

[Better Dicipline](#)

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EDUCATION

Better Dicipline

Revolutionary thinker and leader Jane Nelson teaches parents and teachers nonviolent ways of raising and educating kids

In a recent visit to Kauai, Hawaii, Jane Nelsen conducted a Positive Discipline training session for people who want to teach parenting. "Positive Discipline" is a nonviolent way of raising children with love and respect. Her main principles are: 1) Mistakes are wonderful opportunities to learn; 2) Where did we ever get the crazy idea that in order to make children do better, we first have to make them feel worse? 3) A misbehaving child is a discouraged child; 4) The feeling behind what you do is more important than what you do; 5) The most powerful motivation for change is encouragement; 6) Positive discipline is not about perfection, it is about improvement; 7) Make sure the message of love gets through; 8) Look for solutions, not for ways to inflict "shame, blame and pain." Jane is a mother of seven and a licensed marriage, family and child counselor. She is the author or coauthor of 11 books. Hinduism Today correspondent Tara Katir interviewed Jane during her visit.

Resistance to "Positive Discipline"

I don't personally encounter a lot of resistance among parents. If people want to hear it, I'm there to teach it. There

is, however, a lot of resistance out there to treating children with dignity and respect and using nonpunitive methods. There are too many children in classrooms who are being treated very disrespectfully with punishment. There are a lot of parents who are either too authoritarian or too permissive, and so I just do the best I can to educate and to infiltrate with respect to ideas.

There are some groups, like fundamental Christians, who take on certain philosophies about child rearing. Well, we certainly know their punitive methods of raising children--spare the rod and spoil the child, beat the hell out of the child. They object to any class which teaches children to do their own decision making. They don't want their children to learn that, and they've started lawsuits and put people out of business. Because I teach Positive Discipline, I'm always wondering when they are going to come after me, but they haven't yet.

Unexpected sources of cooperation

What is very interesting to me is there are groups who have decided that Positive Discipline is very helpful, like the nonprofit group in Tuscon, Texas. They decided to fund our program as their way of trying to stop abuse and improve relationships between children and parents. They paid for us to come in and train. They like our program because we train people who can keep on training.

In Michigan I'm going to the Kellogg Foundation which is paying for me to train 72 trainers in

Michigan. It's always nice when people say, "Oh, this really fits with our philosophy." Fifteen years ago I was asked to give training classes that teachers were required to attend. It was not very much fun because a lot of those teachers were very negative and very verbal. So I said, "I don't want to do this. I don't want to try and force anybody to learn anything they're not ready to learn. People who are ready to learn, will learn." Just about this time I just noticed a shift. Regular teachers in the majority of cases were newer and less verbal because it is not so popular to be negative as it used to be. More and more teachers, especially the younger ones and the newer ones, are much more open to positive ways of dealing with children.

Acceptance in Singapore

I've done some work and lectures in Singapore. The reception was wonderful. I also have been to Japan, where my book is being translated into Japanese. There are a few strong groups there. There are some who are very receptive and some who are very hard to change. In Singapore, caning is very popular, and the people who brought me there are very interested

in stopping that. Oddly, my problem is that I go there and then I leave, and I'm not sure how much of an impact it had. But I do know that a magazine there kept asking me to write articles, and I still write for them periodically. Two ladies from Singapore are now Positive Discipline associates and continue to do parenting classes. They came to the United States in July, 1999, for one of my "Positive Discipline Associates Think Tanks." I also had a couple from Japan.

Multiracial impact

Interest in the Hispanic community is very broad in Texas because there is a grant there that pays for a group of Hispanic people to be trained in teaching parenting. I've trained a lot of the Hispanic leaders who are now teaching that population. We've trained over 600 leaders who now teach classes. The fact that Positive Discipline has been translated into Spanish helps, too. They use that book a lot in Texas, and it's also popular in Columbia.

Refinements in your technique

In the last few years, one of the big changes

was my thinking about logical consequences [If a child carelessly loses his favorite napsack, he has to earn money to buy a new one, a "logical" consequence, but not a punishment]. What I kept experiencing was that parents, teachers and students tried to discuss punishment by calling them logical consequences. I think it was two years ago when I was in a classroom, there the kids were coming up to us trying to solve a problem. And some kids were making suggestions in the name of logical consequences which sounded very punitive to me. So I just said, "Wait a minute, let's just stop. What if we just forgot about consequences and focused on solutions. Let's just see what we come up with." And so we went around the circle. I said "Let's find solutions that will really help the person and will help them to not do this again rather than punishing them for what they have done."

These kids were fifth graders and they came up with a wonderful list of solutions. Then I started teaching this to parents and said, "Why don't you forget about consequences and focus on solutions" and some of them said that it stopped many power struggles in their home because they

were unaware that what they were doing was really punishment, and they were just calling it logical consequences.

I've come out with "Positive Time Out" because what I find is that so many parents use "time out" in a way that is very punitive. Now I teach them how to use Positive Time Out in a way that helps children to take some time to cool down. The philosophy of Positive Discipline is that children do better when they feel better. So teaching them to take some time out until they get back up again gives them the power to work on their own solutions.

The future for Positive Discipline

I find it interesting that Texas is such a responsive state when it comes to positive discipline, and yet paddling in schools is allowed by law. I have heard some awful horror stories about what goes on there. But this is one of the things you'll find everywhere. In the same city, the same state and the same country there will be people who are really working toward positive change, and there will be others who still hold on

to the old ideas. There's always the advocates of "going to back to the basics," which always means going back to punishment and control. There seems to always be that backlash from those who think punishment and hurting is the only way. So, we have our work cut out for us.

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