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Positive Discipline by Jane Nelsen, Ed.D.

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Note: You will find some differences in this pdf version of the Positive Discipline book
because it is a more current version that the current book in print.
Chapter One

THE POSITIVE APPROACH

If you are a teacher, have you been teaching long enough to remember when children sat in neat rows and obediently did what they were told? If you are a parent, do you remember when children wouldn’t dare talk back to their parents? Maybe you don’t, but perhaps your grandparents do.

Many parents and teachers today are feeling frustrated because children don’t behave the way they used to in the good old days. What happened? Why don’t today’s children develop the same kind of responsibility and motivation that seemed more prevalent in children many years ago?

We are given many possible explanations, such as broken homes, too much television, video games, and working mothers. These factors are so common in our society today that the situation would seem rather hopeless if they really explained our current challenges with children. (And, we all know of many single and working parents who are doing a great job raising their children because they use effective parenting skills.) Rudolf Dreikurs had another theory.

There are many major changes that have taken place in society over the past few years that more directly explain the differences in children today. The outlook is very encouraging because, with awareness and desire, we can compensate for these changes and in doing so can also eliminate some of the problems that many think are caused by broken homes, too much television, and working mothers.

The first major change is that adults no longer give children an example or model of submissiveness and obedience. Adults forget that they no longer act the way they used to in the good old days. Remember when Mom obediently did whatever Dad said, or at least gave the impression she did, because it was the culturally acceptable thing to do? In the good old days few people questioned the idea that Dad’s decisions were final.

Because of the human rights movement, this is no longer true. Rudolf Dreikurs pointed out, "When Dad lost control of Mom, they both lost control of the children." All this means is that Mom quit giving the children a model of submissiveness. This is progress. Many things about the good old days were not so good. In those days there were many models of submission. Dad obeyed the boss (who was not interested in his opinions) so he wouldn’t lose his job. Minority groups accepted submissive roles at great loss to their personal dignity. Today all minority groups are actively claiming their rights to full equality and dignity. It is difficult to find anyone who is willing to accept an inferior, submissive role in life. Children are simply following the examples all around
them. They also want to be treated with dignity and respect.

It is important to note that equality does not mean the same. Four quarters and a dollar bill are very different, but equal. Children obviously do not deserve all the rights that come with greater experience, skills, and maturity. Adult leadership and guidance is very important. However, children deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. They also deserve the opportunity to develop the life skills they need in an atmosphere of kindness and firmness instead of an atmosphere of blame, shame, and pain.

Another major change is that in today’s society children have fewer opportunities to learn responsibility and motivation. We no longer need children as important contributors to economic survival. Instead children are given too much in the name of love without any effort or investment on their part and they develop an entitlement attitude. Too many mothers and fathers believe that good parents protect their children from all disappointment. They rescue or over-protect—thus robbing their children of the opportunity to develop a belief in their capability to handle the ups and downs of life.

Skill training is often neglected because of busy life schedules or a lack of understanding of how important it is for children to contribute. We often rob children of opportunities to feel belonging and significance in meaningful ways through responsible contributions and then complain and criticize them for not developing responsibility. Children do not develop responsibility when parents and teachers are too strict and controlling, nor do they develop responsibility when parents and teachers are permissive. Children learn responsibility when they have opportunities to learn valuable social and life skills for good character in an atmosphere of kindness, firmness, dignity and respect.

It is important to emphasize that eliminating punishment does not mean children should be allowed to do whatever they want. We need to provide opportunities for children to experience responsibility in direct relationship to the privileges they enjoy. Otherwise, they become dependent recipients who feel the only way to achieve belonging and significance is by manipulating other people into their service. Some children develop the belief that, "I’m not loved unless others take care of me." Others may develop the belief that they shouldn’t try because they can’t do very much that doesn’t invite blame, shame, and pain. It is saddest when they develop the belief, "I’m not good enough," because they don’t have opportunities to practice proficiencies that would help them feel capable. These children spend a great deal of energy in rebellion, trying to prove themselves, of just giving up.

When all their intelligence and energy is directed toward proving themselves, rebellion, or giving up, children do not develop the perceptions and skills needed to become capable people. In the book Raising Self Reliant Children in a Self-Indulgent World, H. Stephen Glenn and I identify the Significant Seven Perceptions and Skills
necessary for developing capable people. They are:
1. Strong perceptions of personal capabilities ("I am capable.")
2. Strong perceptions of significance in primary relationships ("I contribute in meaningful ways and I am genuinely needed.")
3. Strong perceptions of personal power or influence over life ("I can influence what happens to me.")
4. Strong intra personal skills: the ability to understand personal emotions and to use that understanding to develop self discipline and self control.
5. Strong interpersonal skills: the ability to work with others and develop friendships through communicating, cooperating, negotiating, sharing, empathizing, and listening.
6. Strong systemic skills: the ability to respond to the limits and consequences of everyday life with responsibility, adaptability, flexibility, and integrity.
7. Strong judgmental skills: the ability to use wisdom and to evaluate situations according to appropriate values.

Children developed these perceptions and skills naturally when they were allowed to work side by side with their parents, receiving on the job training while making meaningful contributions to the family lifestyle. The irony is that in the good old days children had opportunities to develop strong life skills, but had few opportunities to use them. Now the world is full of opportunities for which too many children are not prepared. Today children do not have many natural opportunities to feel needed and significant, but parents and teachers can thoughtfully provide these opportunities. Most misbehavior can be traced to a lack of development in these Significant Seven Perceptions and skills. The good news is that most behavior problems can be eliminated when parents and teachers learn more effective ways to help their children and students develop healthy perceptions and skills. By more effective, I mean skills that don’t include lectures or punishment.

Understanding why children do not behave the way they used to is the first step for parents and teachers who are facing child discipline challenges. We need to understand why controlling methods, which worked so well many years ago, are not effective with children today. We need to understand our obligation to provide opportunities, which were once provided by circumstances, for children to develop responsibility and motivation. And most importantly, we need to understand that cooperation based on mutual respect and shared responsibility is more effective than authoritarian control. The following chart explains the differences between the three main approaches for adult child interaction.

The attitude of parents or teachers who choose between each of the three approaches
is very different.

Strictness—"These are the rules by which you must abide, and this is the punishment you will receive for violation of the rules." Children are not involved in the decision making process.

Permissiveness—"There are no rules. I am sure we will love each other and be happy, and you will be able to choose your own rules later."

Positive Discipline— "Together we will decide on rules for our mutual benefit. We will also decide together on solutions that will be helpful to all concerned when we have problems. When I must use my judgment without your input, I will use firmness with kindness, dignity and respect."

As a fun way to illustrate the extreme differences between the three approaches, Dr. John Platt tells the story of three year old Johnny at breakfast time in each home. In a strict home, where Mom knows what is best, Johnny does not have a choice regarding breakfast. On a cold, rainy day, controlling mothers all over the world know that Johnny needs some kind of hot mush to get him through the day. Johnny, however, has different ideas. He looks at the mush and says, "Yuk! I don’t want this stuff!" One hundred years ago it was much easier to be a strict, controlling mother. She could just say, "Eat!" and Johnny would obey. It is more difficult today, so Mom goes through the following four steps in her effort to get obedience.

Step 1: Mom tries to convince Johnny why he needs hot mush to get him through the day. Remember what your mother told you that hot mush would do inside your body? "It will stick to your ribs!" Have you ever thought about what a three year old thinks when he is told hot mush will stick to his ribs? He is not very impressed.

Step 2: Mom tries to make the mush taste better. She tries all kinds of concoctions--brown sugar, cinnamon, raisins, honey, maple syrup, and even chocolate chips. Johnny takes another bite and still says, "Yuk! I hate this stuff!"

Step 3: Mom tries to teach him a lesson in gratitude. "But Johnny, think of all the children in Africa who are starving to death." Johnny is still not impressed and replies, "Well, send it to them."

Step 4: Mom is now exasperated and feels her only alternative is to teach him a lesson for his disobedience. She gives him a spanking and tells him he can just be hungry.
Mom feels good about the way she handled the situation for about thirty minutes before she starts feeling guilty. What will people think when they find out she couldn’t get her child to eat? And what if Johnny is really suffering from hunger?

Johnny plays outside long enough to build up guilt power before he comes in and claims, "Mommy, my tummy is so hungry!"

Mom now gets to give the most fun lecture of all--the I told you so lecture. She doesn’t notice that Johnny is staring into space while he waits for her to finish so he can get on with life. Mom feels very good about her lecture. She has now done her duty to let him know how right she was. She then gives him a cracker and sends him out to play again. To make up for the nutritional loss suffered from lack of a good breakfast, she goes into the kitchen and starts fixing liver and broccoli. Guess what lunch will be like?

The next scene takes place in a permissive home, where Mom is training a future anarchist. When this Johnny comes into the kitchen, Mom says, "What would you like for breakfast, sweetheart?"

Since Johnny has had three years of training, he is a real sweetheart and proceeds to run Mom through his training routine. Johnny first requests a soft boiled egg on toast. He makes Mom cook nine eggs before she gets it just right. Then he decides he doesn’t really want a soft boiled egg, he wants French toast. Mom has three eggs left, so she whips up French toast. Meanwhile Johnny has been watching television. During the commercial he sees that athletes can do marvelous things if they eat the Breakfast of Champions. He says, "I want Wheaties, Mom!" After he tastes the Wheaties, he changes his mind and asks for Sugar Crispies. Mom doesn’t have Sugar Crispies, but runs to the store to get some. Johnny doesn’t ever have to build up guilt power. He has Mom running on it twenty four hours a day.

These stories are not exaggerations. They are examples of true situations. One mother told me her child wouldn’t eat anything except potato chips. I asked her where he got them. She exclaimed, "Well, I buy them because he won’t eat anything else!" Many children are being raised to be tyrants who feel they are significant only if they can manipulate other people into fulfilling their demands.

We will now go into a home where Positive Discipline is used. There are two significant differences before breakfast starts. First, Johnny will be dressed and have his bed made before he even comes to breakfast. (Later, you will learn how to accomplish this.) The second difference is that Johnny will do something to make a contribution to the family routine, such as setting the table, making the toast, or scrambling the eggs. (Yes, three year old children can scramble eggs, as you will see when we discuss chores.)

This morning is a cereal day. Mom gives Johnny a limited choice, "Would you like
Cheerios or Wheaties?" (She doesn’t buy sugar coated cereals.)

This Johnny has also been watching television commercials about what the great athletes eat, so he chooses Wheaties. After one taste, he changes his mind and says, "I don’t want this stuff!"

Mom says, "Fine. We can’t recrisp the Wheaties. Go outside and play, and I’ll see you at lunchtime." Notice that Mom skipped all the steps the controlling mom went through. She didn’t try to convince him or tell him about starving children or try to make it taste better. She didn’t even have to spank him. She simply allowed him to experience the consequences of his choice.

Since Mom is new at this, Johnny tries to build up guilt power. Two hours later when he tells Mom that his tummy is so hungry, she respectfully replies, "I’ll bet it is." Mom avoids her "I told you so" lecture and instead reassures Johnny, "I’m sure you can make it until lunch."

