

When Every Rule Becomes a Fight

A teacher in northern England finished a long day and opened her email. Waiting for her was a four-page complaint. No child had been hurt. No serious rule had been broken. A ten-year-old had only been told to stop talking and change seats. But the email spoke about emotional harm and lost freedoms. It warned that the education authorities would be contacted. Some parts copied legal language from American websites. Other parts had clearly been written by AI.

Teachers across Britain say this kind of email is now normal. The difficult students, they say, are the easy part of the job. The real exhaustion comes from the adults. Parents complain about normal discipline. They attack teachers online. They treat schools like businesses that must explain every decision.

The change has happened fast. Surveys show that many teachers have faced insults, online attacks, and threats of legal action from parents. They now spend hours answering angry emails about tiny problems. A few years ago, these problems were solved with a quick word at the school gate.

Then came artificial intelligence.

Now an angry parent can create a long, formal complaint in seconds. Such a letter is hard to answer because it looks serious, even when the argument makes no sense. But the biggest loss is trust. Teachers now feel that any small decision could turn into a public fight, so they hesitate before making one.

Inside the classroom, behavior is also getting worse. British schools report more disruption and even violence against teachers and other children. Some schools now train teachers to handle physical attacks from very young pupils.

Why is this happening?

Many teachers point to a change in parenting. Over the last ten years, a style called "gentle parenting" has spread online. It uses empathy and conversation instead of strict punishment. The idea is kind: children should feel heard. But critics say it is often stretched too far. Some children almost never hear the word "no." So when a teacher says "sit down" or "give me the phone," the child treats it as the start of an argument. One school assistant described children turning over desks while teachers stood and watched, unsure if they were even allowed to punish them.

Still, experts warn us not to blame parents for everything. Not every difficult child is spoiled. Some children really struggle to control their emotions, and this can begin very early in life. Teachers are caught between two demands. One side wants stricter rules. The other wants teachers to focus more on children's feelings.

The pandemic made things harder too. Children who stayed home during important years missed the chance to learn classroom rules and how to solve small conflicts. Money worries and long hours put parents under pressure as well. For some, any criticism of their child feels like criticism of themselves.

The damage keeps spreading. Many teachers say they are thinking about leaving the job. Discipline becomes almost impossible when children know their parents will fight the school. And the children have noticed. They threaten to call their parents the moment a teacher sets a limit.

Almost no one wants cold, strict schools to return. The real question is about balance. How can adults be kind and still set clear limits? Schools and families used to work together, and that connection is now breaking. When every punishment becomes a legal case, schools spend less time teaching and more time protecting themselves.

The strange thing is that both sides want the same thing. They want children who are safe, confident, and capable. But the children are caught in the middle. They are learning, very early, whether rules are something to respect, or just something to argue with until they disappear.

- 1) Do children behave worse today than in the past?
- 2) Why do you think many parents now take their child's side instead of the teacher's?
- 3) What is the best way to discipline a child?
- 4) If children grow up with very few rules, what kind of adults do you think they become?
- 5) How did your parents react when you got in trouble at school?
- 6) Does "gentle parenting" help children, or does it give them too much freedom?
- 7) How much of this problem comes from phones and screens, and how much comes from parenting?
- 8) Why do some parents feel that any criticism of their child is criticism of them?
- 9) Is it good or bad for a child to never hear the word "no?"
- 10) Do children behave worse today because the world has changed, or because adults expect less from them?

Complaint	(n)	a statement that you are unhappy or not satisfied with something	The hotel received many complaints about the slow and noisy elevator.
Warn	(v)	to tell someone about a possible danger or problem before it happens	The teacher warned the students that the test would be very difficult.
Exhaustion	(n)	the state of being extremely tired	After working twelve hours, she felt complete exhaustion and fell asleep on the sofa.
Face	(v)	to deal with a difficult or unpleasant situation	Many small shops are facing serious problems because of rising prices.

Threat	(n)	a warning that someone will hurt you or cause trouble if you do not do what they want	The company received a threat that its website would be attacked.
Formal	(adj)	done in an official and serious way, following accepted rules	She wrote a formal letter to apply for the job.
Make no sense	(exp)	to be impossible to understand, or to seem unreasonable	His explanation made no sense, so we asked him to start again.
Hesitate	(v)	to pause before doing something because you are not sure about it	He hesitated for a moment before answering the difficult question.
Disruption	(n)	a situation in which something cannot continue normally	The heavy snow caused major disruption to flights all over the country.
Pupil	(n)	a child or young person at school (used mainly in British English)	Every pupil in the class had to read a book and write about it.
Empathy	(n)	the ability to understand and share another person's feelings	A good nurse needs empathy as well as medical knowledge.
Strict	(adj)	expecting people to obey rules and behave well	My grandfather was very strict and never allowed us to be late for dinner.
Critic	(n)	a person who says they do not approve of something or someone	Critics of the new law say it will cost too much money.
Stretch	(v)	to make something reach further than usual, or to use something beyond its normal limit	They stretched the meaning of the rule so far that it no longer made sense.
Spoiled	(adj)	(of a child) given too much and allowed to behave badly	The spoiled boy cried whenever he did not get what he wanted.
Struggle	(v)	to try very hard to do something difficult	Many new students struggle to make friends in their first month.
The pandemic	(exp)	used by English speakers to mean the COVID-19 outbreak that began in 2020	During the pandemic, many people learned to work from home for the first time.
Notice	(v)	to see or become aware of something	I noticed that the door was open when I came home.
Capable	(adj)	able to do things well; having the skill or ability to do something	She is a capable manager who can solve problems quickly and calmly.