

Your Village: Parenting Beyond Discipline

#23: What is Positive Discipline? Transcript

Erin: Hello and welcome to this week's episode of Parenting Beyond Discipline, the place to learn about ALL things parenting and get your questions answered. I'm your host, Erin Royer-Asrilant.

Today I'm sharing about a great philosophy in parenting....positive discipline. Because positive discipline is so much more than just a set of tools or a method of discipline. It's really a whole mindset about how we approach parenting and interacting with our child or children. If you listened to last week's episode, you hopefully remember my story about feeling like I was adrift in the middle of the ocean in a small canoe with no oars. If you didn't listen to last week's episode, it is a great precursor to this one so I highly recommend listening to that one first, episode 22, What parenting style are you?

But to share a little more about that story, I was raised with the use of a lot of punitive discipline. I always knew I wasn't going to go that route and wanted something different for my family. So before I had kids I watched a lot of Supernanny, among other things. If you've ever watched that show, and it's pretty old now but her go to when the rubber hit the road was always "the naughty chair or the naughty step." Basically a time out. So I started using this. But after a short while I could see it wasn't working at best and at worst it could have been damaging my relationship with my son (he was only like 2 at the time) But it definitely was NOT working for us. I knew I needed to find some better techniques. But while I was in the process of researching and learning, I did not have many tools for discipline at my disposal and it was a scary place to be. I didn't want my son getting away with behavior I found unacceptable and also didn't want to damage our relationship. But when all you've ever known to use when push comes to shove, is something punitive and then you start to give that up, you feel pretty powerless. I also was in graduate school at that time but hadn't had any classes in child development as of yet. But obviously, after doing all of my research I figured it out and learned that positive discipline is the key.

If you listened to last week's episode you remember I discussed parenting style. Positive discipline falls into the democratic or authoritative parenting style. The outcomes are overwhelmingly positive: children feel loved and respected, children are more cooperative, exhibit the highest levels of cognitive development, rank the highest academically, have stronger self-esteem, are achievement oriented with higher levels of internal motivation & problem-solving skills, exhibit the highest levels of social development, empathy and other social-emotional skills. Kids from these backgrounds

are the most likely to display initiative and even be entrepreneurs. Positive discipline also fosters positive relationships and communication between parent and child and children raised in these homes are more influenced by their parents. Research also shows: as adults tend to be independent, self-controlled, successful in relationships. The democratic parenting style is the most effective in producing well adjusted, responsible, and HAPPY children and adults! But research has also shown that only 10-12% of parents fall in this style consistently.

So you're thinking, that all sounds great! But what does it MEAN, how do I DO this?

So I will get to some great guidelines, as well some specifics in just a few minutes but first I want to take a moment to discuss punishment. So as I also talked about last week, discipline comes from the latin word 'disciplina' which means to teach and to guide. It has nothing to do with punishment. But many people have been led to believe that punishment is a way of teaching, that it does WORK. While it may work in the short term, the long term outcomes are overwhelmingly negative. How do people learn? Through engagement, through respect. Through connection. That's how we really learn, how we make lasting internal changes. When I was in graduate school and learning about how to become a therapist, my advisor and professor often shared that the healing and change that takes place through therapy is "all about the relationship" I heard that phrase so many times. But it's true and bears repeating. "It's all about the relationship." It's not just true for a therapist-patient relationship but any relationship. What more important relationship is there than parent and child. A parent's influence is "all about the relationship." So we want to keep that bond strong. It doesn't mean we will never make our kids mad or they will love every decision. But it's how we deliver the messages and how we wield our power, right? Again, I keep saying this but if you haven't listened to last week's episode, try to go back and do so, because I share an experience I had with my oldest son just a few weeks ago where he wasn't happy with a boundary that we set down as his parents. I explain how I was able to set this boundary with love and respect. I didn't let him bowl me over and take the boundary away to appease him or keep him from getting upset. But I also didn't put my foot down so hard and exclaim "because I'm the adult and I said so." which would have led to resentment. I used positive discipline. Which is kind yet firm. I was kind in my explanation and allowing him to feel upset. But I was firm with the boundary. Positive discipline is all about maintaining this balance as much as possible. This doesn't mean I've never said "because I said so!" I have a handful of times, like everyone has! We all move between the parenting styles. Sometimes I'm a little too lenient and sometimes I'm a little too strict but the majority of the time I fall in this democratic style and use positive discipline and that's the goal! To stay in that realm as much as possible.

So I got off on a tangent so I want to get back punishment and how that actually works. First I want to share about Kohlberg's stages of moral development. The theory holds that moral reasoning, the basis for ethical behavior, has six identifiable developmental stages, each more adequate at responding to moral dilemmas than its predecessor. The first stage, technically the lowest of moral development is obedience and punishment driven. This is a morality based on a fear of punishment. What can I do to avoid punishment? This is the level of moral development that punishment serves. We don't want our kids doing the right thing because they don't like the consequences. Because as they gain more freedom then what guides their moral compass? They are prone to do things we don't approve of when they think they won't get caught. They get sneaky!

