

# POSITIVE DISCIPLINE IN EVERYDAY TEACHING



## GUIDELINES FOR EDUCATORS

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### What is Positive Discipline?

Positive discipline is an approach to teaching that helps children succeed, gives them the information they need to learn, and supports their development. It respects children's right to healthy development, protection from violence, and active participation in their learning.

Positive discipline is *not* about permissiveness, letting students do whatever they want, or having no rules, limits or expectations.

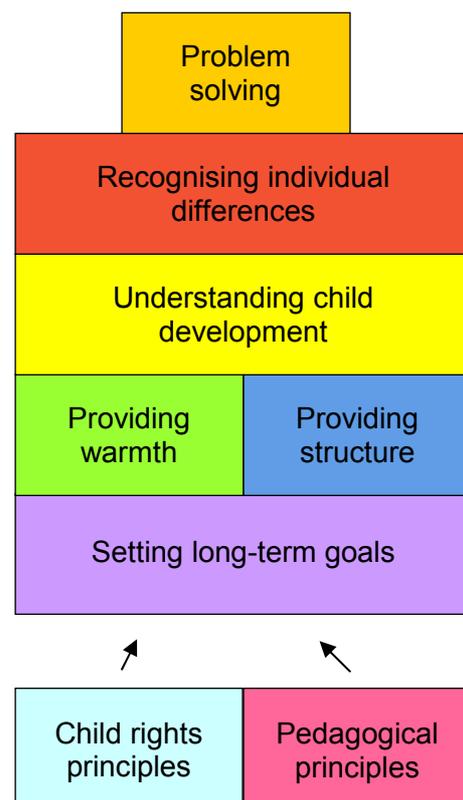
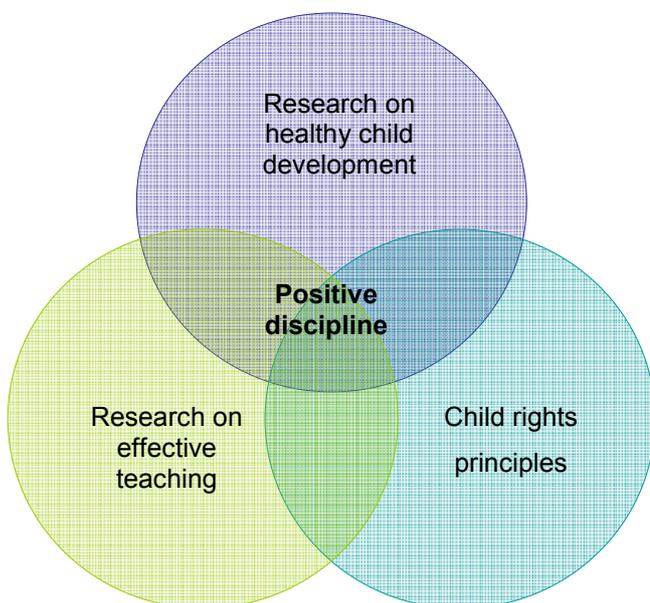
Positive discipline is about long-term solutions that develop students' own self-discipline and their life-long learning. It is about clear and consistent communication, and consistent reinforcement of your expectations, rules and limits. Positive discipline is about teaching non-violence, empathy, self-respect, human rights, and respect for others.

### How is Positive Discipline practised?

Positive discipline has five components:

1. Identifying your long-term goals
2. Providing warmth and structure
3. Understanding child development
4. Identifying individual differences
5. Problem-solving and responding with positive discipline

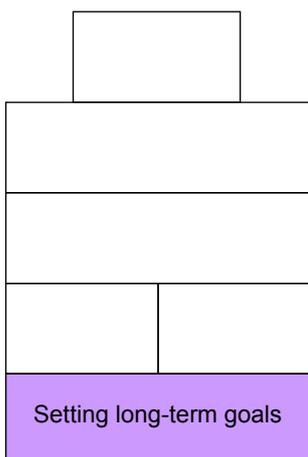
The foundation of positive discipline is child rights and pedagogical principles.





## 1. Identifying your long-term goals

Teaching children all they need to learn in order to be successful in life is one of the world's most important jobs. But many teachers begin a new school year without thinking about the impact they will have on their students' later lives. We tend to focus on short-term goals — do your homework, stop talking, give me an answer now. Short-term situations can cause stress and frustration. The problem is that the way we react to short-term stress often interferes with our long-term goals. Teachers can easily react to short-term frustration in a way that blocks their long-term goals by yelling, humiliating or hitting.



Every time you react this way, you lose an opportunity to show your students a better way — and to strengthen their interest and motivation. Teachers want their students to be confident, kind, motivated, responsible, and non-violent people. Yelling, humiliating and hitting will only teach your students the opposite of what you want them to learn in the long run. This is one of the hardest challenges for teachers — to handle short-term stress in a way that helps them to achieve their long-term goals.