It would be nice if the story could end here with understanding and cooperation from Johnny; however, it doesn’t happen that quickly. Johnny is not used to Mom behaving this way. He is frustrated because he didn’t get what he expected and has a temper tantrum. At this point it would be natural for most mothers to think, this Positive Discipline stuff doesn’t work. Johnny’s mom knew about the following illustration, which explains what often happens when we change our approach.

Children are used to getting certain responses from adults. When we change our responses, children will probably exaggerate their behavior (get worse) in their effort to get us to respond like we are supposed to. This is the kick the soda machine effect. When we put money in the soda machine and a soda doesn’t come out, we kick and pound to try and get it to do what it is supposed to do.

The problem with "strictness" is that when misbehavior is met with punishment, the behavior stops immediately but soon begins again--and again and again.

Although misbehavior might get worse when Positive Discipline skills are first used, you will notice that there is a leveling off before the child misbehaves again. When a child experiences that his manipulation tactics don’t work, he or she will probably test again--just to make sure. Misbehavior becomes less intense, with longer leveling off periods, when Positive Discipline is used consistently.

When we use firmness with dignity and respect, children soon learn that their misbehavior does not get the results they expect, and they are motivated to change their behavior, with their self-esteem in tact. Once we realize this, going through the times when behavior gets worse for a short period is not as bad as the constant hassles of power struggles with an excessively controlling approach.
When Johnny has a temper tantrum, Mom can use the technique of a cooling off period (explained later) and go to another room until they both feel better. It is not much fun to have a temper tantrum without an audience. Or she might try the I need a hug approach (explained in Chapter Seven) so they both feel better. They can then work together on a solution to the problem if the child is old enough to participate in problem-solving. For younger children, simply feeling better or a simple distraction is often enough to change the behavior.

This story illustrates and provides many examples of the difference between the three approaches to adult/child interaction, and how much more effective it is to use Positive Discipline for effective long-term results. However, there is still much work to be done to convince some adults of the long-term benefits of Positive Discipline.

Many adults refuse to give up their attempts to make excessive control work because of their mistaken belief that the only alternative is permissiveness—which is very unhealthy for children and adults. Children who are raised permissively grow up thinking the world owes them a living. They are trained to use all their energy and intelligence to manipulate and hassle adults into taking care of their every wish. They spend more time trying to get out of responsibility than developing their independence and capabilities.

Beware of What Works

Many people feel strongly that strictness and punishment work. I agree. I would never say that punishment does not work. Punishment does work in that it usually stops misbehavior immediately. But what are the long term results? We are often fooled by immediate results. Sometimes we must beware of what works when the long-term results are negative. The long term results of punishment are that children usually adopt one or all of the Four Rs of Punishment:

Four Rs of Punishment

1. Resentment--("This is unfair. I can’t trust adults.")
2. Revenge--("They are winning now, but I’ll get even.")
3. Rebellion--("I’ll do just the opposite to prove I don’t have to do it their way.")
4. Retreat:
   a. Sneakiness--("I won’t get caught next time.")
   b. Reduced self esteem--("I am a bad person.")

Children are not usually consciously aware of the decisions they are making in response to being punished. However, future behavior is based on the subconscious
decisions that are being made. For this reason adults need to be more aware of the long-term effects of their actions instead of being fooled by the short-term results.

Where did we ever get the crazy idea that in order to make children do better, first we have to make them feel worse? Think of the last time you felt humiliated or treated unfairly. Did you feel like cooperating or doing better? Take the time to close your eyes and remember a recent time (or a time during your childhood) when someone tried to motivate you to do better by trying to make you feel bad. Remember exactly what happened. Get in touch with how you felt. Be aware of what you were deciding about yourself, about the other person, and about what to do in the future (even though, most likely, you were not aware that you were making decisions at the time.) Did you feel motivated to do better? If so, was it a good feeling, or was it based on negative feelings about yourself and/or the other person? Did you feel motivated to give up or to cover up so you could avoid future humiliation? Or, did you want to become an approval junkie--giving up a big part of yourself in order to please others? Children do not develop positive characteristics based on the feelings and subconscious decisions they make as a result of punishment.

Parents and teachers who don’t like excessive control or permissiveness, but don’t know what else to do, may switch back and forth in confusion between two ineffective alternatives. They try excessive control until they can’t stand themselves for sounding so tyrannical. They then switch to permissiveness until they can’t stand how spoiled and demanding the children get--so they go back to excessive control.

What is the price when excessive control seems to work with some children? Research has shown that children who experience a great deal of punishment become either rebellious or fearfully submissive. Other research on the long-term effects of punishment show that it teaches violence, sneakiness, low self-esteem, and many other negative skills. Positive Discipline does not include any blame, shame, or pain (physical or emotional) as motivators. On the other hand, permissiveness is humiliating to adults and children and creates unhealthy co-dependence instead of self-reliance and cooperation. The purpose of Positive Discipline is to achieve positive long term results, as well as responsibility and cooperation now.

Since many parents and teachers believe the only alternative to giving up excessive control and strictness is permissiveness, it is important that we define discipline. Discipline is a word that is often misused. Many people equate discipline with punishment--or at least believe that punishment is the way to help people achieve discipline. However, discipline comes from the Latin word discipulus or disciplini which means a follower of truth, principle, or a venerated leader. Children and students will not become followers of
truth and principle unless their motivation comes from an internal locus of control—until they learn self-discipline. Both punishment and reward come from an external locus of control.

**If Not Strictness, and Not Permissiveness—Then What?**

*Positive Discipline* is an approach that does not include excessive control or permissiveness. How is it different from other discipline methods? One difference is that *Positive Discipline* is not humiliating to children, nor to adults.

*Positive Discipline* is based on mutual respect and cooperation. *Positive Discipline* incorporates kindness and firmness at the same time as the foundation for teaching life competencies based on an inner locus of control. *Positive Discipline* stresses the importance of making a connection before correction; and involving children to focus on solutions instead of punishing for mistakes.

When excessive control is used by adults, children depend on an "external locus of control." It is the adult’s responsibility to be constantly in charge of children’s behavior. The most popular form of excessive control used by parents and teachers is a system of rewards and punishment. With this system, adults must catch children being good so they can give rewards and catch them being bad so they can dole out punishment. Who is being responsible? Obviously it is the adult; so what happens when the adult is not around? Children do not learn to be responsible for their own behavior.

It is interesting to note how often controlling adults complain about irresponsibility in children without realizing they are training children to be irresponsible. Permissiveness also teaches irresponsibility because adults and children both relinquish responsibility.

One of the most important concepts to understand about *Positive Discipline* is that children are more willing to follow rules that they have helped establish. They become effective decision makers with healthy self concepts when they learn to be contributing members of a family, a classroom, and of society. These are important long term effects of the positive approach. They can be summarized as follows.

**Five Criteria for Effective Discipline**

1. Is it kind and firm at the same time? (Respectful and encouraging)
2. Does it help children feel a sense of belonging and significance? (Connection)
3. Is it effective long-term? (Punishment works short term, but has negative long-term results.)
4. Does it teach valuable social and life skills for good character? (Respect, concern for others, problem-solving, accountability, contribution, cooperation)
5. Does it invite children to discover how capable they are and to use their personal
power in constructive way?

Punishment does not meet any of these criteria. Every method taught in Positive Discipline does. The first criteria, kindness and firmness at the same time is a cornerstone concept for Positive Discipline.

Criteria No. 1: Kindness And Firmness At The Same Time

Rudolf Dreikurs taught the importance of being both kind and firm. Kindness is important in order to show respect for the child. Firmness is important in order to show respect for ourselves and for the needs of the situation. Authoritarian methods usually lack kindness. Permissive methods lack firmness. Kindness and firmness are essential for positive discipline.

Many parents and teachers struggle with the concept of being kind and firm at the same time for several reasons. One is that they often don’t feel like being kind when a child has "pushed their buttons." Again adults want children to control their behavior when adults don’t control their own behavior?" Often, it is the adults who should take some positive time-out until they can "feel” better so they can "do” better. (More on positive time-out in Chapter 6)

Another reason adults have difficulty being kind and firm at the same time is that they don’t know what kind and firm looks like. They may be stuck in the vicious cycle of being too firm when upset – or because they don’t know what else to do; and then being too kind to make up for being too firm.

Many parents and teachers have mistaken notions about kindness. One of the biggest mistakes some parents and teachers make when they decide to do Positive Discipline is becoming too permissive because they don’t want to be punitive. Some mistakenly believe they are being kind when they please their children, or when they rescue them and protect them from all disappointment. This is not being kind; it is being permissive. Being kind means to be respectful of the child and of yourself. It is not respectful to pamper children. It is not respectful to rescue them from every disappointment so they don’t have the opportunity to develop their disappointment muscles. It is respectful to validate their feelings, "I can see that you are disappointed (or angry, or upset, etc.)." Then it is respectful to have faith in children that they can survive disappointment and develop a sense of capability in the process.

Now let’s take a look at being respectful to you. It is not kind to allow children to treat you (or others) disrespectfully. This is where it gets a little tricky. Not allowing children to treat you or others disrespectfully does not mean handling this situation in a punitive manner. Punishment is very disrespectful. So how do you handle it?
Let’s suppose a child "talks back" to you. One kind and firm way to handle this is to leave the room. Oh, I can hear the objections, "But isn’t that allowing the child to "get away with it?" Let’s take a closer look. You can’t make another person treat you with respect, but you can treat yourself with respect. Walking away is treating yourself with respect – and is a strong model for children. You can always follow-up later, when everyone has had a chance to calm down to feel better so they can do better.

Follow-up might look like this, "Honey, I’m sorry you were so angry. I respect your feelings, but not how you handled them. In the future, whenever you treat me disrespectfully, I will just leave for awhile. I love you and want to be with you, so when you are ready to be respectful you can let me know and I’ll be happy to help you figure out other ways you can deal with your anger. Then we can focus on finding a solution that is respectful to both of us." It is best to let a child know what you are going to do in advance when everyone is calm.

It bears repeating that too many parents think they need to deal with the problem at the time of upset. This is the worst time to deal with a problem. When people are upset, they access their mid-brains where the only option is fight (power struggles) or flight (withdraw and failure to communicate). It is not possible to think rationally when coming from the irrational part of our brains. We say things we are later sorry for. It only makes sense to calm down until you can access your rational brain before you deal with a problem. And, this is a great skill to teach children. Sometimes it is better to “decide what you will do” (a tool you will learn more about in Chapter 5) than to try to make a child do something – at least until you can invite cooperation instead of a power struggle. So remember: kind equals respect.

Now let’s tackle firmness. Most adults are used to thinking that firmness means punishment, lectures, or some other form of control. Not so. Firmness, when combined with kindness, means respect for the child, for you, and for the situation.

