



## **Frequently Asked Questions about Positive Discipline**

### **What is Positive Discipline?**

Positive Discipline (PD) is based on the theories of Alfred Adler and Rudolf Dreikurs who believed that human behavior is motivated by the core need to feel a sense of belonging and significance. PD offers parents, teachers, and caregivers the opportunity to learn through an experiential approach about the child's world so as to better understand thoughts, feelings and decisions children make. Rather than relying on punishment to motivate children to do better, PD stresses the need for kindness and firmness at the same time: adults model firmness by respecting themselves and the needs of the situation and kindness by respecting the needs of the child and themselves. PD emphasizes that mistakes are viewed as opportunities for learning and that we learn best in the context of a caring relationship where effort is made to connect before correction.

Key skills taught to parents are: effective communication techniques, collaborative problem solving skills, focusing on solutions instead of punishment, and focusing on encouragement instead of praise. Children then exhibit greater emotional regulation, response flexibility, and receptivity.

### **How is PD different than traditional parenting models?**

Basically, there are two schools of thought on human behavior: Behaviorist and Adlerian. The dominant and traditional practice of the last several generations have been Behaviorist, believing people respond to rewards and punishments in their environment. Adlerian theory, on which PD is based, believes people seek a sense of belonging (connection) and significance (meaning) in their social context within which they can collaborate and explore mutually respectful and effective solutions.

Behaviorists believe that we have the most influence at the moment of response to a specific Behavior: I catch you doing 'right' and I reward you, or I catch you doing 'wrong' and I punish you. This approach works really well with pets and show animals. It often invites resistance and rebellion or unhealthy pleasing with children, because the love of the parents feels conditional and requires obedience. Adlerian and PD practitioners feel the best way to influence behavior is in an ongoing relationship founded on mutual respect and dignity.

### **Is PD applicable to all cultures?**

Because building relationships based on respect and dignity increases a sense of belonging and significance, this theory and the skills and tools associated with it foster a greater sense of family and shared community. PD is being taught in many different countries whose languages include Spanish, French, Hindi, Chinese, Hungarian, Greek, Filipino, indigenous dialects of Oaxaca, in Mexico, Arabic and English.

Alfred Adler talked about separate realities and our own private logic, which is created by our unique set of experiences and the perceptions and interpretations we make of those experiences. Because PD is taught using experiential exercises, each individual learns what they need to, given their own experiences and the 'lenses' through which they see life.

### **Is PD consistent with current research on brain function and is it Trauma-informed?**

We know children are visual learners and will do what is modeled. This, combined with the contagious effects of mirror neurons, means that we do our best problem solving when we are rational and not in our emotionally reactive, limbic brains. This requires calming down and doing something that helps us re-gather our prefrontal cortex or rational brain. PD calls this Positive Time Out, instead of punitive time out -a forced isolation with conditions for re-admittance into the adult world. Adlerians promote an internal locus of control, self-regulation, understanding other's perspectives and collaborative problem solving.



## **PD effectively meets the criteria for being trauma-informed in many ways including:**

- Identification of trauma as a key factor in what ails the population served – there is over 15 years of experience in SC County with PD for Parents in Recovery.
- Curriculum and materials are designed to create a sense of connection and safety -- “connection before correction,” “mistakes are opportunities to learn,” “people do better when they feel better,” etc.
- Values the emotional and physical safety of participants – using engaging and non-threatening communication, understanding brain function, being non-punitive in focus, teaching ways to avoid power struggles, modeling, appreciating any contribution or effort made, and encouraging mutual respect, etc.
- Emphasizes self-care, positive coping strategies, and non-violent communication. It is a strength-based approach that builds upon existing coping skills.
- Maximizes participant choices and control, looking for solutions, including listening to complaints, voluntary participation and universal access, experiential learning, non-prescriptive with many different tools and strategies provided and honored, active solicitation of suggestions, and ability to check in with curiosity questions for course evaluations. An attitude that different choices can be made next time.
- Prioritizes participant empowerment and strengths – ‘parents helping parents’ exercises, use of interactive format, and an emphasis on encouragement.

## **How does PD create an optimal *social/emotional* learning environment in schools and classrooms?**

Implementing PD in the Classroom is a process that involves teachers and students in true dialogue and problem solving on issues that are of real and practical concern to them. When students and teachers work together to solve problems, they learn to appreciate each other, to understand and respect differences, and to develop social interest by helping each other.

By implementing PD in the Classroom using class meetings, students look for win/win solutions and move toward developing competency and self-worth through responsibility in making decisions and helping each other. Students run class meetings, gaining facilitation skills and building confidence in their ability to make decisions democratically. Through PD in the Classroom, schools can empower young people with courage, confidence, and life skills.

## **It sounds so time consuming! Why don't children just mind?**

Punishment does work in that it usually stops misbehavior immediately. On a long-term basis however, it usually results in resentment, revenge, rebellion or reduced self-esteem and sneakiness. Jane Nelsen, the author and founder of the PD model, suggests we must beware of what works when the long-term results are negative. When excessive control is used, children depend on an ‘external locus of control.’ It is the adult’s responsibility to be constantly in charge of children’s behavior. For teachers and parents, this most often looks like punishment and rewards. This can be a constant source of anxiety and exhaustion for parents.

PD is an approach that does not include excessive control or excessive permissiveness. It is different from other discipline methods in that it is not humiliating to children or to adults. “Connection before correction” presents the opportunity to use discipline that teaches in the context of a healthy, loving relationship. PD incorporates kindness and firmness at the same time as the foundation for teaching life competencies. It develops an ‘internal locus of control.’ It integrates discipline and the development of life skills into the on-going relationship based on mutual respect and dignity

## **Websites and links for additional information:**

**Positive Discipline Community Resources - [www.pdccc.org](http://www.pdccc.org)**

**Positive Discipline Association (global movement, certifications, etc.) - [www.positivediscipline.org](http://www.positivediscipline.org)**

**Positive Discipline Social networking site - [www.positivediscipline.ning.com](http://www.positivediscipline.ning.com)**

**Positive Discipline material resources such as books, manuals, etc. - [www.positivediscipline.com](http://www.positivediscipline.com)**

**Empowering People - [www.empoweringpeople.com](http://www.empoweringpeople.com)**