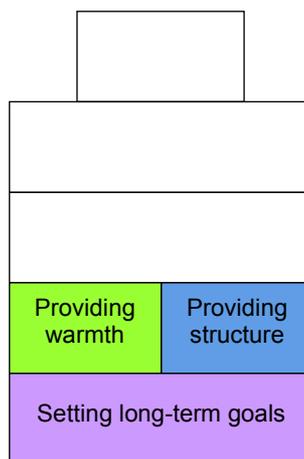
The aim of education is to prepare students for success in their adult lives. We can turn short-term challenges into opportunities to work towards our long-term goals by teaching children how to manage stress, respect themselves and others, and be successful learners.

## 2. Providing warmth and structure

Your long-term goals are your blueprints. They keep you focused on the impact you want to have on your students. Achieving those goals requires two tools — warmth and structure.

### Warmth

Warmth affects students academically, emotionally and behaviourally. As teachers and adults, we are motivated to try, to learn from our mistakes, and do better next time when we are supported by those around us. Students also learn best when they feel respected, understood, trusted, and safe. A warm classroom environment is the foundation for meeting your long-term goals.



In warm environments, students feel safe to make mistakes, which is an important part of learning. Students also are much more likely to be cooperative and to have fewer behaviour problems. Their academic success fuels their interest, so they are less distractible. They are not anxious, so they are less restless. And they come to associate the classroom with positive feelings, so their love of learning grows.

Teachers provide warmth to their students by supporting them in their learning, showing interest in who they are, recognising their efforts and successes, and looking at situations from their students' point of view.

### Structure

Structure is the information and support that students need in order to succeed academically and behaviourally. It gives students the tools they need to solve problems when you are not present. Structure shows students how to work out conflicts with other people in a constructive, non-violent way. It also informs them about how they can succeed academically.

When students know what is expected of them, and believe they will get the information needed to meet those expectations, they become more confident in their learning ability and they want to learn more. They are less confused and less frustrated, so they can focus their concentration on their learning. Their success gives them positive feelings about school and the subject being taught. And their behaviour improves.

Teachers provide structure for their students by acting as positive role models and mentors, explaining the reasons for rules, involving students in setting rules, hearing students' point of view, helping them find ways to fix their mistakes in a way that helps to learn, being fair, controlling anger, and avoiding threats.

Positive discipline combines warmth and structure throughout each student's school years. It is a way of thinking that helps teachers to meet their short-term goals, while having a positive life-long impact on their students. It also is a way of increasing students' interest in learning, strengthening their motivation to achieve and promoting their academic success.

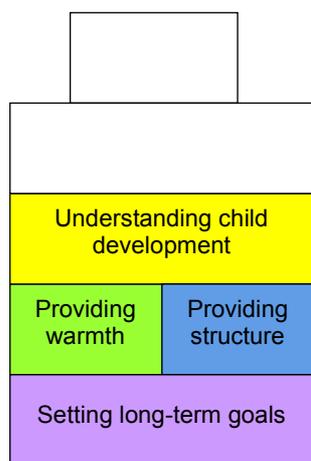


### 3. Understanding child development

Teachers are well aware that children change as they grow. Development is an ongoing, never-ending process. It is because children change that we are able to teach them new information and new skills. All learning builds on prior learning – and forms a foundation for future learning.

But children do not learn in the same way at every age. Their ways of thinking and understanding change, so the ways that we teach them must change as well. To reach your long-term goals you need to provide warmth and structure that are appropriate to your students' stage of development. Expectations need to match students' abilities.

When we start to see the world through the eyes of a 6-year-old or a 13-year-old, we can begin to understand the reasons for their behaviour. Then we can be more effective teachers.



#### Early childhood

Much of students' development is invisible to teachers. Children's experiences before school entry set the stage for their readiness to learn, their motivation to learn, and their skills in social interaction.

In many cases, the learning and behavioural difficulties that become evident in school had their origins in what children learned about themselves years earlier.

It is important for teachers to consider and find out how a child's preschool experiences might have formed a self-concept that is expressed in his attitudes toward learning and his behaviour in the classroom or in the schoolyard.

#### Transition to school

Making the transition to school is a momentous event in a child's life. It is one of the biggest adjustments she will ever make. From a child's perspective, school is an entirely new world. It is in a new location, filled with new children and new adults with new expectations. There are new schedules and routines to follow. And, perhaps for the first time, the child is without her parents or caregivers. This situation presents a tremendous challenge for the child.

At the moment of school entry, teachers assume a large share of responsibility for the child's successful transition. Their responses can affect children's feelings toward school and learning for many years to come. Teachers can help children to make this adjustment when they understand how children think at this age.

At the time of school entry, children have difficulty understanding things they have not yet experienced. Children of this age can grasp concrete concepts, but have difficulty with abstract concepts and understanding that there is more than one aspect to any situation. They focus on the aspect that is most obvious to them, unable to consider the less obvious one at the same time.

