

# Introduction to Parenting with Positive Discipline

Parent University at Redwood Day School

January 28, 2012

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***Resources:***

Available at your local library or bookstore:  
Positive Discipline by Jane Nelsen  
Children the Challenge by Rudolf Dreikurs  
Punished by Rewards by Alfie Kohn  
Parenting from the Inside Out by Daniel Siegel and Mary Hartzel

***Available online:***

[www.positivediscipline.org](http://www.positivediscipline.org) Positive Discipline Association. Tips, Q & A.  
<http://positivediscipline.ning.com/> Many parents find great benefit in furthering the exploration of this theory by joining the social networking site founded by Jane Nelsen.

# Very Brief Overview of the Adlerian Approach

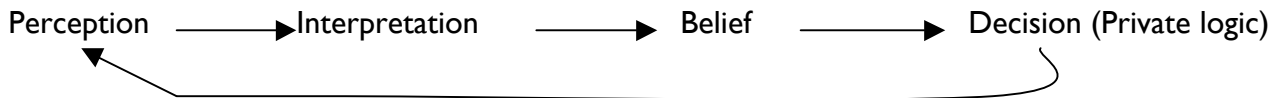
## Theory:

Alfred Adler, Rudolf Dreikurs, Jane Nelsen, Lynn Lott.

Behavior is purposive

The goal of behavior is belonging (sense of connection) and meaning (significance).

(Mis-behavior is from “mis”-taken belief about how to find belonging/meaning.)



People (adults, teens, children) are continually making decisions based on how their world is perceived.

Horizontal relationships: Everyone is worthy of equal dignity and respect. (This does not mean people are the same, or that leaders are not necessary.)

Gemeinschaftsgefühl (Community feeling):

Being part of a community (belonging/connection)

Being able to make a contribution to the community (significance/purpose)

## Basic tools:

Teaching life skills

Understanding the power of perception and interpretation

Encouragement

Kindness and Firmness *at the same time*

Mutual Respect

Respect for yourself and the situation (firmness)

Respect for the needs of the child and others (kindness)

Mistakes are opportunities to learn. (The courage to be imperfect.)

## Five Criteria for Effective Discipline

Effective Discipline:

1. Helps children feel a sense of connection. (Belonging and significance.)
2. Is mutually respectful and encouraging. (Kind and firm at the same time.)
3. Is effective long - term. (Considers what the child is thinking, feeling, learning, and deciding about himself and his world – and what to do in the future to survive or to thrive.)
4. Teaches important social and life skills. (Respect, concern for others, problem solving, and cooperation as well as the skills to contribute to the home, school or larger community.)
5. Invites children to discover how capable they are. (Encourages the constructive use of personal power and autonomy.)

Source: Jane Nelsen, [www.positivediscipline.com](http://www.positivediscipline.com)

## Curiosity Questions

**Comment:** Sometimes curiosity questions can be very simple (one question), and sometimes they can involve more questions to help children explore the consequences of their choices (as opposed to imposing consequences on them). Use curiosity questions to connect with children and understand their perspective, but also to help them look at a situation from a different perspective.

Tone is important. **Interest and caring must be expressed through tone.**

- What do you think will happen if. . . ?
- What would you like to happen?
- How can you be helpful? or What would you like to do to help?
- What happened?
- What do you think caused that to happen?
- What were you trying to accomplish?
- What did you want to happen?
- 
- How do you feel about what happened?
- What did you learn from this experience?
- What ideas do you have to take care of this problem?
- What could you do next time?
- How could you solve this?
- How can you use what you learned in the future?
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- What is your picture of...?
- What is your plan for...?
- How do you see that working...?
- What is your story about ....?
- Is there anything else?

<b>Telling Parent</b>	<b>Asking Parent</b>
1. Get your cleats for your soccer game.	1. What do you need for soccer?
2. Don't forget your coat.	2. What do you need to take if you want to be warm today?
3. Brush your teeth and take a shower.	3. What do you need to do to get ready for bed?
4. Do your homework.	4. What is your plan for doing your homework?
5. Stop fighting with your brother.	5. What can you and your brother do to solve this problem?
6. Put your dishes in the dishwasher.	6. What needs to happen when you leave the table?
7. Hurry up and get dressed or you'll miss the bus.	7. What do you need to do to catch the bus on time?

