

## [Family Relief At Last](#)

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SOCIETY

## Family Relief At Last

A brave couple in Hawaii introduce their community to nonviolent parenting

Amala Seyon, Hawaii

Diane's son, 13, sensed something had changed, but he couldn't quite put his finger on it. Here he was on Sunday morning, having one of those all-too-frequent standoffs with his mother over where he went and what he did Saturday night. But Mom wasn't yelling at him, she wasn't screaming, she hadn't even made any threats. She was talking to him in a calm, rational manner--actually treating him as an "adult." He was having trouble keeping up his usual resistance. Then suddenly he was on to her: "You're taking parenting classes, aren't you, Mom!"

Yes, her secret was out. Every Monday night Diane was joining other moms, dads and teachers seeking a kinder, gentler and more effective way of raising children. Many felt they were in over their heads when it came to child rearing. Some had resorted to desperate, even brutal, measures to control and direct their children. Others had fallen for an almost unconditional permissiveness or license in the name of love.

Now they were at a parenting class taught by my husband and me. It was based on the technique called "Positive Discipline," developed by Dr. Jane Nelsen, a family therapist and mother of seven children.

Our guru, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, publisher of Hinduism Today, had encouraged and advised my husband and me to find better parenting methods and "to help stop the war in the home." After reviewing numerous books and video tapes, we came upon the series of works by Dr. Nelsen that appeared consistent with our Hindu principles of love and nonviolence. Jane herself was frustrated with the "bag of tricks" she used as a mother, which included the usual threatening, yelling and spanking. A class in Alfred Adler's theories of psychology changed her entire perspective on child rearing and resulted in the method of "Positive Discipline."

Seeking to share this knowledge with our Kauai island community, we scheduled a class in the community center, advertised on radio and got our first group of ten students. We were a little intimidated to hear that most were either teachers or counselors, frustrated by having to spend more time disciplining than teaching. One admitted she was ready to quit.

For eight weeks, we sat together every Monday evening--ignoring the screams and chants from the karate class next door--sharing and helping each other understand positive discipline. We discussed Jane's major concepts: 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."

Nice ideas, but a little hard to swallow for teachers who face students with abusive attitudes towards authority. One middle school teacher related that he had a very discouraged student who was constantly causing disruption in the class. After exploring some of the techniques in positive discipline, he adopted the "Positive Time Out" approach in which "time out" is not punishment but an opportunity to calm down and think over the problem, then rejoin the group when you feel better. The teacher had the student come in during recess and spend personal time with him. At first the student was confused because of the friendly, caring attitude, and the absence of punishment, but it worked, and their new relationship resulted in a change in the student's behavior.

Everyone in the class wanted their children to develop self discipline. Jane Nelsen makes self discipline a reality by bringing the children into the family's decision making process through regular home meetings. Who does what chores and when? Who is responsible for picking up the toys and what do we do if they are not picked up? Talk about it before it happens and get the kids involved in the solutions. When children have "ownership" in the way the family functions, they learn to be responsible.

After sharing positive discipline now for several months, we have concluded that it is nothing new. Rather, it is the most natural and effective way to relate to our children and all those around us. History has proven that kindness, respect, cooperation and dignity build strong families, communities and countries. Punitive punishment, humiliation and fear create unsolvable problems in relationships and have created a world where violence and fear are spreading into our neighborhoods and schools.

Contact: Jane Nelsen, [jane@positivediscipline.com](mailto:jane@positivediscipline.com)

## My Goodness, It Worked! Success stories from the family front lines

Sometimes we think our child knows what we want when he doesn't. One father of eight children complained his son **John** slammed the door every time he left the house. He admitted he was ready to slap the boy. The group suggested that he take his son over to the door and show him how to shut the door carefully--run through it a couple of times, actually train him how

to close a door. He came back to class the next week amazed--"It worked!"

One mother found that Jane's ideas on birth order gave her enormous insight into her youngest son who had given up on his school work and just about everything else. It was inexplicable in such a loving home. She discovered her older son's excellence in school was unknowingly having a profound effect on the youngest son who had decided, "I can't compete with him, so why try?"

Anne didn't realize how important one positive discipline tool had become until one night when she tucked her two girls into bed and walked out. One daughter, **Laura**, shouted, "Mom! You forgot to ask what was the saddest thing that happened today and what was the happiest thing. Not only had their previous endless crying

and getting out of bed repeatedly stopped, but these simple questions asked every night as a remedy had opened a wonderful new world of communication and bonding.

**Allison, 13, was**  
supposed to spend

Saturday night with her grandmother after the football game. Instead she went to a friend's house. The parents didn't even know where this friend lived, and spent a very worried night. The father was livid in the morning, but June



wanted to apply the method, "make sure the message of love gets through." Rather than react with anger, the parents honestly expressed their love for their daughter and their fears at not knowing where she was. This honest confession,

rather than pushing her away with "pain, blame and shame," proved effective in opening Allison's mind to the breach of trust she had caused. Allison realized the need to take responsibility and recreate trust between herself and

her parents.