

# POSITIVE DISCIPLINE



## What it is and how to do it

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### What is Positive Discipline?

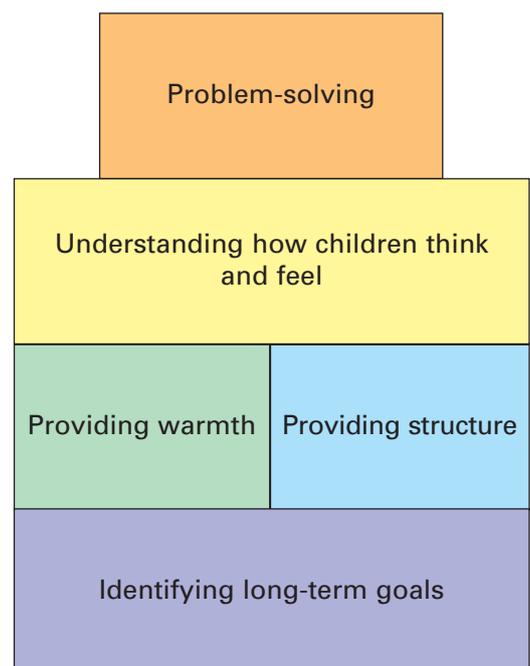
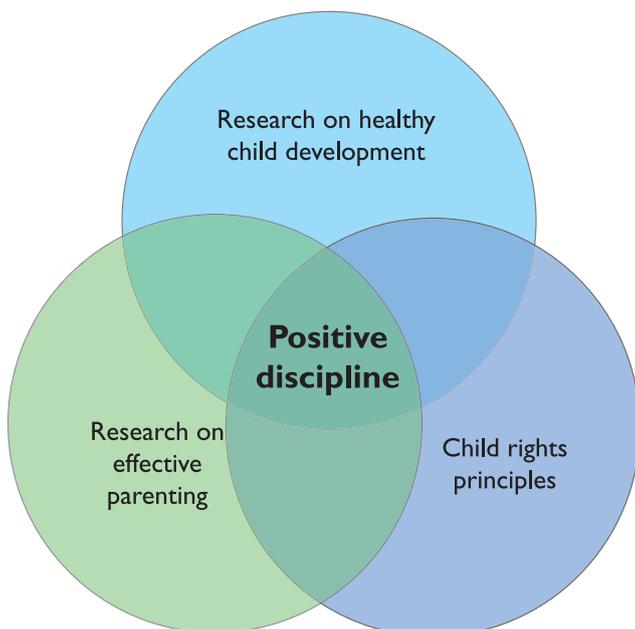
Positive discipline is an approach to parenting that teaches children and guides their behaviour, while respecting their rights to healthy development, protection from violence and participation in their learning. Positive discipline is based in research on children's healthy development and effective parenting, and founded on child rights principles.

Positive discipline is not permissive parenting and is not about punishment. It is about long-term solutions that develop children's own self-discipline and their life-long skills. Positive discipline is about teaching non-violence, empathy, self-respect, human rights and respect for others.

### How is Positive Discipline practiced?

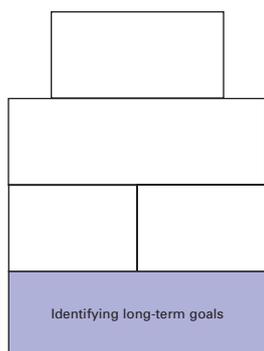
Positive discipline has four components:

- 1) identifying your long-term childrearing goals;
- 2) providing warmth and structure;
- 3) understanding how children think and feel; and
- 4) problem-solving.





## 1. Identifying your long-term goals

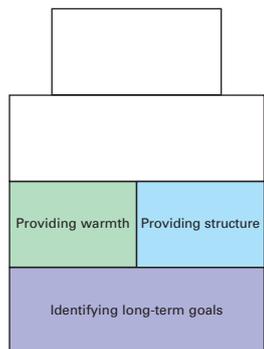


Parents' days are filled with trying to find ways to meet their short-term goals – getting a child to put her shoes on now, get off the road now, come in the house now, stop hitting his sister now. Short-term situations can cause frustration and stress, and a feeling of urgency that can result in parents responding with hitting and yelling.