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# The Brain in the Palm of your Hand

(From *Parenting from the Inside Out*, by Daniel Siegel and Mary Hartzell)

**Your Wrist and Palm:** Brain Stem. Responsible for survival instincts: flight, freeze or fight; Autonomic (“automatic”) functions

**Your Thumb:** Mid brain. Freeze, flight or fight response, emotions, where we store and integrate memories, and hold fears.

**Your Fingers over your Thumb:** Cortex. Perception, motor action, speech, higher processing and what we normally call “thinking.”

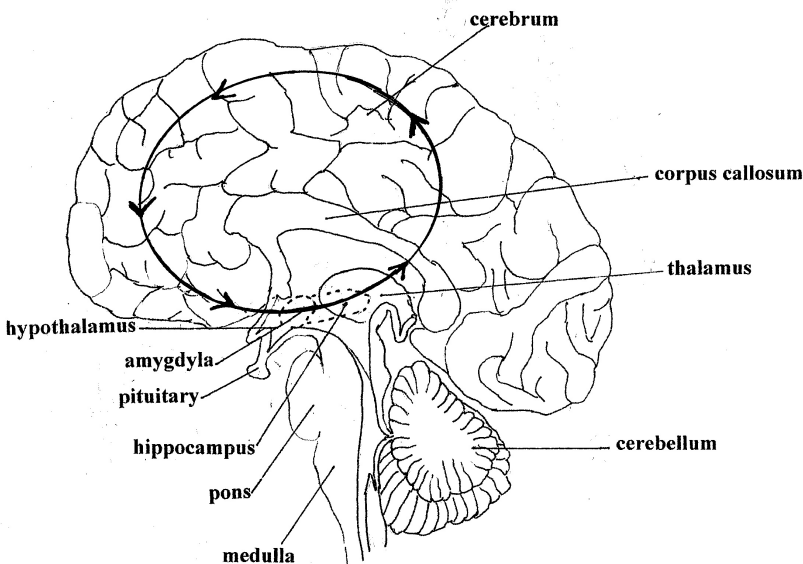
**Your Fingernails:** (This is approximately behind your eyes in your head) Orbitofrontal cortex/ pre-frontal cortex – a primary integration center for the brain, almost like a “switchboard” that makes sure messages get where they need to go. Documented functions of the pre-frontal cortex are: regulation of body through autonomic nervous system, emotional regulation, regulation of interpersonal relationships, response flexibility, intuition, mindsight, self awareness, letting go of fears, morality.

What happens when you are stressed, overwhelmed, or trying to deal with traumatic or painful memories? The pre-frontal cortex shuts down; it no longer functions. (This is temporary, thank goodness!) You have flipped your lid. You can’t use most of those 9 functions above. And you can’t learn without them. To engage, to learn, you need to calm down and bring the orbito-frontal cortex back into functioning.

**Mirror Neurons:** The “monkey see, monkey do” neurons that play a key role in social interaction, connection and learning. Go to: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/sciencenow/3204/01.html> to see an excellent 14 minute Nova episode on **mirror neurons**.

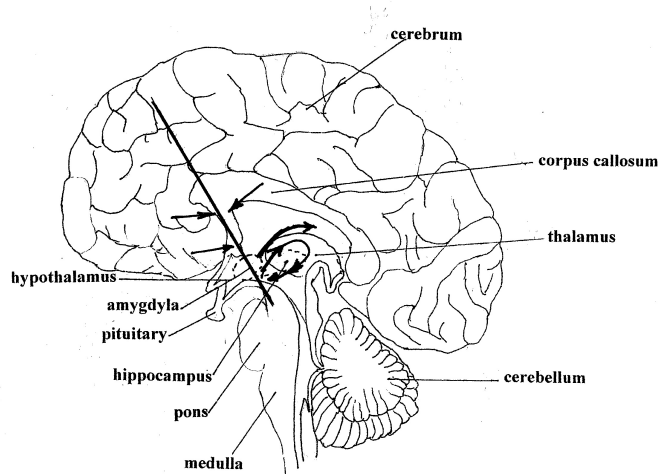
Your brain, when the prefrontal cortex is working:

Integrative functioning (the high road)



**Integrative functioning:** “A form of processing information that involves the higher, rational, reflective thought process of the mind. High-road processing allows for mindfulness, flexibility in our responses and an integrating sense of self awareness. The high road involves the prefrontal cortex in its processes.” Siegel and Hartzell, *Parenting from the Inside Out*.