Let’s take the situation of limits. Most parents decide what the limits should be and then take responsibility for enforcing them. But let’s consider the purpose of limits. The purpose is to keep children safe and socialized. When adults set the limits and then enforce them with punishment, lectures, and control, they often invite rebellion and power struggles. This does not keep children safe or socialized. Instead, involve children when setting and enforcing limits. For example, you can brainstorm together what the limits should be for TV viewing, text messaging, curfews, playtime away from home, homework, etc. Include children in a discussion—which means they talk at least as much, if not more, than you do. Discuss why the limits are important, what they should be, and how everyone can be responsible to follow them. For example, when you ask children why
homework is important, they will tell you (so I can learn, so I will get a better grade). They can then decide how much time they need and when is the best time for them. (Parents usually want their children to do their homework as soon as they get home from school. Children would usually like some down time first. When they get some choice, they feel empowered.) Once they decide on the time that works best for them, you can both set some limits such as (TV for only one hour and only after homework is done. You can let them know you will be available to help only between 7:00 and 8:00, and will not give in to last minute crises pleas for help during other times. Children are much more willing to follow limits they have helped create based on their understanding of why they are necessary and how to be responsible for them.

Of course limit setting is different for children under the age of four. Parents need to set limits for younger children, but they can still be enforced with kindness and firmness at the same time. (Child development and age appropriate issues are discussed thoroughly in Positive Discipline the First Three Years, and Positive Discipline for Preschoolers.)

When a limit is broken, don’t lecture or punish. Continue respectful involvement with the child. Avoid telling what happened and what should be done about it. You might ask curiosity questions: "What happened? What do you think caused that to happen? What ideas do you have to solve the problem now?" What did you learn that will help you next time?"

A word of warning: if children are used to lectures and punishment, they may say, "I don’t know." This is the time for you to say, "You are such a good problem solver. Why don’t you think about it and we’ll get together in 30 minutes and you can let me know what you have come up with."

Parents and teachers habitually lecture and make demands. Children often respond by resisting or rebelling. Following are some more kind and firm phrases that will help you avoid disrespectful language and increase cooperation:

• Your turn is coming.
• I know you can say that in a respectful way.
• I care about you and will wait until we can both be respectful to continue this conversation.
• I know you can think of a helpful solution.
• Act, don’t talk. (E.g. quietly and calmly take the child by the hand and show him what needs to be done.)
• We’ll talk about this later, now it is time to get in the car.
• (When child is having a temper tantrum.) Validate feelings before saying, "We need to leave the store now. We’ll try again later (or tomorrow."

When you decide to stop being punitive, you will need to practice new skills. And,
you will need to take time for training to help children learn mutual respect, and problem-solving skills.

**OPPOSITES ATTRACT:**

**WHEN ONE PARENT IS KIND AND THE OTHER IS FIRM.**

It is interesting to note that two people with these opposing philosophies often get married. One has a tendency to be just a little too lenient. The other has a tendency to be just a little too strict. Then the lenient parent thinks he or she needs to be just a little more lenient to make up for the mean old strict parent. The strict parent thinks he or she needs to be just a little more strict to make up for the wishy washy lenient parent—so they get further and further apart and fight about who is right and who is wrong. In truth they are both being ineffective.

One way to help children and parents learn effective communication is to have regular family meetings where they have an opportunity, on a weekly basis, to brainstorm for solutions to problems and to choose the solutions that are respectful to everyone. Focusing on solutions is one of the best ways for “opposites” to get closer together and be supportive of each other and their children, and is discussed in more detail in chapter six.

**Criteria No. 2:**

**Helping Children Feel A Sense Of Belonging And Significance**

*(Connection)*

Belonging and significance (connection) are the primary goals of all people—especially children. It is so important that a sense of connection (or lack thereof) is a primary indicator of how well children will do in school—both academically and socially. None of the students who killed other students and teachers felt a sense of belonging and significance. They felt very disconnected instead of connected.

Punishment does not help children feel a sense of belonging, significance, and connection. That is one reason why punishment is not effective long-term. Positive Discipline methods do help children feel a sense of connection and is an ongoing theme of this book. Connection is essential before respectful correction can take place.

**CONNECTION BEFORE CORRECTION**

Positive Discipline stresses the importance of making a connection before correction. Whenever possible, correction includes involving children to focus on solutions instead of punishing for mistakes. Making a connection means creating a feeling of closeness and
trust before using any of the many respectful and encouraging corrective methods suggested in this book.

Punishment creates distance and hostility instead of closeness and trust. That is one reason why punishment is not effective long-term. So what is?

Before sharing effective ways to create a connection with children, I want to point out that it is a mistake to think that giving children whatever they want is a good way. Rescuing, fixing, and over-protecting are not good ways. Effective connections are made when both child and adult feel belonging and significance—even though it is the adult who takes the first steps. Some of these steps to connection are:

• Listen. Really listen. Stop doing whatever you are doing and give your child your full attention
• Validate your child’s feelings. Don’t we all feel connected when we feel understood?
• Share your feelings when appropriate. Remember that children will listen to you AFTER they feel listened to. Children feel special when you respectfully share something about yourself. Respectfully, means no stories about walking miles in the snow.
• Focus on solutions WITH children after a cooling off period. There is that word "with" again–because it is a golden bridge to connection.
• Take time for respectful training during calm times.
• Ask curiosity questions to help children explore the consequences of their choices instead of imposing consequences on them.
• Teach valuable social and life skills that help children feel capable. Just two examples are helping them create their own positive time-out space and creating routine charts with them, not for them.
• Have faith in children to handle their own problems. (Offer support through validating feelings or giving a hug, but not by rescuing or fixing.)
• Spend special time with children. What could create a greater connection for your child than to know your enjoy spending time with him or her.
• Hugs. There are times when all of us need nothing more than a hug.

All of these methods, and many more, will be discussed more thoroughly in later chapters. Once the connection is made, children are then open to respectful correction.

It is very important to understand that correction the Positive Discipline way is very different from conventional correction. The biggest difference is that conventional
correction usually involves punishment (punitive time-out, grounding, and taking away privileges being the most common). In other words, conventional correction consists of adults doing something TO children. Positive Discipline correction respectfully involves children whenever possible, doing things with them. Other methods for correction, to name just two, are family or class meetings and joint problem-solving. These are very powerful tools that respectfully involve children to learn and use their personal power in contributing ways.

It is interesting to note that all of the steps for connection also work for correction. They are things adults do WITH children, not TO or FOR children. When children feel a connection, they feel belonging and significance. Often that is enough for misbehavior to stop. As you learn about the many Positive Discipline tools, notice that they are all designed to create a connection before respectful correction.

Criteria No. 3:
Is It Effective Long-Term?
One of the primary reasons parents and teachers continue to use punishment is that it works—short term. Punishment will usually stop the misbehavior for the moment. The problem is that adults don’t understand the long-term effects of punishment. Children who have been punished are not thinking, “Oh thank you. This is so helpful. I can hardly wait to seek your help with all my problems.” Instead they are thinking about rebelling (as soon as they get a chance) or complying at great loss to their sense of self.

Other reasons adults use punishment are that they are afraid the only alternative is permissiveness; they are afraid they will be giving up control and will not be doing their jobs as parents and teachers; and punishment is easier. You never have to tell adults how to use punishment. They know. Punishment is often a “reactive” response. It takes effort and skills to use effective discipline.

The final reason adults use punishment even though it is not effective long-term is that they don’t know what else to do. This book is filled with alternatives to punishment that are effective long-term—and that teach the last two criteria for effective discipline.

Criteria No. 4:
Teaching Valuable And Social Life Skills For Good Character And Inviting Children To Discover How Capable They Are And To Use Their Personal Power In Constructive Ways?
Using discipline as a way to teach children life skills and to help them use their power constructively is a new idea for most parents and teachers. If you care to research the research on the long-term effects of punishment, you will find that it teaches violence, sneakiness, low self-esteem, and many other negative skills. As you study Positive Discipline methods, you will notice that all of the discipline tools not only stop misbehavior—they teach social and life skills for good character and help children discover how capable they are and to use their personal power in constructive ways.

**Criteria No. 5:**

**Does It Help Children Use Their Personal Power In Constructive Ways and Discover How Capable They Are?**

You’ll notice how often this book stresses doing things with children instead of to them or for them. Doing with them involves them so they have daily training in using their personal power in constructive ways and, thus, discovering how capable they are. Doing with them creates the kind of connection that makes correction unnecessary.

**THE POSITIVE DISCIPLINE JOURNEY**

When embarking upon the journey into Positive Discipline, it helps to have a destination in mind. What is it that you really want for your children? Whenever parents and teachers are asked to make a list of characteristics they would like to help children develop, they think of the following qualities:

- positive self concept
- interest in learning
- responsibility
- courtesy
- self discipline
- honesty
- cooperation
- self control
- open mindedness
- patience
- objective thinking skills
- sense of humor
- respect for self and others
- problem solving skills
- compassion
- inner wisdom
- acceptance of self and enthusiasm for life
• integrity

Add any characteristics to the list that you feel have been left out. Keep these characteristics in mind as you study the concepts of Positive Discipline. It will be evident that children develop these characteristics when they are actively involved in this model of mutual respect and cooperation.
Chapter Two

SOME BASIC CONCEPTS

This book contains hundreds of practical application ideas for non-punitive discipline. However, before getting into "how to" it's important to know "why to." Too many parents and teachers use methods that don’t produce effective long-term results for children because they don’t understand essential concepts of human behavior. The basic Adlerian concepts described in this and the next two chapters help parents and teachers understand more about human behavior, why children misbehave, and why Positive Discipline methods work to help children become happy, contributing members of society.

Alfred Adler was a man with ideas ahead of his time. During his popular lectures and public seminars in Vienna (after breaking away from Freud), he was advocating equality for all people, all races, women, and children long before it was popular to do so. Adler, an Austrian of Jewish descent, had to leave his native land during the Nazi persecution in order to continue his work.

Rudolph Dreikurs worked closely with Adler and continued to develop Adlerian psychology after Adler’s death in 1937. Dreikurs authored and coauthored many books (see "Suggested Reading") to help parents and teachers understand the practical application of Adlerian theory to improve their relationships with children at home and at school.

Before he died in 1971, Dreikurs was concerned because so many adults who attempted to practice his suggestions did not understand some of the basic concepts. This lack of understanding caused them to distort many of the techniques and use them to win over children rather than to win children over. Adults win over children when they use controlling, punitive methods. Adults win children over when they treat them with dignity and respect (kindness and firmness at the same time) and have faith in their abilities to cooperate and contribute. This requires that adults use lots of encouragement.

Winning over children makes them losers, and losing generally causes children to be rebellious or blindly submissive. Neither characteristic is desirable. Winning children over means creating a connection before engaging in correction.

Too many adults try to teach children from the "outside in" using the common practice of adding humiliation to a logical consequence in the mistaken belief that children won’t learn unless they suffer for their mistakes. It is true that humiliation may motivate children to do better, but at what cost to their sense of self-worth? Will they
become "pleasers" or "approval junkies"—always thinking their worth depends on the approval of others? Will they do better but be afraid to take risks for fear of failure? Will their learning include the kind of blame, shame and pain that invites lowered self-esteem? Or, will their learning be based on adult empathy, encouragement, unconditional love, and involving children in ways that invite life-skill training and a healthy sense of self-worth?

**Self-Esteem—an Illusionary Concept**

Since self-esteem and self-worth have been mentioned it is important to define these terms—even though experts don’t agree on a definition. I was a member of the California Self-Esteem Task Force, and it was interesting to listen to the task force members debate over a definition of self-esteem.

