



all about people

News from BILD

3 November 2010

A 'cage' for a child?

The use of 'safe spaces' for children in a wide variety of settings appear to be on the increase, since 2008 BILD have collected evidence of 32 separate practice examples of the use of 'time out' for children and young people throughout the UK. These examples are often brought to our attention by investigating authorities or worried parents and professionals who have seen them being used.

The issue has been raised again by the shocked reaction by many to the 'cage' created for an autistic pupil at the Nicolson Institute in Stornoway, on Lewis, Scotland reported by the BBC this week. [<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-highlands-islands-11664558>.]

This is yet another examples of well meaning people getting it startlingly wrong, it is no surprise that people are shocked when presented with the reality of such environments but BILD believes examples of similar environments can be found all over the UK. It is also the case that some commercial companies design purpose built environments which then legitimise a blatantly illegal and totally non therapeutic practice. These commercial companies often suggest that removing a child to a 'quiet environment' can reduce anxiety and therefore stop the 'problem behaviour'; such suggestions are not supported by research and are highly questionable.

Put simply if a child has a learning disability or severe autism does it seem plausible that any distress will be alleviated by isolation? BILD does not believe this to be the case.

When such practices are defended by the suggestion that they increase safety of the child, we believe consideration should be given to the case of Jonathon King, a 13 year-old pupil in Murrayville, Georgia, USA who killed himself after being put in a time out cell at his special education school.

[<http://edition.cnn.com/2008/US/12/17/seclusion.rooms/index.html>]

"Children are extremely vulnerable and deserve to be protected", said Sharon Paley, development manager for positive behaviour support at the British Institute of Learning Disabilities (BILD), "they are entitled to such protection morally and legally, why do intelligent people believe that isolating a child in a space effectively imprisoning them is either helpful or legal? In any other context the same people would be horrified by such practices."

BILD is concerned that the number of incidents are likely to increase in future. In his announcement to the UK Parliament on 7 July, Mr Nick Gibb MP, the Minister for Schools, announced a strengthening of current guidance for teachers in relation to the Use of Force. BILD remains concerned that unless such guidance is clear about the legal context

of the use of force it may actually lead to a increase in practices such as 'time out' and 'seclusion' by staff who believe they have lawful excuse.

ENDS

For more information please contact BILD's Communications Manager, Peter Salisbury on 01562 723010 or email p.salisbury@bild.org.uk

Notes:

BILD (The British Institute of Learning Disabilities) is based in Kidderminster, Worcestershire and was founded in 1971.

BILD's vision is a society where people with learning disabilities are equal citizens and have access to the support and services they need. We work to make this happen in partnership with people with a learning disability and family carers. They are the real 'experts', knowing what support is needed, and what needs to change to improve the quality of their lives.

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