

Positive Discipline Guidelines

From the book Positive Discipline
by Jane Nelsen

- 1. Misbehaving children are “discouraged children”** who have mistaken ideas on how to achieve their **primary goal—to belong**. Their mistaken ideas lead them to misbehavior. We cannot be effective unless we address the mistaken beliefs rather than just the misbehavior.
- Use **encouragement** to help children feel “belonging” so the motivation for misbehaving will be eliminated. Celebrate each step in the direction of improvement rather than focusing on mistakes.
- A great way to help children feel encouraged is to **spend special time** “being with them.” Many teachers have noticed a dramatic change in a “problem child” after spending five minutes simply sharing what they both like to do for fun.
- When tucking children into bed, ask them to **share with you** their “saddest time” during the day and their “happiest time” during the day. Then you **share with them**. You will be surprised what you learn.
- Have **family meetings** or **class meetings** to solve problems with cooperation and mutual respect. This is the key to creating a loving, respectful atmosphere while helping children develop self-discipline, responsibility, cooperation, and problem-solving skills.
- Give children **meaningful jobs**. In the name of expediency, many parents and teachers do things that children could do for themselves and one another. **Children feel belonging when they know they can make a real contribution.**
- Decide together** what jobs need to be done. Put them all in a jar and let each child draw out a few each week; that way no one is stuck with the same jobs all the time. Teachers can invite children to help them make class rules and list them on a chart titled, “We decided.”. Children have ownership, motivation, and enthusiasm when they are included in the decisions.
- Take time for training**. Make sure children understand what “clean the kitchen” means to you. To them it may mean simply putting the dishes in the sink. Parents and teachers may ask, “What is your understanding of what is expected?”
- Teach and model mutual respect**. One way is to be **kind and firm at the same time**—kind to show respect for the child, and firm to show respect for yourself and “the needs of the situation.” This is difficult during conflict, so use the next guideline whenever you can.
- Proper **timing** will improve your effectiveness tenfold. It does not “work” to deal with a problem at the time of conflict—emotions get in the way. Teach children about **cooling-off periods**. You (or the children) can go to a separate room and do something to make yourself feel better—and then work on the problem with mutual respect.
- Get rid of the crazy idea that in order to make children do better, first you have to make them feel worse. Do you feel like doing better when you feel humiliated?** This suggests a whole new look at “time out.”
- Use Positive Time Out**. Let your children help you design a pleasant area (cushions, books, music, stuffed animals) that will help them feel better. Remember that children do better when they feel better. Then you can ask your children, when they are upset, “Do you think it would help you to take some positive time out?”
- Punishment may “work” if all you are interested in is stopping misbehavior for “the moment.” Sometimes we **must beware of what works** when the long-range results are negative—resentment, rebellion, revenge, or retreat.
- Teach children that **mistakes are wonderful opportunities to learn!** A great way to teach children that mistakes are wonderful opportunities to learn is to model this yourself by using the Three Rs of Recovery after you have made a mistake:
 - (1) Recognize your mistake.
 - (2) Reconcile: Be willing to say “I’m sorry, I didn’t like the way I handled that.”
 - (3) Resolve: Focus on solutions rather than blame. (#3 is effective only if you do #1 & #2 first.)
- Focus on **solutions** instead of **consequences**. Many parents and teachers try to disguise punishment by calling it a logical consequence. Get children involved in finding solutions that are
 - (1) **related**
 - (2) **respectful**
 - (3) **reasonable**
- Make sure the message of love and respect gets through. Start with “I care about you. I am concerned about this situation. Will you work with me on a solution?”
- Have fun!
Bring joy into homes and classrooms.