I believe we have done children a disservice by thinking we can give them self-esteem. There has been a movement to give children self-esteem through praise, happy stickers, smiley faces, and making them very important person of the day. All of this could be fun and harmless, unless a child decides that his or her self-worth depends on the outside opinion of others. When this happens, children may become pleasers or approval junkies. They learn to look to others to decide if what they are doing is okay instead of learning to self-evaluate and reflect on right action internally. They develop other esteem instead of self esteem.

Have you noticed how illusive self-esteem can be? One day you may feel great about yourself. Then you make a mistake and criticize yourself, or hear criticism from someone else—and, suddenly, your self-esteem goes down the tubes.

It is my opinion that we are of the greatest service to children when we teach them self-evaluation (discussed in more detail in Chapter 7 on Encouragement) instead of dependency upon praise and the opinion of others. Adults can help by teaching that mistakes are wonderful opportunities to learn. By allowing kids to experience failure, they will figure out for themselves how to solve problems when they arise. They will benefit greatly from learning to be resilient so they know how to handle the ups and downs of life. Children benefit by having many opportunities to feel good about themselves when they make a meaningful contribution in their home, school, or community. A sense of belonging and significance is the key.

One of my favorite Peanuts cartoons shows Nancy asking Linus, "How was school today?" Linus answers, "I didn’t go. I opened the door and asked, ‘Does anyone in there need me?’ No one answered so I went home." Children need to feel needed.
When children develop strength in all of the Significant Seven discussed in Chapter 1, they will have a strong sense of self-worth and will be able to deal with the illusive nature of "self-esteem." Adults can start by creating a positive learning environment by winning children over instead of trying to win over children.

**WINNING CHILDREN OVER**
Children feel encouraged when they think you understand their point of view—a great way to create connection. Once they feel understood, they are more willing to listen to your point of view and to work on a solution to the problem. Remember that children are more likely to listen to you after they feel listened to. Using the following Four Steps for Winning Cooperation is a great way to create a connection so children feel ready to listen and to cooperate.

**FOUR STEPS FOR WINNING COOPERATION**
1. Express understanding for the child’s feelings. Be sure to check with him to see if you are right.
2. Show empathy without condoning. Empathy does not mean you agree or condone. It simply means you understand the child’s perception. A nice touch here is to share times when you have felt or behaved similarly.
3. Share your feelings and perceptions. If the first two steps have been done in a sincere and friendly manner, you will have created a connection and the child will be ready to listen to you.
4. Invite the child to focus on a solution. Ask if he has any ideas on what to do in the future to avoid the problem. If he doesn’t, offer some suggestions and seek his agreement.

An attitude of friendliness, caring, and respect are essential to these steps. Your decision to create a connection will be enough to create positive feelings in you. After the first two steps, the child will be won over, too. He will now be ready to hear you when you use the third step (even if you may have expressed your feelings many times before without being heard.) The fourth step — (invite the child to focus on a solution) is likely to be effective now that you have created an atmosphere of respect.

Mrs. Martinez shared the following experience where she first created distance and hostility and then used the four steps for winning cooperation to correct her mistake and create closeness and trust. Her daughter, Linda, came home from school complaining that her teacher had yelled at her in front of the whole class. Mrs. Martinez put her hands on her hips and asked Linda in an accusing voice, "Well, what did you do?"
Linda dropped her eyes and angrily replied, "I didn’t do anything."

Mrs. Martinez said, "Oh, come on, teachers don’t yell at students for nothing. What did you do?"

Linda flopped on the couch with a sullen look on her face and just glared at her mother. Mrs. Martinez continued in her accusing tone, "Well, what are you going to do to solve this problem?"

Linda belligerently replied, "Nothing."

At this point Mrs. Martinez remembered the Four Steps for Winning Cooperation. She took a deep breath, changed her attitude, and commented in a friendly tone of voice, "I’ll bet you felt embarrassed to have the teacher yell at you in front of the others." (Step 1. Express understanding.)

Linda looked up at her mother with suspicious interest. Mrs. Martinez then shared, "I can remember once in the fourth grade that happened to me just because I got up to sharpen my pencil during a math test. I was so embarrassed and angry that my teacher would yell at me in front of the whole class.” (Step 2. Show empathy without condoning—and share a similar experience.)

Linda was interested now. "Really?" she said, "All I did was ask to borrow a pencil. I certainly didn’t think it was fair for my teacher to yell at me for that."

Mrs. Martinez said, "Well, I can certainly understand how you must have felt. Can you think of anything you might do to avoid that kind of embarrassing situation in the future?" (Step 4. Invite child to focus on a solution. Step 3 was not necessary in this case.)

Linda responded, "I suppose I could be sure I had more than one pencil, so I would not have to borrow.”

Mrs. Martinez said, "That sounds like an excellent idea.”

One of Mrs. Martinez’s goals was to help Linda behave in ways that would not invite her teacher’s anger and disapproval. Notice that the first time she invited Linda to think about what she could do to solve the problem, Linda was feeling too hostile to cooperate. Once her mother used encouragement to create a connection (through the Four Steps for Winning Cooperation), Linda felt closeness and trust instead of distance and hostility, and was willing to think of a solution. When her mother was able to see things from Linda’s point of view, Linda no longer felt the need to be defensive.

Mrs. Jones also used the Four Steps for Winning Cooperation when she learned that her six year old son, Jeff, had been stealing. She found a quiet time when no one else was around and asked Jeff to come sit on her lap—a great way to create connection. She then
told Jeff she had heard about him stealing a pack of gum from the store. (Notice she didn’t "set him up" by asking him if he had done something when she already knew he had.) Next she shared a time when she was in the fifth grade and had stolen an eraser from a store; she knew she shouldn’t have done it, and it made her feel very guilty, so she decided it wasn’t worth it. Jeff said defensively, "But the store has so much gum." Mrs. Jones then led Jeff in a discussion exploring how much gum and other merchandise the store owner had to sell in order to pay his rent, pay employees, pay for inventory, and earn enough money to live on. Jeff admitted he had never thought of that. They also discussed how they wouldn’t like to have others take their things. Jeff confided he did not want to steal things anymore, and that he would pay for the gum he had stolen. Mrs. Jones offered to go with him for moral support.

Mrs. Jones was able to create a connection and win Jeff over by not accusing, blaming, or lecturing. Jeff did not have to feel he was a bad person for what he had done, and he was willing to explore socially responsible reasons for not doing it again. Also, he was able to participate in a solution that, although embarrassing for him, would be a very valuable life lesson for future behavior. He was able to do this because his mother created a feeling of support rather than attack and defensiveness.

**THE FEELING BEHIND WHAT YOU DO OR SAY IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN WHAT YOU DO OR SAY.**

What we do is never as important as how we do it. The feeling and attitude behind what we do will determine the how. An adult can ask, "What did you learn from this?" with a tone of voice that is blaming and shaming or with a tone of voice that shows empathy and interest. An adult can create an atmosphere that invites closeness and trust, or an atmosphere that creates distance and hostility. It is amazing how many adults believe they can have a positive influence on children after creating distance and hostility instead of a connection of closeness and trust. (Do they really believe this -- or are they simply reacting without thinking?)

The feeling behind words is often most evident in our tone of voice. Adding humiliation violates the basic concept of mutual respect. It also changes what could be a logical consequence into punishment, which won’t achieve positive long term effects. If a child spills milk on the floor, the logical solution would be for her to clean it up. It remains a logical solution so long as the adult engages the child through kind but firm words, such as "Whoops, what do you need to do about that?" (Notice how much more engaging it is to ask the child what she needs to do instead of telling her what she needs to do. Asking instead of telling is one of the most effective Positive Discipline methods
you will learn and is discussed in more detail in Chapter Six.

Telling invites resistance and rebellion. Respectfully involving children invites them to feel capable and to use their power in contributing ways. A request becomes a punishment when adults don’t use a tone of voice that is kind and respectful or adds humiliation, such as, "How can you be so clumsy? Clean that up right now, and let me pour the milk from now on since you can’t seem to get it right."

Adlerian psychology provides a set of basic concepts that offer a wealth of knowledge to help us increase our understanding of children and of ourselves, but it is so much more than just theory. The basic concepts are lost without attitudes of encouragement, understanding, and respect. If these attitudes are not understood, the techniques will be reduced to disrespectful manipulation. We will be more effective with children if we always ask ourselves, "Is what I am doing empowering or discouraging?"

Have I taken the time to create a connection before attempting correction?

**BASIC ADLERIAN CONCEPTS**

Eight basic Adlerian concepts are explained in this chapter so that practical application methods can be properly understood. The explanations are oriented toward understanding children’s behavior, but their application to adults will be obvious.

**1. CHILDREN ARE SOCIAL BEINGS**

Behavior is determined within a social context. Children make decisions about themselves and how to behave, based on how they see themselves in relationship to others and how they think others feel about them. Remember that children are constantly making decisions and forming beliefs about themselves, about the world, and about what they need to do to survive or thrive. When they are "thriving" they are developing strength in all of the Significant Seven discussed in Chapter One. When they are in their "survival" mode (trying to figure out how to feel a sense of belonging and significance), adults often interpret this as misbehavior. Does misbehavior seem different to you when you think of it as "survival mode" behavior?

The concept of behavior being determined within a social context will make more sense when combined with the next two.

**2. BEHAVIOR IS GOAL ORIENTED**

Behavior is based on a goal to be achieved within a social context. The primary goal is to belong. Children are not consciously aware of the goal they hope to achieve. Sometimes they have mistaken ideas of how to achieve what they want and behave in ways that
achieve just the opposite of their goal. For example, they may want to belong, but they act obnoxious in their awkward attempts to achieve this goal. It can become a vicious cycle. The more their behavior invites annoyance or anger, the more obnoxious they may act because they want to belong.

Dreikurs explained this when he said, "Children are good perceivers, but poor interpreters." Children are not the only ones with this problem, but the following situation is an example of how it begins.

When the mother of two year old Adele comes home from the hospital with a new baby brother, Adele perceives how much attention Mother gives to the baby. Unfortunately, Adele interprets this to mean that Mother loves the baby more than her. This is not true, but the truth is not as important as what Adele believes. Her behavior will be based on what she believes is true rather than on what is true. Adele’s goal is to regain her special place with Mother, and she mistakenly believes that the way to achieve this goal is to act like a baby, so she may want a bottle, poop her pants, and cry a lot. She achieves just the opposite of her goal when Mother feels frustrated and rejecting rather than loving and affectionate.

3. A CHILD’S PRIMARY GOAL IS TO BELONG AND TO BE SIGNIFICANT

The first two concepts are brought together here as we see that the goal of all behavior is to achieve belonging and significance within the social environment. Misbehavior is based on a mistaken belief about how to achieve belonging and significance, as in the previous example. This is why I think misbehavior should be spelled with a hyphen.

