

# Positive Discipline: Behavioral Management Skills for Parents and Teachers—Part 3: Fostering the Parent–Child and Teacher–Student Relationship to Build Responsibility<sup>1</sup>

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## Other Articles in This Series

*Part 1: Types of Misbehaviors and Keys to Success* (<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/fy1458>)

*Part 2: General Approaches to Managing Behavior* (<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/fy1459>)

*Tell me and I forget,  
Teach me and I may remember,  
Involve me and I learn.*

The general goal of healthy parenting and teaching is to produce children and students who can think critically, make good decisions, and become independent, accountable, responsible, and contributing members of society. Part 3 of this *Positive Discipline: Behavioral Management Skills for Parents and Teachers* series covers tips and strategies to help parents and teachers build critical thinking and positive behavioral skills in children. Foster Cline and Jim Fay (2006) have pioneered some simple and easy-to-learn strategies through *Love and Logic* that can help parents and teachers achieve these goals. Several of these strategies are discussed in this article.



Figure 1. Parents and teachers need to be clear about their expectations for children and students.

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## Four Steps To Responsibility (Adapted from Cline and Fay, 2006)

One of the greatest reasons that misunderstandings, frustrations, and unhappiness occur in parenting and teaching is because parents and teachers are not clear about their expectations with their children and students. As a result, they often fail to help children “own” and take

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responsibility for their behaviors when they fail to meet these expectations.

- **Step 1: Give the child a task he/she can handle.** Give a child a task and have the child describe how the finished task will look so he or she knows what is expected.
- **Step 2: Hope the child “blows” it.** Significant real-world learning experiences become opportunities for growth and development (significant learning opportunities, or SLOs) when children make mistakes. The costs for making mistakes go up with age (i.e., stealing an item when the child is young vs. as a teenager), resulting in very different consequences. Being available to mentor children and students is important so that parents and teachers can help them learn from their mistakes.
- **Step 3: Let equal parts of the consequence and empathy do the teaching.** It is important to let children own their problems. Each child must take responsibility for them. Parents and teachers must not own them for the children; otherwise, they will not learn. Skilled parents and teachers find ways to turn around an inappropriate behavioral situation so the child experiences the frustration and disappointment from his/her own misbehaviors. If parents and teachers “lose it” and allow themselves to be caught in parenting/teaching traps, the child is less likely to accept responsibility for his/her actions. Do not let them play the victim. Parents and teachers should reflect on the behavior and help children be accountable for their actions through employing empathy and natural and logical consequences. Natural consequences are those that occur as a normal result of behavior (e.g., the child doesn’t wear a coat to school and gets cold as a result). Logical consequences are rewards and punishments that the parent or teacher pairs with both positive behaviors and misbehaviors (e.g., the child completes homework on time and is allowed an extra half hour of free time vs. the child does not complete homework on time and extra free time is not made available).
- **Step 4: Give the same task again.** Giving children the same task again builds accountability, responsibility, and trust and it communicates that parents and teachers believe children are capable of succeeding.

## Practice the Be C.O.O.L. Principles (Adapted from Cline and Fay, 2006)

Parents and teachers need to **Be C.O.O.L.** as they help children learn to manage and regulate their own behavior. According to *Love and Logic Parenting* (Adapted from Cline and Fay, 2006), C.O.O.L. stands for the following:

- **C is for Control that is shared by both parent and child or teacher and student.** Sharing control helps both parent and child or teacher and student to avoid power and control tactics and to work together toward a common solution.
- **O is for Ownership of the problem by the child/student.** If a parent or teacher is frustrated with a child’s behavior, they must figure out how to shift ownership of the issue to the child through practicing the principles and strategies outlined above and through employing the “5 Steps to Conflict Resolution” and the “5 Steps to Successful Classroom Management” provided below.
- **O is for Opportunity for thinking and decision making.** When children make a mistake or misbehave, they have an important opportunity (SLO) to learn from their mistakes or misdeeds. This is why parents and teachers play such a significant role as mentors.
- **L is for Let consequences and empathy do the teaching.** Expressing sympathy and empathy for the child’s predicament is an important way to build the relationship and to step out of the way of potential power and control traps. As mentioned above, it is the parent’s or teacher’s role to bring about natural and logical consequences without “losing it” so SLOs can result in positive behavior change.