When a child of this age is punished, he is likely to feel rejected. When children feel rejected by their teachers, they become insecure and anxious in the school environment. As a result they might withdraw – or they might act up. Children who withdraw become quiet, shy and fearful of making mistakes. If teachers then respond with criticism, these children become more anxious. Over time, they can easily lose their motivation to try. Children who act up are likely to be punished again, leading to greater anxiety. These children find it hard to concentrate on their schoolwork and begin to fail. Over time, they can easily stop caring about school.

If a child is having difficulty making the adjustment to school, it is important to assess the behaviour and find the reasons that lie behind it. Then we can choose a response that encourages self-discipline while motivating the child to learn and achieve.

#### Early Primary (6- to 8-year-olds)

If the transition to school has been made successfully, children in the early years of elementary/primary school are typically eager to learn and highly motivated to master new challenges. They have an innate drive to understand their world.

Children's experiences in primary school set the stage for their success in later years. At this time, teachers need to create a learning climate that is supportive and encouraging, and that nurtures children's motivation to learn.

Some characteristics of children in this stage can present challenges to creating a supportive environment. These children are active, curious, distractible and independent.

Each of these characteristics can lead to conflict in the classroom. Teachers' approaches to these conflicts can have a powerful impact on children's feelings about school.

### Late Primary (9- to 12-year-olds)

By the late primary grades, children are able to solve problems mentally, so their mathematical abilities progress quickly. They also become able to think about their own thinking (metacognition). This means that they can reflect on how they learn, assess their strategies, and try out new ones.

Socially, children become focused on peer relationships. They form close friendships – and can experience intense conflict. In this stage, teachers need to create a learning climate that fosters both academic and social confidence.

### Adolescence (13- to 18- year-olds)

Adolescence is a time of remarkable transformation. Youth are crossing the bridge from childhood to adulthood, an amazing change seen in all areas of their development.

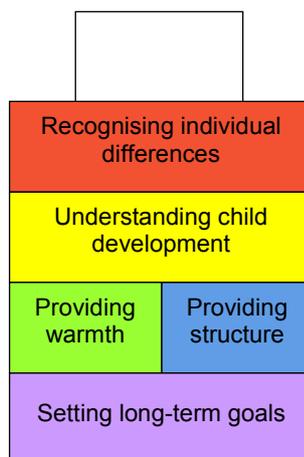
Youth are able to think hypothetically - they can approach problems scientifically, proposing hypotheses and testing them systematically. They think about "big issues", such as politics and tradition. They might question adults' ways of thinking. This is not a sign of disrespect, but a sign that they are able to think for themselves and to figure out what they value and believe.

Adolescents struggle to achieve a sense of identity. Their strong drive for independence, need for peer acceptance, and difficulty understanding the risks they are taking can result in frequent conflict with parents and teachers. Attempts to control them or to force them to adopt particular views will create resentment and close down communication. Physical punishment will humiliate them and lead to very negative attitudes toward school.

Teachers need to help students develop a sense of right and wrong, and a sense of responsibility and competence. Trust is important - so are listening, giving them clear and honest information, clear expectations and structure.

## 4. Recognising individual differences

While all children go through the same stages of development, they do so within different environments, cultures, and with different personalities, talents and abilities. Every class is made up of a group of individual students, each with his or her own story. Teachers need to find out the different stories in their classrooms.



Each child arrives in the classroom with a unique set of experiences that affects her. It is extremely important that teachers understand the challenges each child faces and provide the support they need.

For students who feel "different", a teacher who believes in them can make the difference between their success and failure in school.

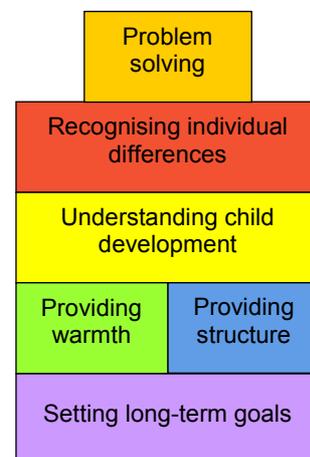
## 5. Problem solving

Sometimes students' behaviours can be mystifying to teachers. "Why won't she stop talking?" "Why can't he just do his homework?"

Once a teacher has identified her long-term goals, understands the importance of providing warmth and structure, understands child development and recognises the importance of individual differences, she will have the information she needs to solve these challenges by responding with positive discipline.

Remember that a student needs to feel respected, understood, and safe. Discipline is not about punishment. It is not always easy to respond constructively in challenging situations. Positive discipline takes thought and practice.

Positive discipline can guide all teachers' interactions with their students, not just the challenging ones. It also can guide their teaching of academic skills, not just social and behavioural skills. It is important to think ahead and plan a response. And practice, practice, and practice.



The content of this primer is taken from *Positive Discipline in Everyday Teaching* by Joan E. Durrant, Ph.D., published by Save the Children.

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