4. A MISBEHAVING CHILD IS A DISCOURAGED CHILD

A misbehaving child is trying to tell us, "I don’t feel I belong or have significance, and I have a mistaken belief about how to achieve it.” When a misbehaving child acts obnoxious, it is easy to understand why it is difficult for most adults to get past the misbehavior and remember the real meaning and message behind it, "I just want to belong." Understanding this concept is the first step for adults to be more effective in helping misbehaving children. It helps to be a "code breaker." When a child mis-behaves, think of the misbehavior as a code and ask yourself, "What is she really trying to tell me?" Remember, the child is not consciously aware of her coded message, but will feel deeply understood when you deal with her hidden belief instead of reacting just to the behavior. You will feel differently about misbehavior if you remember that behind the misbehavior is a child who just wants to belong and is confused or unskilled about how to accomplish this goal in a socially useful way. Also, it will be helpful if you look closely to see if your
behavior is inviting the child to believe she doesn’t belong or have significance. These first four concepts are discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four.

5. SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY OR COMMUNITY FEELING

Another important contribution of Alfred Adler is the concept of Gemeinschaftsgefühl, a beautiful German word coined by Adler. There is not a good English translation, but Adler finally chose social interest (and I use social responsibility). It means having real concern for one’s fellow person and a sincere desire to make a contribution to society. The following story was shared by Kristin R. Pancer in the December 1978 issue of the Individual Psychologist to convey the meaning of social responsibility

Once there were two brothers who owned a farm together. They had a difficult time making a living because of the rocky soil and drought, but they shared all profits equally. One of the brothers had a wife and five children. The other was a bachelor. One night the married brother could not sleep. He tossed and turned as it occurred to him how unfair their arrangement was. He thought, "My brother does not have any children to go home to, or to take care of him in his old age. He really needs more than half. Tomorrow I will offer him two thirds of our profits. Surely that will be more equitable." That same night the other brother also had difficulty sleeping, because he also decided their fifty fifty arrangement was not fair. He thought, "My brother has a wife and five children to feed. They also contribute more labor to the farm than I do. My brother deserves more than half. Tomorrow I will offer him two thirds. The next day the brothers met and each shared his plan for a more equitable arrangement. This is an example of social responsibility in action.

Adler had what he called his Fourteen Day Cure Plan. He claimed he could cure anyone of mental illness in just fourteen days if they would just do what he told them to do. One day a woman who was extremely depressed came to see Adler. He told her, "I can cure you of your depression in just fourteen days if you will follow my advice."

She was not very enthusiastic as she asked, "What do you want me to do?"

Adler replied, "If you will do one thing for someone else every day for fourteen days, at the end of that time your depression will be gone."

She objected, "Why should I do something for someone else, when no one ever does anything for me?"

Adler jokingly responded, "Well, maybe it will take you twenty one days." He went on to add, "If you can’t think of anything you are willing to do for someone else, just think of what you could do if you felt like it." Adler knew that if she would even think about doing something for someone else, she would be on her way toward improvement.
It is extremely important to teach social responsibility to children. What good is academic learning if young people do not learn to become contributing members of society? Dreikurs often said, "Don’t do anything for a child that a child can do for herself.” The reason for this is that we rob children of opportunities to develop the belief that they are capable, through their own experience, when we do too much for them. Instead they may develop the belief that they need to be taken care of or that they are “entitled” to special service.

The first step in teaching social responsibility is to teach self-reliance. Then children are ready to help others, and feel extremely capable when they do. When adults take the role of super-moms and super-teachers, children learn to expect the world to serve them rather than to be of service to the world. These are the children who think it is unfair if they don’t get their own way. When others refuse to serve them they feel sorry for themselves or seek revenge in some hurtful or destructive way. When they seek revenge, they always hurt themselves as much or more than they hurt others.

At the other extreme are parents and teachers who are too busy to take the time to teach children social and life skills for good character. These same adults become upset when children don’t "behave themselves.” I’m not sure where they think these children learn respectful behavior. Too many adults are “blaming” children for their misbehavior instead taking responsibility (not blame) for their part in the misbehavior equation. Positive Discipline helps children and adults end these vicious cycles by encouraging social interest. Parents and teachers are usually not aware of how much they are doing for children that children could be doing for themselves. They don’t take time to teach children how to make a contribution to the home or classroom. Take an inventory. Teachers, how many things are you doing in the classroom that could be done by children? Parents, how much are you doing for children because it is expedient instead of helping them feel capable by contributing?

In the book, Positive Discipline in the Classroom my co-authors and I talk about the importance of getting students involved in brainstorming all the jobs that need to be done in the classroom. The teacher can participate in the brainstorming, but it is amazing how many things children can think of when they are invited to do so. After the list is completed, ask for volunteers for each job. Make sure there is at least one job for everyone. There can even be a "job monitor." It is important to establish (with student input) a job rotation system so that no one gets stuck with the less enticing jobs for too long. It is obvious how job sharing can increase belonging, teach life skills, and allow children to experience social responsibility.
6. EQUALITY

Many people today do not have trouble with the concept of equality until it comes to children. Then many objections are raised. "How can children be equal when they don’t have the same experience, knowledge, or responsibility?” they ask.

As emphasized in the last chapter, equality does not mean "the same." Adler meant by equality that all people have equal claims to dignity and respect. Most adults are willing to agree that children are equal to them in value. This is one reason why Positive Discipline does not include humiliation. Humiliating techniques are contrary to the concepts of equality and mutual respect.

7. MISTAKES ARE WONDERFUL OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN

In our society we are taught to be ashamed of mistakes. We are all imperfect. What we need to achieve is the courage to change our debilitating beliefs about imperfection. This is one of the most encouraging concepts, and yet one of the hardest to achieve in our society. There isn’t a perfect human being in the world, yet everyone is demanding it of themselves and others -- especially children.

Close your eyes and remember the messages you received from parents and teachers about mistakes when you were a child. What were those messages? To make this exercise more powerful, you may want to write them down. When you made a mistake, did you receive the message that you were stupid, inadequate, bad, a disappointment, a klutz? Close your eyes again and let yourself remember a specific time when you were being berated for a mistake. What were you deciding about yourself and about what to do in the future? Remember, you were not aware that you were making a decision at the time; but when you look back it is usually obvious what decisions you were making. Some people decide they are bad or inadequate. Others decide they should not take risks for fear of humiliation if their efforts fall short of perfection. As discussed above, too many decide to become approval junkies and try to please adults at great cost to their self-esteem. And some decide they will be sneaky about their mistakes and do everything they can to avoid getting caught. Are these healthy messages and decisions that encourage productive life skill development? Of course not.

When parents and teachers give children negative messages about mistakes, they usually mean well. They are trying to motivate children to do better for their own good. They haven’t taken time to think about the long term results of their methods. So much parenting and teaching is based on fear. Adults fear they aren’t doing a good job if they don’t make children do better. Too many are more concerned about what the neighbors will think than about what their children are learning. Others are afraid that children will never learn to do better if they don’t instill them with fear and humiliation. Most are
afraid because they don’t know what else to do—and fear that if they don’t inflict blame, shame and pain, they will be acting permissively. Often adults cover up their fear by acting more controlling.

There is another way. It is not permissive, and it truly motivates children to do better without paying the price of a lowered sense of self-worth. We need to learn and teach children to be excited about mistakes as opportunities to learn. Wouldn’t it be wonderful to hear an adult say to a child, “You made a mistake. That is fantastic. What can we learn from it?” And I do mean we. We are partners in most of the mistakes made by children. Many mistakes are made because we haven’t taken time for training and encouragement. We often provoke rebellion instead of inspiring improvement. Model the courage to accept imperfection so that children will learn from you that mistakes truly are an opportunity to learn.

Children learn to see and practice mistakes as opportunities to learn during family and class meetings (discussed in later chapters). Many families have found it helpful to invite everyone to share a mistake of the day and what they learned from it at dinner time. Once a week during a class meeting (held on a daily basis) some teachers allow time for every student to share a mistake and what they learned from it. Children need daily exposure to the value of mistakes—and learning from them in a safe environment.

Another primary theme of this book, one that you will hear over and over, is learning how to use discipline challenges as opportunities to learn. First, however, adults need to change any negative beliefs about mistakes they may have so they can model what Rudolf Dreikurs called the courage to be imperfect. Using the three Rs of Recovery is an excellent way to model the courage to be imperfect

THE THREE Rs OF RECOVERY FROM MISTAKES

1. Recognize—"Wow! I made a mistake."
2. Reconcile—"I apologize."
3. Resolve—"Let’s work on a solution together."

It is much easier to take responsibility for a mistake when it is seen as a learning opportunity rather than something bad. If we see mistakes as bad we tend to feel inadequate and discouraged and may become defensive, evasive, judgmental, or critical—of ourselves or others. On the other hand, when mistakes are seen as opportunities to learn, recognizing them will seem like an exciting venture. "I wonder what I will learn from this one." Self forgiveness is an important element of the first R of Recovery.

Have you ever noticed how forgiving children are when we are willing to apologize?
Have you ever said you were sorry to a child? If so, how did that child respond? I ask this question during lectures all over the world, and the response is universal. When adults sincerely apologize, children almost always say, "That’s okay, Mom" (or Dad, or Teacher.) Children can be feeling angry and resentful in response to disrespectful behavior one minute (and adults probably deserve it) and switch to total forgiveness as soon as the adult says, "I am sorry."

The first two Rs of Recovery—recognize and reconcile—create a connection before the third R, working on solutions. Trying to work on solutions before creating a connection is totally non-productive.

Just like most adults and children, even when I know better, I don’t always do what I know. As human beings it is common for us to become emotionally hooked and lose our common sense (revert to our reptilian brains). We then thoughtlessly react instead of acting thoughtfully. One thing I love about the Positive Discipline principles is that no matter how many mistakes I make, and no matter how many messes I create with my mistakes; I can always go back to the principles, learn from my mistakes, clean up the mess I made -- and make things better than they had been before the mistakes.

Since I make so many mistakes, the Three Rs of Recovery is one of my favorite concepts. My signature example is the time I said to my then eight year old daughter, "Mary, you are a spoiled brat." (Does that sound like kindness, firmness, dignity, and respect?)

Mary, who is very familiar with the Three Rs of Recovery, retorted, "Well, don’t tell me later that you are sorry."

In total reaction, I said, "You don’t have to worry, because I’m not."

Mary ran to her bedroom and slammed the door. I soon reverted back to my rational brain, realized what I had done, and went to her bedroom to apologize. She was still angry, and was not ready for an apology. She had her copy of an early edition of Positive Discipline and was very busy underlining with a big, black marking pen. I looked over her shoulder and saw that she had scribbled "phony" in the column.

I left the room thinking, "Oh dear, there will probably be another Mommy Dearest book hitting the market any day." I knew I had made a huge mistake.

In about five minutes Mary came to me, timidly put her arms around me and said, "I’m sorry, Mama."

I said, "Honey, I’m sorry too. In fact, when I called you a spoiled brat, I was being one. I was upset at you for losing control of your behavior, but I had lost control of my own behavior. I am so sorry."
Mary said, "That’s okay, I was acting like a brat."
I said, "Well, I can see what I did to provoke you to act that way."
Mary said, "Well, I can see what I did."
I have seen this happen over and over. When adults take responsibility for what they did to create a conflict (and, any conflict takes at least two) children are usually willing to follow this modeling and take responsibility for their part. Children learn accountability when they have models of accountability.
A few days later I overheard Mary on the phone saying to her friend, "Oh Debbie, you are so stupid!" Mary quickly realized what she had done and said, "I’m sorry Debbie. When I call you stupid, that means I am being stupid."
Mary had internalized the principles of Recovery and learned that mistakes are nothing more than wonderful opportunities to learn. And there is one more key concept that unlocks all doors . . .