## Change a “No” to a “Yes” (Adapted from Cline and Fay, 2006)

Effective parents and teachers understand the importance of when to use the word “no” and how to change it to a “yes” as often as they can in an attempt to steer clear of potential power and control traps. According to Cline and Fay (2006),

“The word *no* is one of the biggest fighting words in the parental arsenal of commands... In fact, parents of two-year-olds are known to say ‘no’—in some form or other—77 percent of the time... They hear it so much that the first word many children learn to say is ‘no’ and variations of it. The rule with ‘no’ is that we use it as seldom as possible. But when we use it, we mean business. All the other times we are tempted to use ‘no,’ we can avoid a fight by replacing ‘no’ with a ‘yes’ to something else” (p. 75).

How can parents and teachers change a “no” to a “yes”? Here are some examples.

### Example 1

- NO: “You can’t go and play until you have completed your homework—understand?”

- YES: “You are welcome to go and play with your friends when your homework is completed.”

### Example 2

- NO: “Don’t you ever raise your voice at me again or you are grounded!”
- YES: “When your voice is as calm as my voice, I would be happy to talk with you about it.”

### Example 3

- NO: “There will be no exam review today at the end of class unless you quit talking and get your assignment done.”
- YES: “I would be happy to help you review for the upcoming exam when I can see that it is quiet and your assignment is completed. If not, I guess you’ll just have to try to prepare the best you can on your own.”

## Take Control of a Situation by Offering Choices (Adapted from Cline and Fay, 2006)

Parents and teachers can take control of almost any situation by sharing power and control with children and students by offering choices. The “5 Steps to Conflict Resolution” (Cline & Fay, 2006) and the “5 Steps to Successful Classroom Management” (Harris, 2013) below are some proven strategies for offering choices and managing behavior effectively.



Figure 2. Parents and teachers can offer choices that lead to conflict resolution.

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## 5 Steps to Conflict Resolution

Cline and Fay (2006) have identified five steps in the conflict resolution process that can be effective in practicing C.O.O.L. principles with both children and students. They include:

1. **Empathy.** Using statements like “I bet that is painful,” “This is a problem,” and “I’m sure that hurts” are powerful ways to let sympathy and empathy, rather than judgment and condemnation, guide the negotiation of conflict.
2. **Send the Power Message.** The power message is sent by the parent or teacher by asking the question, “What are you going to do about this problem?” This question empowers the child to take ownership of the issue, problem, or behavior.
3. **Offer Choices.** Typically, the child or student will respond with the words, “I don’t know,” so the parent or teacher will need to be ready to respond with the question, “Would you like to hear what others in your situation have tried?”
4. **Have the Child State the Consequences.** During this step, the parent or teacher shares potential solutions and after each proposed solution asks, “How would that work out for you?” The key here is to have the child or student reason through the options.
5. **Give Permission to Solve Problem.** Both parents and teachers who are wise do not solve the problems for their children and students but allow them the potential for SLOs by making statements like “I hope it works out for you” or “Let me know how it turns out.”

## 5 Steps to Successful Classroom Management

One of the best ways to reduce classroom management problems is simply to be an engaging, caring, and effective teacher. Carlette Hardin (2008) has said, “The ultimate goal of classroom management should not be simple obedience, but on having students behave appropriately because they know it is the right thing to do and because they can understand how their actions affect other people” (p. 142). Hardin also provided this insight: “Inappropriate behavior [is] a problem to be solved together in a supportive classroom community” (p. 145).

Harris (2013) has offered a proven set of steps for successful classroom management that can be helpful in meeting

the goal of solving inappropriate behavior in a supportive classroom environment. These steps include the following:

1. **Use Positive Peer Pressure.** Using a statement like “Look at the people around you and make sure they are quiet” is a good way to remind the students that it is time to be quiet.
2. **Narrow the Focus.** If a student continues to talk, the teacher will want to point to the group of students where the disruptive student resides and state something like, “We still have some people talking over here. Are we ready to go?” (**Note:** Most classroom issues can be resolved using steps 1 and 2.)
3. **State the Expectation.** If the disruptive student continues to talk or is quiet but then talks and disrupts later, the teacher may want to call the student by name and have the student state the expectation for learning, “John, we will need to have you listen. Are you good-to-go?”
4. **Have the Person State the Consequences.** If the disruption or misbehavior continues, the teacher will want to validate the student’s worth to the classroom community and then state, “John, what’s going to have to happen if we can’t get you to participate in listening so you are not disrupting the learning environment?” John will then need to state the potential consequences for continuing to disrupt the class.
5. **Enforce the Consequences.** The teacher will then need to intervene, because the behavior is consequential, and state, “John, I’m sorry you have chosen not to remain in class with us and to miss out on the fun. Would you like to wait outside or in my office so we can talk after class?”