## Non-integrated function (flipping your lid, the low road)



“Low road functioning involves the shutting down of the higher processes of the mind and leaves the individual in a state of intense emotions, impulsive reactions, rigid and repetitive responses and lacking in self reflection and the consideration of another’s point of view. Involvement of the prefrontal cortex is shut off when one is on the low road.”  
Siegel and Hartzell, *Parenting from the Inside Out*.

Drawings adapted from Siegel and Hartzell, *Parenting from the Inside Out*, P. 157

## De-escalation tips: For when the mid brain takes over.....

Partly adapted from *Conflict Unraveled: Fixing Problems at Work and in Families* by Andra Medea

### We refer to this as “**having a flipped lid**” or “**flooding**”

Tips for when YOU have flipped your lid:

- **Recognize what it feels like physically:** fast heart beats, pounding head, a sense of urgency etc. Learn your own body’s warning signs.
- **Recognize what it feels like mentally:** a sense of urgency, thoughts that keep repeating or going in circles, an inability to think calmly and clearly (or do mental math). Learn your own body’s warning signs.
- **Take a time out from the situation to calm down.** Recognize that continued engagement isn’t going to help.
- **Focus on your breathing.** Do belly breathing.
- **Use large muscles:** walk, do isometrics, do windmills with your arms.
- **Try to engage your cortex.** Do mental math, spell things backwards, list facts...and slow the pace.
- **Notice why you are in “survival brain.”** This situation makes me feel vulnerable because (I’m not being heard, I may not be able to prevent injury, I’m not being respected) and work to not take it personally.

Tips for when the OTHER person has flipped his/her lid (child or adult):

- **Watch for signs in the other person:** Irrational action, flushed face, intense emotion, disjointed sentences.
- **Notice your own body.** Remember that mirror neurons work quickly. Don’t let the other person’s flipped lid “catch you.”
- **Remember safety.** People who are using their mid brain and not their cortex do not act rationally and can be physically dangerous. Stay calm, move slowly and be aware.

- **Use your mirror neurons.** The more you stay calm and connected, the easier it is for them to calm down.
- **Acknowledge feelings:** using few words and calm empathetic tone.
- **Don't talk at them.** Don't touch them, and don't make fast movements. If they want to leave (and it is safe) let them.
- **Don't crowd them.** Don't demand from them, don't give complicated directions (they cannot process them).
- **Invite them to take a time out (non punitive) or "cool down time" (CDT)** This works best if it is an option, not a command.
- **Simple tasks may engage their cortex.** You might ask them to remind you how their name is spelled, to count to ten, ask if they remember how to spell your name.
- **Ask for their help.** When they have begun to de-escalate, change the subject by asking for their help. "I can tell you aren't ready to engage in work yet, but are you calm enough to help me by.....?" "I can tell you aren't quite ready to play again, but would you be willing to help me by...?"

Courage (from the root word: cor – latin, heart) is the very small step you take in the direction to be more of who you truly are when it might be easier to take a step in another direction. (This is not an official definition!) So when you encourage someone, you are creating a space for him or her to take that step.

### Mistakes

What is a mistake? What makes it a big mistake, or a small mistake? How is life different when we really understand that mistakes are opportunities to learn? Who would you be without all of the mistakes you have learned from?

Recovery from a mistake (*repair is critical!*): (adapted from Jane Nelsen, *Positive Discipline*)

**Re-gather:** *Make sure both of you have calmed down. Even if it means waiting.*

**Recognize:** *"Whoops, I made a mistake."*

**Reconcile:** *"I'm sorry."*

**Resolve:** (Re-Solve): *"How can we work on this together to make it better?" (or some variation)*

Results of Punishment (from Jane Nelsen, *Positive Discipline*)

**Resentment** *"This is unfair. I can't trust adults"*

**Revenge** *"They are winning now, but I'll get even"*

**Rebellion** *"I'll do just the opposite to prove I don't have to do it their way"*

**Retreat**

from others: *"I won't get caught next time"*

or from one's self: *"I'm a bad person"*

Solutions:

**Reasonable,  
Respectful,  
Related  
AND Helpful**

<p><i>"A misbehaving child is a discouraged child."</i> Rudolf Dreikurs</p>
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