8. MAKE SURE THE MESSAGE OF LOVE GETS THROUGH
Mrs. Smith, a single parent, called for help with a problem she was having with her daughter, Maria. Mrs. Smith was afraid Maria might be getting into drugs. She had found a six pack of beer on the floor in Maria’s closet and described the following scene. She confronted Maria with the six-pack of beer in her hand and asked, "What is this!"
Mrs. Smith’s tone of voice clearly indicated that she was not really interested in an answer to her question. It was a set up question designed to trap and humiliate. The question immediately created distance and hostility.
Maria replied with sarcasm, "It looks like a six pack of beer to me, Mom."
The battle escalated. Mrs. Smith said, "Don’t get smart with me, young lady. You tell me about this."
Maria said, with total innocence, "Mom, I don’t know what you are talking about!"
Mrs. Smith was now ready to spring the trap, "I found this beer on the floor of your closet young lady, and you’d better explain."
Maria did some fast thinking and said, "Oh, I forgot all about that. I was hiding it for a friend of mine."
Mrs. Smith sarcastically said, "Oh, sure! Do you think I’m going to believe that?"
Maria angrily replied, "I don’t care if you believe it or not," as she went into her bedroom and slammed the door.
I wanted to help Mrs. Smith get to the bottom line message of love by asking, "Why were you upset about finding the beer?"
I could tell she thought that was a stupid question as she indignantly replied, "Because I don’t want her to get into trouble."

"Why don’t you want her to get into trouble?", was the next question.

I could tell Mrs. Smith was sorry she had called as she answered with total irritation, "Because I don’t want her to ruin her life!"

Since she still hadn’t discovered her bottom line message, I persisted, "And why is it that you don’t you want her to ruin her life?"

She finally got it. "Because I love her!" Mrs. Smith exclaimed.

The final question was asked gently, "Do you think she got that message?"

Mrs. Smith felt chagrined as she had not come even close to conveying her message of love to Maria.

The next week Mrs. Smith called to report how she had used a combination of The Three Rs of Recovery and the Four Steps for Winning Cooperation. The next night, when Maria came home she greeted her at the door, and coming from an attitude of love she asked, "Maria, can we talk?"

Maria asked belligerently, "What do you want to talk about?" (It is important to note that it may take a while for children to hear and trust a change in attitude by adults.) Mrs. Smith understood this. Instead of reacting to the belligerence, she got into Maria’s world and made a guess about how she might be feeling: "I’ll bet that when I started yelling at you about the six-pac of beer last night, you probably thought I didn’t even care about you."

Maria felt so understood that she started to cry. With accusation and a tremor in her voice she said, "That’s right. I’ve been feeling like I’m nothing but a bother to you -- and that only my friends really care about me."

Mrs. Smith said, "I can see how you might feel that way. When I come at you with my fear and my anger instead of my love, how could you feel anything else?"

Maria visibly relaxed her belligerent attitude. Her mother’s attitude of love was finally getting through to her. When Mrs. Smith could see this she continued, "I’m really sorry for the way I blew up at you yesterday."

The distance and hostility had changed to connection, closeness, and trust. Maria responded by saying, "That’s okay, Mom. I really was hiding it for a friend."

Mrs. Smith then shared, "Maria, I really do love you. Sometimes I get scared that you might do things that could hurt you. I go overboard with my fears, and I forget to tell you that it is only because I love you." Mrs. Smith put her arms around Maria and said,
"Will you give me another chance? Can we start talking with each other and solve problems together with love and concern for each other?"

Maria said, "Sure Mom. Sounds good to me."

Mrs. Smith reported that they started having family meetings that night. She felt grateful because an atmosphere of love and connection had been established that totally changed their relationship.

You’ll notice that the examples in this chapter illustrate how adult misbehavior (lack of knowledge or skills) contributes to the misbehavior of the children. When the adults changed their behavior—so did the children. And, in every case, the adults experienced more joy, as well as positive results, when they remembered to make sure that the message of love got through.

These eight basic Adlerian concepts provide the foundation for understanding behavior and developing the attitudes and methods necessary to implement the Positive Discipline approach. The methods will help adults learn the attitudes and skills they need to help children develop the life skills and characteristics they need when they venture out into the world.
Chapter Two

SOME BASIC CONCEPTS

This book contains hundreds of practical application ideas for non-punitive discipline. However, before getting into "how to" it’s important to know "why to." Too many parents and teachers use methods that don’t produce effective long-term results for children because they don’t understand essential concepts of human behavior. The basic Adlerian concepts described in this and the next two chapters help parents and teachers understand more about human behavior, why children misbehave, and why Positive Discipline methods work to help children become happy, contributing members of society.

Alfred Adler was a man with ideas ahead of his time. During his popular lectures and public seminars in Vienna (after breaking away from Freud), he was advocating equality for all people, all races, women, and children long before it was popular to do so. Adler, an Austrian of Jewish descent, had to leave his native land during the Nazi persecution in order to continue his work.

Rudolph Dreikurs worked closely with Adler and continued to develop Adlerian psychology after Adler’s death in 1937. Dreikurs authored and coauthored many books (see "Suggested Reading") to help parents and teachers understand the practical application of Adlerian theory to improve their relationships with children at home and at school.

Before he died in 1971, Dreikurs was concerned because so many adults who attempted to practice his suggestions did not understand some of the basic concepts. This lack of understanding caused them to distort many of the techniques and use them to win over children rather than to win children over. Adults win over children when they use controlling, punitive methods. Adults win children over when they treat them with dignity and respect (kindness and firmness at the same time) and have faith in their abilities to cooperate and contribute. This requires that adults use lots of encouragement.

Winning over children makes them losers, and losing generally causes children to be rebellious or blindly submissive. Neither characteristic is desirable. Winning children over means creating a connection before engaging in correction.

Too many adults try to teach children from the "outside in" using the common practice of adding humiliation to a logical consequence in the mistaken belief that children won’t learn unless they suffer for their mistakes. It is true that humiliation may
motivate children to do better, but at what cost to their sense of self-worth? Will they become "pleasers" or "approval junkies"—always thinking their worth depends on the approval of others? Will they do better but be afraid to take risks for fear of failure? Will their learning include the kind of blame, shame and pain that invites lowered self-esteem? Or, will their learning be based on adult empathy, encouragement, unconditional love, and involving children in ways that invite life-skill training and a healthy sense of self-worth?

**Self-Esteem—an Illusionary Concept**

Since self-esteem and self-worth have been mentioned it is important to define these terms—even though experts don’t agree on a definition. I was a member of the California Self-Esteem Task Force, and it was interesting to listen to the task force members debate over a definition of self-esteem.

I believe we have done children a disservice by thinking we can give them self-esteem. There has been a movement to give children self-esteem through praise, happy stickers, smiley faces, and making them very important person of the day. All of this could be fun and harmless, unless a child decides that his or her self-worth depends on the outside opinion of others. When this happens, children may become pleasers or approval junkies. They learn to look to others to decide if what they are doing is okay instead of learning to self-evaluate and reflect on right action internally. They develop other esteem instead of self-esteem.

Have you noticed how illusive self-esteem can be? One day you may feel great about yourself. Then you make a mistake and criticize yourself, or hear criticism from someone else—and, suddenly, your self-esteem goes down the tubes.

It is my opinion that we are of the greatest service to children when we teach them self-evaluation (discussed in more detail in Chapter 7 on Encouragement) instead of dependency upon praise and the opinion of others. Adults can help by teaching that mistakes are wonderful opportunities to learn. By allowing kids to experience failure, they will figure out for themselves how to solve problems when they arise. They will benefit greatly from learning to be resilient so they know how to handle the ups and downs of life. Children benefit by having many opportunities to feel good about themselves when they make a meaningful contribution in their home, school, or community. A sense of belonging and significance is the key.

One of my favorite Peanuts cartoons shows Nancy asking Linus, "How was school
today?” Linus answers, ”I didn’t go. I opened the door and asked, ‘Does anyone in there need me?’ No one answered so I went home.” Children need to feel needed.

When children develop strength in all of the Significant Seven discussed in Chapter 1, they will have a strong sense of self-worth and will be able to deal with the illusive nature of ”self-esteem.” Adults can start by creating a positive learning environment by winning children over instead of trying to win over children.

WINNING CHILDREN OVER
Children feel encouraged when they think you understand their point of view—a great way to create connection. Once they feel understood, they are more willing to listen to your point of view and to work on a solution to the problem. Remember that children are more likely to listen to you after they feel listened to. Using the following Four Steps for Winning Cooperation is a great way to create a connection so children feel ready to listen and to cooperate.

FOUR STEPS FOR WINNING COOPERATION
1. Express understanding for the child’s feelings. Be sure to check with him to see if you are right.
2. Show empathy without condoning. Empathy does not mean you agree or condone. It simply means you understand the child’s perception. A nice touch here is to share times when you have felt or behaved similarly.
3. Share your feelings and perceptions. If the first two steps have been done in a sincere and friendly manner, you will have created a connection and the child will be ready to listen to you.
4. Invite the child to focus on a solution. Ask if he has any ideas on what to do in the future to avoid the problem. If he doesn’t, offer some suggestions and seek his agreement.

An attitude of friendliness, caring, and respect are essential to these steps. Your decision to create a connection will be enough to create positive feelings in you. After the first two steps, the child will be won over, too. He will now be ready to hear you when you use the third step (even if you may have expressed your feelings many times before without being heard.) The fourth step —(invite the child to focus on a solution) is likely to be effective now that you have created an atmosphere of respect.

Mrs. Martinez shared the following experience where she first created distance and hostility and then used the four steps for winning cooperation to correct her mistake and create closeness and trust. Her daughter, Linda, came home from school complaining that
her teacher had yelled at her in front of the whole class. Mrs. Martinez put her hands on her hips and asked Linda in an accusing voice, "Well, what did you do?"

Linda dropped her eyes and angrily replied, "I didn’t do anything."

Mrs. Martinez said, "Oh, come on, teachers don’t yell at students for nothing. What did you do?"

Linda flopped on the couch with a sullen look on her face and just glared at her mother. Mrs. Martinez continued in her accusing tone, "Well, what are you going to do to solve this problem?"

Linda belligerently replied, "Nothing."

At this point Mrs. Martinez remembered the Four Steps for Winning Cooperation. She took a deep breath, changed her attitude, and commented in a friendly tone of voice, "I’ll bet you felt embarrassed to have the teacher yell at you in front of the others." (Step 1. Express understanding.)

Linda looked up at her mother with suspicious interest. Mrs. Martinez then shared, "I can remember once in the fourth grade that happened to me just because I got up to sharpen my pencil during a math test. I was so embarrassed and angry that my teacher would yell at me in front of the whole class." (Step 2. Show empathy without condoning—and share a similar experience.)

Linda was interested now. "Really?" she said, "All I did was ask to borrow a pencil. I certainly didn’t think it was fair for my teacher to yell at me for that."