## Practice Activity

When confronting a behavioral issue, it is important that parents and teachers first define the problem, consider possible solutions, assess what they know about the problem and what they need to know, and then decide on a solution or a set of solutions that will work best (Teemant, Moen, & Harris, 2012). Take a minute and decide how you would handle the scenarios below. Make sure to indicate how you will use the *principles* and *strategies* discussed in Parts 1–3 to deal with the situation effectively. Use the questions below and the positive discipline table to help you decide on a *Recommendation for Action* for the given scenarios:

## Potential Positive Discipline Solution(s)

Ask yourself:

1. Which of the four principle(s) of positive parenting (e.g., children are motivated more by rewards than punishments) will you use to deal with the situation effectively, and why?
2. What strategies will you use for dealing with the specific misbehavior and for promoting behaving well, and why?
3. How might you employ the four steps to responsibility?
4. Which C.O.O.L principle(s) will you employ, and why?
5. What can you do to change a “no” to a “yes?”
6. How will you use the *5 Steps of Conflict Resolution* and/or the *5 Steps to Successful Classroom Management* to help you resolve the specific issue?

## Scenario # 1

Your teenager is consistently late returning home with the car and asks to take the car again.

1. Define the problem.
2. Possible solutions.
3. What do you know?
4. What do you need to know?
5. Which positive discipline solution(s) would work best?
6. Recommendation for action.

## Scenario # 2

A child in your first grade class accuses another child of stealing her favorite pencil eraser.

1. Define the problem.
2. Possible solutions.
3. What do you know?
4. What do you need to know?
5. Which positive discipline solution(s) would work best?
6. Recommendation for action.



### Scenario # 3

A student is whispering to a friend when you are teaching and is disrupting class.

1. Define the problem.
2. Possible solutions.
3. What do you know?
4. What do you need to know?
5. Which positive discipline solution(s) would work best?
6. Recommendation for action.

### Scenario # 4

Your child hits a sibling.

1. Define the problem.
2. Possible solutions.
3. What do you know?
4. What do you need to know?
5. Which positive discipline solution(s) would work best?
6. Recommendation for action.

## Conclusion

Guiding children and students to become independent, accountable, and responsible human beings takes knowledge and skills. In Parts 1–3 we have discussed some important, even critical, principles and strategies that can help you manage child behavior more effectively. Some of the benefits of managing behavior skillfully include helping children develop critical thinking and decision-making, self-esteem, and self-regulation skills (to name a few). But these benefits are not limited to children. There are also many important and rewarding benefits for parents and teachers who mentor them. Being a role model for children is never an easy job. Becoming as knowledgeable and skilled as possible can help parents and teachers provide the support and strength that children need to succeed.

## Tracking Your Behavioral Management Skills

Take a minute to track how you are doing with the behavioral management skills discussed in Parts 1–3 of this series by putting a “+” (plus sign) next to each target behavior you accomplish and a “–” (minus sign) next to each behavior you may still need to work on a little more. You are welcome to work on these behavioral management target behaviors all at once or one or two at a time until they become a part of your parenting and teaching arsenal. The “Y” stands for “You” and the “P” can stand for a fellow Parent, Co-Parent, or Partner/Teacher that you might choose to work with as you support each other in acquiring these important skills. Good Luck!

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Table 1. Positive Discipline Decision-Making Table

Scenarios	Steps				
	Define the problem	Possible solutions	What do you know?	What do you need to know?	Which solution(s) would work best?
Scenario # 1					
Scenario # 2					
Scenario # 3					
Scenario # 4					
Recommendation for action					

Table 2. Tracking Positive Parenting/Teaching Skills Week:

Target Behavior	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Totals
Y = You P = Partner/Participant Response	Y P	Y P	Y P	Y P	Y P	Y P	Y P	Y P
1. Parental/Teacher warmth								
2. Parental/Teacher connectedness								
3. Parental/Teacher monitoring								
4. Verbally acknowledge appropriate behavior <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positively</li> <li>• Randomly</li> <li>• Briefly</li> <li>• Variety</li> </ul>								
5. Ignore inconsequential behavior								
6. Reinforce other appropriate behavior								
7. Stop, redirect, reinforce appropriate behavior								
8. Avoid parent traps								
9. Practice (Be) C.O.O.L.								
10. Give child task, hope she blows it, give task again								
11. 5 steps of love & logic <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Empathy</li> <li>• Send the power message</li> <li>• Offer choices</li> <li>• Have child state the consequences</li> <li>• Give permission to solve problem</li> </ul>								