But these short-term responses don't teach children what we want them to learn over the long term. Most parents want to teach their children to be good problem solvers and good communicators. They want to have strong relationships with their children. And they want their children to become confident, kind, motivated, responsible, empathic, non-violent people. Hitting and yelling actually block these goals.

By thinking about what kinds of people we want our children to become, we can identify our long-term childrearing goals. Then, we can turn short-term challenges into opportunities to work toward those goals by teaching children how to manage stress, communicate respectfully, handle conflict without hitting, consider other peoples' feelings, and achieve their goals without harming others physically or emotionally.

## 2. Providing warmth and structure



Once we know where we are going, we can use two powerful tools to get there. The first is warmth. As adults, we are motivated to try, to learn from our mistakes, and do better next time when we feel supported by those around us. Children also learn best when they feel respected, understood, trusted, safe and loved.

If children are afraid of those they rely on, they become less motivated to try, less honest and less confident. Some become resentful and aggressive. Others become anxious and depressed. But in an atmosphere of warmth and emotional security, children feel safe, even if they make mistakes. They become motivated and confident, and they trust their parents. They also learn the importance of empathy and respect for others' feelings. A warm home climate is the foundation for meeting your long-term goals.

Parents provide warmth to their children by showing them they are loved even when they do something wrong, comforting them when they are hurt or afraid, listening to them, looking at the situation from their point of view, playing with them, laughing with them, supporting them when they are facing challenges, encouraging them when they have to do something difficult, telling them that they believe in them, recognizing their efforts and successes, and showing them that they trust them.

The second tool is structure. As adults, we are more likely to succeed at learning if we are given the information that we need, and if someone talks calmly with us about our mistakes and shows us how to improve next time. Children also learn best when they have information, when they are helped to find constructive ways of meeting their goals, and if they understand the reasons for our rules and guidelines.

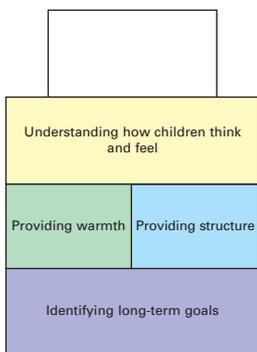
If we set rules for our children that we do not follow ourselves, or expect them to figure things out and punish them when they make mistakes, they will feel confused and anxious. If we try to force them to behave in certain ways, they will resist. If we hurt them when they make mistakes, they will become afraid to try. But if we model what we want our children to do and provide the information they need to make good decisions, they will become more confident, competent and independent.

Parents provide structure for their children by acting as positive role models and guides, explaining the reasons for rules, involving their children in setting the rules, hearing their point of view, helping them find ways to fix their mistakes in a way that helps them to learn, teaching



them about the effects of their actions on other people, talking with them often, being fair and flexible, controlling anger and avoiding threats.

### 3. Understanding how children think and feel



Sometimes we expect children to behave in ways that are beyond their abilities, such as expecting a baby to sleep through the night or expecting a 3-year-old to sit still. Sometimes we think that children are being “stubborn” or “spoiled” when they won’t go to bed or when they have tantrums. When our expectations do not match our children’s abilities, or when we think that they are

trying to be “bad”, we can provoke conflicts that are difficult to resolve because they are the result of our own mistaken beliefs.

When we see the world through the eyes of a 1-year-old, a 5-year-old or a 13-year-old, we can begin to understand the real reasons for their behaviour. Then we can be much more effective teachers.

Our relationships with our children begin when they are born. In the earliest months, we build our children’s trust in us and form an attachment that will be the basis of our relationship for years to come. Our task is to provide a safe and secure environment for our babies – a place where their needs will be met, where they will not be hit or shaken, where they can explore without danger of harm, and where they will receive support and reassurance when they are frightened. We need to respect their ways of communicating and show them that they can trust us to respond.