Mrs. Martinez said, "Well, I can certainly understand how you must have felt. Can you think of anything you might do to avoid that kind of embarrassing situation in the future?" (Step 4. Invite child to focus on a solution. Step 3 was not necessary in this case.)

Linda responded, "I suppose I could be sure I had more than one pencil, so I would not have to borrow."

Mrs. Martinez said, "That sounds like an excellent idea."

One of Mrs. Martinez’s goals was to help Linda behave in ways that would not invite her teacher’s anger and disapproval. Notice that the first time she invited Linda to think about what she could do to solve the problem, Linda was feeling too hostile to cooperate. Once her mother used encouragement to create a connection (through the Four Steps for Winning Cooperation), Linda felt closeness and trust instead of distance and hostility, and was willing to think of a solution. When her mother was able to see things from Linda’s point of view, Linda no longer felt the need to be defensive.

Mrs. Jones also used the Four Steps for Winning Cooperation when she learned that
her six year old son, Jeff, had been stealing. She found a quiet time when no one else was around and asked Jeff to come sit on her lap— a great way to create connection. She then told Jeff she had heard about him stealing a pack of gum from the store. (Notice she didn’t ”set him up” by asking him if he had done something when she already knew he had.) Next she shared a time when she was in the fifth grade and had stolen an eraser from a store; she knew she shouldn’t have done it, and it made her feel very guilty, so she decided it wasn’t worth it. Jeff said defensively, ”But the store has so much gum.” Mrs. Jones then led Jeff in a discussion exploring how much gum and other merchandise the store owner had to sell in order to pay his rent, pay employees, pay for inventory, and earn enough money to live on. Jeff admitted he had never thought of that. They also discussed how they wouldn’t like to have others take their things. Jeff confided he did not want to steal things anymore, and that he would pay for the gum he had stolen. Mrs. Jones offered to go with him for moral support.

Mrs. Jones was able to create a connection and win Jeff over by not accusing, blaming, or lecturing. Jeff did not have to feel he was a bad person for what he had done, and he was willing to explore socially responsible reasons for not doing it again. Also, he was able to participate in a solution that, although embarrassing for him, would be a very valuable life lesson for future behavior. He was able to do this because his mother created a feeling of support rather than attack and defensiveness.

THE FEELING BEHIND WHAT YOU DO OR SAY IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN WHAT YOU DO OR SAY.

What we do is never as important as how we do it. The feeling and attitude behind what we do will determine the how. An adult can ask, ”What did you learn from this?” with a tone of voice that is blaming and shaming or with a tone of voice that shows empathy and interest. An adult can create an atmosphere that invites closeness and trust, or an atmosphere that creates distance and hostility. It is amazing how many adults believe they can have a positive influence on children after creating distance and hostility instead of a connection of closeness and trust. (Do they really believe this -- or are they simply reacting without thinking?)

The feeling behind words is often most evident in our tone of voice. Adding humiliation violates the basic concept of mutual respect. It also changes what could be a logical consequence into punishment, which won’t achieve positive long term effects. If a child spills milk on the floor, the logical solution would be for her to clean it up. It remains a logical solution so long as the adult engages the child through kind but firm words, such as “Whoops, what do you need to do about that?” (Notice how much more
engaging it is to ask the child what she needs to do instead of telling her what she needs to do. Asking instead of telling is one of the most effective Positive Discipline methods you will learn and is discussed in more detail in Chapter Six.

Telling invites resistance and rebellion. Respectfully involving children invites them to feel capable and to use their power in contributing ways. A request becomes a punishment when adults don’t use a tone of voice that is kind and respectful or adds humiliation, such as, "How can you be so clumsy? Clean that up right now, and let me pour the milk from now on since you can’t seem to get it right."

Adlerian psychology provides a set of basic concepts that offer a wealth of knowledge to help us increase our understanding of children and of ourselves, but it is so much more than just theory. The basic concepts are lost without attitudes of encouragement, understanding, and respect. If these attitudes are not understood, the techniques will be reduced to disrespectful manipulation. We will be more effective with children if we always ask ourselves, "Is what I am doing empowering or discouraging?"

Have I taken the time to create a connection before attempting correction?

**BASIC ADLERIAN CONCEPTS**

Eight basic Adlerian concepts are explained in this chapter so that practical application methods can be properly understood. The explanations are oriented toward understanding children’s behavior, but their application to adults will be obvious.

1. **CHILDREN ARE SOCIAL BEINGS**

Behavior is determined within a social context. Children make decisions about themselves and how to behave, based on how they see themselves in relationship to others and how they think others feel about them. Remember that children are constantly making decisions and forming beliefs about themselves, about the world, and about what they need to do to survive or thrive. When they are “thriving” they are developing strength in all of the Significant Seven discussed in Chapter One. When they are in their "survival" mode (trying to figure out how to feel a sense of belonging and significance), adults often interpret this as misbehavior. Does misbehavior seem different to you when you think of it as "survival mode” behavior?

The concept of behavior being determined within a social context will make more sense when combined with the next two.

2. **BEHAVIOR IS GOAL ORIENTED**

Behavior is based on a goal to be achieved within a social context. The primary goal is to
belong. Children are not consciously aware of the goal they hope to achieve. Sometimes they have mistaken ideas of how to achieve what they want and behave in ways that achieve just the opposite of their goal. For example, they may want to belong, but they act obnoxious in their awkward attempts to achieve this goal. It can become a vicious cycle. The more their behavior invites annoyance or anger, the more obnoxious they may act because they want to belong.

Dreikurs explained this when he said, "Children are good perceivers, but poor interpreters." Children are not the only ones with this problem, but the following situation is an example of how it begins.

When the mother of two year old Adele comes home from the hospital with a new baby brother, Adele perceives how much attention Mother gives to the baby. Unfortunately, Adele interprets this to mean that Mother loves the baby more than her. This is not true, but the truth is not as important as what Adele believes. Her behavior will be based on what she believes is true rather than on what is true. Adele’s goal is to regain her special place with Mother, and she mistakenly believes that the way to achieve this goal is to act like a baby, so she may want a bottle, poop her pants, and cry a lot. She achieves just the opposite of her goal when Mother feels frustrated and rejecting rather than loving and affectionate.

3. A CHILD’S PRIMARY GOAL IS TO BELONG AND TO BE SIGNIFICANT
The first two concepts are brought together here as we see that the goal of all behavior is to achieve belonging and significance within the social environment. Misbehavior is based on a mistaken belief about how to achieve belonging and significance, as in the previous example. This is why I think misbehavior should be spelled with a hyphen.

4. A MISBEHAVING CHILD IS A DISCOURAGED CHILD
A misbehaving child is trying to tell us, "I don’t feel I belong or have significance, and I have a mistaken belief about how to achieve it." When a misbehaving child acts obnoxious, it is easy to understand why it is difficult for most adults to get past the misbehavior and remember the real meaning and message behind it, "I just want to belong." Understanding this concept is the first step for adults to be more effective in helping misbehaving children. It helps to be a "code breaker." When a child mis-behaves, think of the misbehavior as a code and ask yourself, "What is she really trying to tell me?" Remember, the child is not consciously aware of her coded message, but will feel deeply understood when you deal with her hidden belief instead of reacting just to the behavior. You will feel differently about misbehavior if you remember that behind the misbehavior
is a child who just wants to belong and is confused or unskilled about how to accomplish this goal in a socially useful way. Also, it will be helpful if you look closely to see if your behavior is inviting the child to believe she doesn’t belong or have significance. These first four concepts are discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four.

5. SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY OR COMMUNITY FEELING
Another important contribution of Alfred Adler is the concept of Gemeinsehaftsgefuehl, a beautiful German word coined by Adler. There is not a good English translation, but Adler finally chose social interest (and I use social responsibility). It means having real concern for one’s fellow person and a sincere desire to make a contribution to society.

The following story was shared by Kristin R. Pancer in the December 1978 issue of the Individual Psychologist to convey the meaning of social responsibility

Once there were two brothers who owned a farm together. They had a difficult time making a living because of the rocky soil and drought, but they shared all profits equally. One of the brothers had a wife and five children. The other was a bachelor. One night the married brother could not sleep. He tossed and turned as it occurred to him how unfair their arrangement was. He thought, "My brother does not have any children to go home to, or to take care of him in his old age. He really needs more than half. Tomorrow I will offer him two thirds of our profits. Surely that will be more equitable." That same night the other brother also had difficulty sleeping, because he also decided their fifty fifty arrangement was not fair. He thought, "My brother has a wife and five children to feed. They also contribute more labor to the farm than I do. My brother deserves more than half. Tomorrow I will offer him two thirds. The next day the brothers met and each shared his plan for a more equitable arrangement. This is an example of social responsibility in action.

Adler had what he called his Fourteen Day Cure Plan. He claimed he could cure anyone of mental illness in just fourteen days if they would just do what he told them to do. One day a woman who was extremely depressed came to see Adler. He told her, "I can cure you of your depression in just fourteen days if you will follow my advice."

She was not very enthusiastic as she asked, "What do you want me to do?"

Adler replied, "If you will do one thing for someone else every day for fourteen days, at the end of that time your depression will be gone."

She objected, "Why should I do something for someone else, when no one ever does anything for me?"

Adler jokingly responded, "Well, maybe it will take you twenty one days." He went on to add, "If you can’t think of anything you are willing to do for someone else, just think
of what you could do if you felt like it.” Adler knew that if she would even think about doing something for someone else, she would be on her way toward improvement.

It is extremely important to teach social responsibility to children. What good is academic learning if young people do not learn to become contributing members of society? Dreikurs often said, "Don’t do anything for a child that a child can do for herself.” The reason for this is that we rob children of opportunities to develop the belief that they are capable, through their own experience, when we do too much for them. Instead they may develop the belief that they need to be taken care of or that they are "entitled” to special service.

The first step in teaching social responsibility is to teach self-reliance. Then children are ready to help others, and feel extremely capable when they do. When adults take the role of super-moms and super-teachers, children learn to expect the world to serve them rather than to be of service to the world. These are the children who think it is unfair if they don’t get their own way. When others refuse to serve them they feel sorry for themselves or seek revenge in some hurtful or destructive way. When they seek revenge, they always hurt themselves as much or more than they hurt others.

At the other extreme are parents and teachers who are too busy to take the time to teach children social and life skills for good character. These same adults become upset when children don’t "behave themselves.” I’m not sure where they think these children learn respectful behavior. Too many adults are "blaming” children for their misbehavior instead taking responsibility (not blame) for their part in the misbehavior equation. Positive Discipline helps children and adults end these vicious cycles by encouraging social interest. Parents and teachers are usually not aware of how much they are doing for children that children could be doing for themselves. They don’t take time to teach children how to make a contribution to the home or classroom. Take an inventory. Teachers, how many things are you doing in the classroom that could be done by children? Parents, how much are you doing for children because it is expedient instead of helping them feel capable by contributing?

In the book, Positive Discipline in the Classroom my co-authors and I talk about the importance of getting students involved in brainstorming all the jobs that need to be done in the classroom. The teacher can participate in the brainstorming, but it is amazing how many things children can think of when they are invited to do so. After the list is completed, ask for volunteers for each job. Make sure there is at least one job for everyone. There can even be a "job monitor." It is important to establish (with student input) a job rotation system so that no one gets stuck with the less enticing jobs for too long. It is obvious how job sharing can increase belonging, teach life skills, and allow
children to experience social responsibility.

