reporting on children and young people' <<https://www.unicef.org/media/reporting-guidelines>>.