As children understand more about the world around them, we can begin to provide structure within this climate of emotional security. But we need to see the situation from their point of view in order to respond in a constructive way. We need to understand what they are trying to tell us when they cry, say “No!” or stamp their

feet. Our task becomes showing them how to express their feelings and them how to resolve conflict without violence.

As they grow, children want to learn more and more. We teach them self-respect when we answer their questions respectfully. We motivate them to learn when we encourage their exploration. We show them that they are competent when we give them opportunities to find solutions to problems. When children believe that they are capable, they are much better prepared to master the challenges they will face in the years ahead.

When they begin school, children’s social worlds expand rapidly. Children who have watched their parents handle conflict, anger and stress without aggression or violence are more likely to resolve their own conflicts well. Those who see themselves as good, caring and capable are more likely to make good decisions. Those who have learned how to listen, communicate and treat others with respect are more likely to do the same with their peers and teachers. And those who feel supported and accepted by their parents are more likely to turn to them for advice and help.

With early adolescence comes a powerful desire for independence, profound physical and emotional changes, and a strong need for peer acceptance. A parent’s task is now to encourage independent decision-making while providing a strong safety net. They need to help their children develop their own sense of right and wrong, as well as a sense of responsibility and competence. And they need to be there to provide support when their children make mistakes. Children who have learned that their parents can be trusted are now more likely to listen to their advice. Children who have received support and guidance from their parents are now more likely to go to them before trouble strikes.

By mid-adolescence, children are struggling to establish their own identities. They may suddenly change their styles of clothing, taste in music, academic interests, or plans for the future. Often, adolescents try on identities that are very different from those of their parents. They listen to music that their parents don’t like, wear clothes that their parents don’t like, and hold viewpoints that their



Global Initiative to

End All Corporal Punishment  
of Children

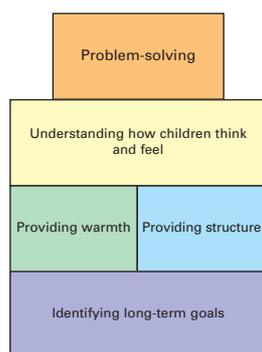


Save the Children

parents disagree with. By becoming very different from their parents, they are better able to figure out who they are.

In this final stage of childhood, trust becomes extremely important. Children need to know that their parents are there, providing clear and honest information, clear expectations and structure, and a safe environment. Sometimes they will make mistakes. Just as their parents kept their environments safe, gave them information, and supported their growth as young children, their parents can do this now as well – by strengthening the parent-child bond, monitoring the child's activities, and nurturing the child's independence.

#### 4. Problem solving



Once you have identified your long-term parenting goals, you understand the importance of providing both warmth and structure in order to reach your goals, and you understand how children think and feel at different ages, you can put it all together to respond with positive discipline.

Responding with positive discipline means providing warmth and structure that meets children's developmental needs and teaches them what they need to know in the long term. It is not about punishment. It is about problem solving. It takes thought and it takes practice.

When you are in a challenging situation, go through these steps before responding:

1. Think about your long-term goals.
2. Remember that your child needs to feel respected, understood, safe and loved.
3. Ask yourself: What does your child need to understand for the situation to be resolved? What can you do in this situation to help you reach your long-term goals?
4. Consider how your child thinks and feels at this stage of development. See the situation through your child's eyes and think about it through your child's mind. Ask yourself: How would your child describe the situation?
5. Respond in a way that shows respect for your child, provides useful information and leads you toward your long-term goals.

It is not always easy to respond constructively in challenging situations. It is wise to think ahead and plan your response. And practice, practice, practice.

### Why Positive Discipline?

The 2006 World Report on Violence against Children revealed that physical maltreatment of children in their homes is a global issue affecting millions of children worldwide. Much physical violence against children takes the form of punishment and is often embedded in a cultural belief that children learn through physical pain. The Report recommends the elimination of all corporal punishment of children and the promotion of non-violent, positive discipline.

The content of this primer is developed from *Positive Discipline: What It Is and How To Do It* by Joan E. Durrant, Ph.D., published by the Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children and Save the Children Sweden.

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