6. EQUALITY
Many people today do not have trouble with the concept of equality until it comes to children. Then many objections are raised. "How can children be equal when they don’t have the same experience, knowledge, or responsibility?” they ask.

As emphasized in the last chapter, equality does not mean "the same." Adler meant by equality that all people have equal claims to dignity and respect. Most adults are willing to agree that children are equal to them in value. This is one reason why Positive Discipline does not include humiliation. Humiliating techniques are contrary to the concepts of equality and mutual respect.

7. MISTAKES ARE WONDERFUL OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN
In our society we are taught to be ashamed of mistakes. We are all imperfect. What we need to achieve is the courage to change our debilitating beliefs about imperfection. This is one of the most encouraging concepts, and yet one of the hardest to achieve in our society. There isn’t a perfect human being in the world, yet everyone is demanding it of themselves and others -- especially children.

Close your eyes and remember the messages you received from parents and teachers about mistakes when you were a child. What were those messages? To make this exercise more powerful, you may want to write them down. When you made a mistake, did you receive the message that you were stupid, inadequate, bad, a disappointment, a klutz? Close your eyes again and let yourself remember a specific time when you were being berated for a mistake. What were you deciding about yourself and about what to do in the future? Remember, you were not aware that you were making a decision at the time; but when you look back it is usually obvious what decisions you were making. Some people decide they are bad or inadequate. Others decide they should not take risks for fear of humiliation if their efforts fall short of perfection. As discussed above, too many decide to become approval junkies and try to please adults at great cost to their self-esteem. And some decide they will be sneaky about their mistakes and do everything they can to avoid getting caught. Are these healthy messages and decisions that encourage productive life skill development? Of course not.

When parents and teachers give children negative messages about mistakes, they usually mean well. They are trying to motivate children to do better for their own good. They haven’t taken time to think about the long term results of their methods. So much parenting and teaching is based on fear. Adults fear they aren’t doing a good job if they don’t make children do better. Too many are more concerned about what the neighbors
will think than about what their children are learning. Others are afraid that children will never learn to do better if they don’t instill them with fear and humiliation. Most are afraid because they don’t know what else to do--and fear that if they don’t inflict blame, shame and pain, they will be acting permissively. Often adults cover up their fear by acting more controlling.

There is another way. It is not permissive, and it truly motivates children to do better without paying the price of a lowered sense of self-worth. We need to learn and teach children to be excited about mistakes as opportunities to learn. Wouldn’t it be wonderful to hear an adult say to a child, "You made a mistake. That is fantastic. What can we learn from it?" And I do mean we. We are partners in most of the mistakes made by children. Many mistakes are made because we haven’t taken time for training and encouragement. We often provoke rebellion instead of inspiring improvement. Model the courage to accept imperfection so that children will learn from you that mistakes truly are an opportunity to learn.

Children learn to see and practice mistakes as opportunities to learn during family and class meetings (discussed in later chapters). Many families have found it helpful to invite everyone to share a mistake of the day and what they learned from it during dinner time. Once a week during a class meeting (held on a daily basis) some teachers allow time for every student to share a mistake and what they learned from it. Children need daily exposure to the value of mistakes – and learning from them in a safe environment.

Another primary theme of this book, one that you will hear over and over, is learning how to use discipline challenges as opportunities to learn. First, however, adults need to change any negative beliefs about mistakes they may have so they can model what Rudolf Dreikurs called the courage to be imperfect. Using the three Rs of Recovery is an excellent way to model the courage to be imperfect

THE THREE Rs OF RECOVERY FROM MISTAKES

1. Recognize-- "Wow! I made a mistake."
2. Reconcile-- "I apologize."
3. Resolve-- "Let’s work on a solution together."

It is much easier to take responsibility for a mistake when it is seen as a learning opportunity rather than something bad. If we see mistakes as bad we tend to feel inadequate and discouraged and may become defensive, evasive, judgmental, or critical— of ourselves or others. On the other hand, when mistakes are seen as opportunities to learn, recognizing them will seem like an exciting venture. "I wonder what I will learn
from this one." Self forgiveness is an important element of the first R of Recovery.

Have you ever noticed how forgiving children are when we are willing to apologize? Have you ever said you were sorry to a child? If so, how did that child respond? I ask this question during lectures all over the world, and the response is universal. When adults sincerely apologize, children almost always say, "That’s okay, Mom" (or Dad, or Teacher.) Children can be feeling angry and resentful in response to disrespectful behavior one minute (and adults probably deserve it) and switch to total forgiveness as soon as the adult says, "I am sorry."

The first two Rs of Recovery--recognize and reconcile--create a connection before the third R, working on solutions. Trying to work on solutions before creating a connection is totally non-productive.

Just like most adults and children, even when I know better, I don’t always do what I know. As human beings it is common for us to become emotionally hooked and lose our common sense (revert to our reptilian brains). We then thoughtlessly react instead of acting thoughtfully. One thing I love about the Positive Discipline principles is that no matter how many mistakes I make, and no matter how many messes I create with my mistakes; I can always go back to the principles, learn from my mistakes, clean up the mess I made -- and make things better than they had been before the mistakes.

Since I make so many mistakes, the Three Rs of Recovery is one of my favorite concepts. My signature example is the time I said to my then eight year old daughter, "Mary, you are a spoiled brat." (Does that sound like kindness, firmness, dignity, and respect?)

Mary, who is very familiar with the Three Rs of Recovery, retorted, "Well, don’t tell me later that you are sorry."

In total reaction, I said, "You don’t have to worry, because I’m not."

Mary ran to her bedroom and slammed the door. I soon reverted back to my rational brain, realized what I had done, and went to her bedroom to apologize. She was still angry, and was not ready for an apology. She had her copy of an early edition of Positive Discipline and was very busy underlining with a big, black marking pen. I looked over her shoulder and saw that she had scribbled "phony" in the column.

I left the room thinking, "Oh dear, there will probably be another Mommy Dearest book hitting the market any day." I knew I had made a huge mistake.

In about five minutes Mary came to me, timidly put her arms around me and said, "I’m sorry, Mama."

I said, "Honey, I’m sorry too. In fact, when I called you a spoiled brat, I was being
one. I was upset at you for losing control of your behavior, but I had lost control of my own behavior. I am so sorry."

Mary said, "That’s okay, I was acting like a brat."

I said, "Well, I can see what I did to provoke you to act that way."

Mary said, "Well, I can see what I did."

I have seen this happen over and over. When adults take responsibility for what they did to create a conflict (and, any conflict takes at least two) children are usually willing to follow this modeling and take responsibility for their part. Children learn accountability when they have models of accountability.

A few days later I overheard Mary on the phone saying to her friend, "Oh Debbie, you are so stupid!" Mary quickly realized what she had done and said, "I’m sorry Debbie. When I call you stupid, that means I am being stupid."

Mary had internalized the principles of Recovery and learned that mistakes are nothing more than wonderful opportunities to learn. And there is one more key concept that unlocks all doors . . .

8. MAKE SURE THE MESSAGE OF LOVE GETS THROUGH

Mrs. Smith, a single parent, called for help with a problem she was having with her daughter, Maria. Mrs. Smith was afraid Maria might be getting into drugs. She had found a six pack of beer on the floor in Maria’s closet and described the following scene. She confronted Maria with the six-pack of beer in her hand and asked, "What is this?"

Mrs. Smith’s tone of voice clearly indicated that she was not really interested in an answer to her question. It was a set up question designed to trap and humiliate. The question immediately created distance and hostility.

Maria replied with sarcasm, "It looks like a six pack of beer to me, Mom."

The battle escalated. Mrs. Smith said, "Don’t get smart with me, young lady. You tell me about this."

Maria said, with total innocence, "Mom, I don’t know what you are talking about!"

Mrs. Smith was now ready to spring the trap, "I found this beer on the floor of your closet young lady, and you’d better explain."

Maria did some fast thinking and said, "Oh, I forgot all about that. I was hiding it for a friend of mine."

Mrs. Smith sarcastically said, "Oh, sure! Do you think I’m going to believe that?"

Maria angrily replied, "I don’t care if you believe it or not," as she went into her bedroom and slammed the door.
I wanted to help Mrs. Smith get to the bottom line message of love by asking, "Why were you upset about finding the beer?"

I could tell she thought that was a stupid question as she indignantly replied, "Because I don’t want her to get into trouble."

"Why don’t you want her to get into trouble?", was the next question.

I could tell Mrs. Smith was sorry she had called as she answered with total irritation, "Because I don’t want her to ruin her life!"

Since she still hadn’t discovered her bottom line message, I persisted, "And why is it that you don’t want her to ruin her life?"

She finally got it. "Because I love her!" Mrs. Smith exclaimed.

The final question was asked gently, "Do you think she got that message?" Mrs. Smith felt chagrined as she realized she had not come even close to conveying her message of love to Maria.

The next week Mrs. Smith called to report how she had used a combination of The Three Rs of Recovery and the Four Steps for Winning Cooperation. The next night, when Maria came home she greeted her at the door, and coming from an attitude of love she asked, "Maria, can we talk?"

Maria asked belligerently, "What do you want to talk about?" (It is important to note that it may take a while for children to hear and trust a change in attitude by adults.) Mrs. Smith understood this. Instead of reacting to the belligerence, she got into Maria’s world and made a guess about how she might be feeling: "I’ll bet that when I started yelling at you about the six-pac of beer last night, you probably thought I didn’t even care about you."

Maria felt so understood that she started to cry. With accusation and a tremor in her voice she said, "That’s right. I’ve been feeling like I’m nothing but a bother to you -- and that only my friends really care about me."

Mrs. Smith said, "I can see how you might feel that way. When I come at you with my fear and my anger instead of my love, how could you feel anything else?"

Maria visibly relaxed her belligerent attitude. Her mother’s attitude of love was finally getting through to her. When Mrs. Smith could see this she continued, "I’m really sorry for the way I blew up at you yesterday."

The distance and hostility had changed to connection, closeness, and trust. Maria responded by saying, "That’s okay, Mom. I really was hiding it for a friend."

Mrs. Smith then shared, "Maria, I really do love you. Sometimes I get scared that you
might do things that could hurt you. I go overboard with my fears, and I forget to tell you that it is only because I love you.” Mrs. Smith put her arms around Maria and said, "Will you give me another chance? Can we start talking with each other and solve problems together with love and concern for each other?"

Maria said, "Sure Mom. Sounds good to me."

Mrs. Smith reported that they started having family meetings that night. She felt grateful because an atmosphere of love and connection had been established that totally changed their relationship.

You’ll notice that the examples in this chapter illustrate how adult misbehavior (lack of knowledge or skills) contributes to the misbehavior of the children. When the adults changed their behavior—so did the children. And, in every case, the adults experienced more joy, as well as positive results, when they remembered to make sure that the message of love got through.

These eight basic Adlerian concepts provide the foundation for understanding behavior and developing the attitudes and methods necessary to implement the Positive Discipline approach. The methods will help adults learn the attitudes and skills they need to help children develop the life skills and characteristics they need when they venture out into the world.