So positive discipline teaches about 5 negative outcomes of punishment. The first is resentment. When kids are punished. They can harbor resentment. That breaks down the relationship. It can lead to revenge. "I'll get even. Next time, I'll show them." This becomes an escalating and never ending cycle. Kid gets revenge, the punishment gets more severe. It becomes a big power struggle. The third is rebellion. We see a lot of this coming into play in the tween/teen years. Kids get physically bigger and the punishments that used work, withholding privileges, grounding, they get less effective quickly. the next negative outcome to punishment is the sneakiness that I mentioned earlier. "I'll still do what I want but I'll just be more careful and not get caught next time." Lastly, it damages self-esteem. I'm going to add a 6th outcome that I've already alluded to but it breaks down relationships. So for something that seems so effective in the short term, it has a lot of negatives in the long-term.

Let's talk about goals, our goals in raising our kids. I obviously cannot speak for everyone but I think for most parents, our goals are to raise, caring, kind, compassionate, ambitious, cooperative, happy kids who reach their own individual potential AND who have developed a strong sense of justice, an internal moral compass, not one based on fear of punishment. You may have your own adjectives you'd like to add to your description and that's great. Regardless, it's a tall order and a BIG job. Research shows the most effective way to raise these happy, successful kids is with the democratic parenting style, which means using positive discipline.

So, we've already talked about kind and firm. So how do we do that? Positive discipline offers lots of different tools for doing this. I use all the different tools depending on the situation, the child, age of the child.

Democratic style means freedom with order. It means choices within limits. I love the analogy of comparing parenting to flying a kite. If we hold the string too tightly, our

kids never learn how to fly. If we let it out too fast, they crash and burn. This is where parenting is more art than science right? Every kid is different. They are different about different experiences. Each kid needs a different level of guidance in different areas. So we parents have a big job figuring out the sweet spots of each kid in each area. When we see our kite/kid starting to dip too fast, we have to tighten that string. When we see the string is really tight and they pulling, showing their ability to go higher, we let it out a little. We are never always going to make the best and perfect decision every time. So we also need to cut ourselves some slack on that. But we learn. What's so beautiful about positive discipline is that we give our children a voice to share their frustrations, their desires so that we can take that into account in our decisions, we CAN change our minds or let the string out more based on their feedback. Strengthening that relationship even more. This of course, is discourse that takes place more commonly and more frequently as they age into the elementary school years and beyond. But allowing them to have a voice and then saying yes or no is a practice that can start pretty early.

So what are some ways you can start to use positive discipline right now? One of the most common, basic and flexible tools that is great from toddlerhood from about 18 months all the way up through around 10 is choices. Especially with little ones, offer choices all day long. It gives them that feeling of autonomy that they crave so much and because they get it, they are much more cooperative overall when you just need them to go with the flow. Choices change with age. So early on, Starting around 18 months offer choices as much as possible. The choices need to be very concrete, and limited to 2 such as "banana or strawberries?" "doggy or teddy bear?" "pants or shorts?" This is GREAT practice. It gives them control, builds cooperation, and increases the likelihood they will comply when they don't have a choice. Offer choices all day long, from wake-up to bedtime.

By 3, most kids want to do everything for themselves, As my daughter was saying even before turning 2 "me do it!" Continue offering all the choices from before, sticking with only 2 choices only. But now you can add, "do you want to do it by yourself or with my help?" Kids this age will usually choose to try to do the task by themselves.

By 5-6, kids are looking for more freedom over jobs they can do and how they can help. So rather than assigning a job, give them a list of age-appropriate chores and let them choose. Kids this age are also looking for more freedom over scheduling such as when and where they do their homework, as well as over their environment, like how they want to decorate their room.

In our house, we have a chore chart. Each chore has a value or payment attached. Our oldest now 7, chooses which chores he will do throughout the week. I implemented this because he would balk every time it was time to do a job that he got tired of doing. He would do the windows for a few weeks, with excitement and then once the novelty wore off, it was a struggle. So this gives him not only a choice about what to do, but WHEN to do it. Now he happily does his chores weekly because he has autonomy. He feels respected and enjoys the feeling of responsibility. For more details on guidelines and exactly how to implement this, you can see the class on chores and allowance on the website, YourVillageOnline.com.

By 7-9, kids are really looking for more physical independence. "Do you want to sit 3 or 4 rows in front of us at the movies?" "Where do you want to do your homework? In the dining room at the kitchen table or your room?"

In the positive discipline classes on the website, I also like to share all the pitfalls and what I call little genius tactics, which are those things that most kids will do to try to get around the boundaries and rules we are putting in place. So I'm going to share these, starting with the pitfalls, which are things parents do that can undermine the effectiveness of a technique. The first pitfall is offering a second set of choices after the child refuses the first.

It would go something like this. Do you want toast or oatmeal? No. Then do you want cereal or yogurt? No. Well then how about a bagel or waffle? Stick with first set of choices. "I'm offering toast or oatmeal today. Let me know when you decide."

