

Should Knives Ever Be Allowed at School?

Fifth grader Rajinder Singh Cheema was playing basketball on the school playground. He had the ball and jumped up toward the hoop. His shirt lifted briefly. Under his shirt was a small "knife" strapped to his chest in its case. The school in California had a rule that said: **No weapons allowed at school.**

When the principal asked him why he brought the knife to school, Rajinder explained that it was not really a knife. It was a part of his religion.

Rajinder is a Sikh. Sikhism is a religion founded in India about 500 years ago. There are about 200,000 Sikhs in the United States. The knife (called a *kirpan*) symbolizes the religious duty to help people in need. It's a sacred symbol. In the Sikh religion, males wear the kirpan and are expected only to use it in a life or death matter. To Sikhs, wearing the kirpan at all times is very important. Here are some of the things that the kirpan stands for:

- coming to the aid of a person who needs help.
- preventing violence from being done to a defenseless person.
- the power of truth.

Rajinder's kirpan had a curved, rounded edge. He wore it in a case. It hung around Rajinder's neck under his clothing.

At Rajinder's school there was a very strict rule about weapons. No weapons of any kind were allowed at school. The principal was in charge of enforcing this rule. The purpose of the rule was to keep the students safe. Rajinder was not allowed to come to school with his kirpan because:

- no student can have any kind of knife, even a toy knife, at school.
- all of the students should feel safe while they are at school.
- students and parents need to feel sure that there are never any weapons on the school grounds.

Question for Deliberation: Should the principal allow Rajinder to wear his kirpan?

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