The second pitfall is using a forced choice. A forced choice is offering one positive and one negative choice. It sounds like this, "you can clean up now or I will put the blocks in the garage for the next week. Which do you want?" this is a setup that is manipulative because, no one wants the negative choice. So there's really not much a choice to be had. Be sure to use two positives, "now or in 5 minutes." "the blocks or the trains first?" If your child does not choose or follow through, then follow up with a consequence. Consequences are not manipulative because they are setup as a given rather than a choice. "If you do not clean up right now, I will put the blocks away for the next 2 days." For kids 4 and under, 1-2-3 magic is also a great tool to use as a way to get kids moving with a deadline. There is a very specific way to use this tool as well as several pitfalls and genius tactics that are common. So I highly recommend watching that class, to learn how to use that tool well. It's also covered in the discipline tools for toddlers and discipline tools for preschoolers class, along with 15 other discipline tools.

Now for our little genius tactics. Remember these are the ways our kids will sometimes try to undermine our efforts. The first tactic is when your child changes his mind after the fact. It goes like this, "Do you want toast or oatmeal?" "Oatmeal!" "As soon as you place the oatmeal in front of him, he protests, "I want TOAST!" Your child does not consciously understand what he's doing, but he's trying to gain power. If he can get you to make a second meal, it tips the power scale strongly in favor of the child. So let your child know he needs to stick with his first choice. "you chose oatmeal so this is what you have for today. Tomorrow you can choose toast." If your child gets upset you can use your empathy skills, "I see you are upset because you changed your mind." Let your child share his feelings. If he continues to ask for toast again, you can remind him, "you chose oatmeal. Today we are going to stick with oatmeal." After a few times, your child will learn that game does not work and to put more thought into the initial choice. This is a great example of how giving a choice could turn into a power struggle if the parent comes down to the child's level. But by staying firm, yet calm and kind, the power struggle is completely avoided. If power struggles are an area of concern, you can see the power struggles class on the website for all the ways to avoid falling into a power struggle with children of any age. If you find your child is changing his or her mind often, after the fact, then start using clarification after she chooses, "I heard you say oatmeal. Is that what you want?" "Yes!" "OK. I'm going to make oatmeal and you need to stick with this choice. I am not going to make anything else. Do you understand?"

The next tactic is when your child is taking too long to choose. In this case, give a warning. "This is taking too long. We need to get going. You can choose or I will need to choose for you." You can implement 1-2-3 magic if needed to give your child a concrete deadline. Make sure to give this warning otherwise you just offered some power and then took it away before he had a chance to use it. "That took too long, here's your toast." Ooh, then you are headed straight for meltdown city!!

The last genius tactic is when your child takes the secret 3rd option, something not on the list. "Do you want to take horse or sock monkey?" "Dinosaur."

If the alternate choice meets your goal, say yes and give your reason. "Sure you can take dinosaur. He's another soft animal to cuddle with at nap time today." This is your child's way of letting you know she is ready for more decision making. This way you are making room for some flexibility by allowing her to move to the next level. If, however the 3rd choice does not meet your goal then say no and give your reason. "I'm sorry, we can't take bunny. He's too small and could get lost at school. He's safer at home." Or my personal favorite, that my oldest loved doing, asking for something outrageous

given the first set of choices, "Do you want carrots or apples for snack?" "Ice cream!" That's not a healthy choice. If you want a snack you can have carrot sticks or an apple.

The class on choices covers some more details, like the other benefits for children's development as well as the vast options available in using choices. Choices are covered in detail in all 3 discipline tools classes, discipline tools for toddlers, preschoolers and elementary age kids. Like last week the promo code GOODKIDS, can be used for 20% off any of the discipline classes on the site, as well as the monthly membership options. For more positive discipline tools, be sure to check out the discipline tab at YourVillageOnline.com.

We are taking our family summer vacation over the next couple of weeks. The podcast has been growing quickly and therefore I have been getting quite a few questions lately that I haven't been able to fit into the podcast episodes, including a great one for today's episode that I really hoped I would have time to answer. So instead, I am going to have a Q&A session for next week's episode and try to get through as many of these questions as possible. So this way, the podcast will only have a 1 week hiatus and these awesome parents can get answers to their questions and all of my great listeners can learn as well.

If you have a question, please be sure to send it Podcast@YourVillageOnline.com. If I continue getting an abundance of questions, I will do a Q&A session in between episodes to answer any parenting questions that come in.

Thanks everyone to tuning in today! If you would like to submit a question for next week's episode or other future episodes, you can send an email to Podcast@YourVillageOnline.com. You can also see what other topics we have coming up by visiting the page on our site, YourVillageOnline.com/Podcast. If you're loving what you're hearing on our podcast, please let us know by giving us a great review, and also, subscribing to our channel. If there is something you think we can do better or if there is a topic you would like to hear about, please send an email to Podcast@YourVillageOnline.com. Thanks so much everyone and I look forward to seeing you next time.