

Week 3. THE “WE”: WE’RE IN THIS TOGETHER!

HANDOUT: TWELVE KEY PRINCIPLES TO INTEGRAL DISCIPLINE



12 key principles that facilitate an integral approach to discipline, based upon viewing my child as a human being and a human becoming:

1) HEALTHY ATTACHMENT IS THE FOUNDATION OF HEALTHY DISCIPLINE. Attachment orchestrates the healthy instincts in parent and child. As creatures of attachment our natural orientation and expectation as a human being is to be seen, heard, loved, and connected with. So, if there is one thing to invest in that will have the greatest leverage in your parenting efforts, including discipline, it is the quality and depth of the relationship (‘WE’) with your child! That is the foundation: WHO you are to your child is more important than what you DO (the latter flows from the former). Build a warm, trusting, loving relationship with your child and engage in collecting your child, gathering him or her into your fold regularly. Nurture the relationship thru integrity, play, dignity, honesty, presence, inquiry, listening, love, fun, compassion, and attentiveness. A well - attached child is generally well-behaved, and requires little disciplining. A well-attached child also trusts you and is more likely to listen and respond to you in moments when you do need to discipline them. It is never too late to build attachment and connection.

2) KNOW YOURSELF. Disciplining your child is one of the areas of parenting in which you will most directly come face to face with how you were parented – approached with compassion, and a willingness to inquire and make different choices can make it a healing, therapeutic and evolutionary experience. This involves knowing what triggers you, and where/when you might be tempted to discipline to ease something inside yourself, rather than to help your child grow up. It includes the practice of containing

your emotions, doing the inner work of discerning where you are coming from (reactive or responsive), as well as the commitment to not take your child's behavior personally. It also rests upon the understanding that you are your child's first model, and to discipline your child, you first need to discipline yourself. Engaging in this as a spiritual practice is both revealing, healing, and stretching. Becoming self-aware helps us deliver discipline with calm firmness, rather than in a snappy, impatient, or disrespectful manner or in an inappropriate moment. We will be exploring this in more depth in Week 6.

3) KNOW YOUR CHILD: Knowing your child's capabilities, your child's perspective, and needs at various ages, as well as your child's type, learning style, what forms of communication work best with her, which areas she is well developed in and where she may need more encouragement and practice, and her current state will help you attune your discipline approach to where she is at in her journey, and how you can best help her take her next step. Discipline is something you do *with* your child, not to your child. For this reason, getting behind the eyes (the "I") of your child is one of the most useful practices to engage in as a parent.

4) CONSIDERING DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES: Behavior matures. Knowing your child involves understanding your child's **stage of development**, which helps us know if/how to discipline. This knowledge enables us to neither expect too much nor too little at any given stage. A lot of strife and unnecessary frustration (on both the parents' and the child's behalf) is the direct result of overseeing this point. Knowing age-appropriate behavior, for example, helps us discern when to respond to our child with patience and humor, when with firm direction or instruction. In addition, by knowing where we would like our child to grow toward (e.g. an integrated, mature, considerate, empowered adult) we can guide him toward this goal at a pace and in a manner that is possible for him to assimilate and implement. We can also provide opportunities for him to creatively contribute to and participate in daily activities and learning situations, and achieve new milestones in various developmental lines. There are no shortcuts to

growing up. When we have a sense of age-appropriate behavior, we can accompany them at their pace, without rushing forward or holding them back. For example, it is fine and healthy for an 18-month old child to ask for something with sounds, grunts. However, with a two and a half-year old we would encourage the use of words, and with a 3-year-old increasingly also a pleasant (rather than demanding) tone of voice. An older child can be directed to not interrupt, and from around 8 years up we can also bring their attention to how our tone of voice affects how other people feel, that with our communications we can be adding to more goodness, truth and beauty on the planet, or less. **Direction** is brought in when there is a **likelihood it can stick**; in other words, when it is developmentally appropriate. **Modelling** the behavior we hope to encourage in our children begins from **day one onward**.

5) HOLDING MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES: Holding more than one perspective at a time opens up new possibilities. This capacity allows us to see life from many different vantage points... our own, our child's, our environment, others present. This means not only being able to see multiple perspectives, but also deeply feeling into them and genuinely being with the other. By listening to our children in this way we are more likely to **talk with** rather than talk at them, to provide an “embrace” or a “stretch” while considering as fully as possible the child before us. With a multi-perspectival awareness we can consider more, and respond more fully to the moment. We can also dance with seeming paradoxes, for example, bringing together what often is seen as opposing: a “yes” and a “no”. In disciplining your child this enables you to bring forward a clear “no”, or a boundary, held within a vessel of unconditional love and warmth. Another example is bringing together a “whole” and a “part” – relating with our children as both whole complete sovereign persons, while simultaneously understanding that they are developing, evolving, and need our guidance, our direction and feedback. This enables us to guide our child in the direction we perceive he can and should grow, while ensuring that he feels heard and respected.

6) VISION: What are we guiding our children toward? As parents we are in a unique and responsible position of guiding another human being, of having to make one decision after the next for the well-being and healthy development of another person. In order to do so we must constantly **discern** what is conducive to our child's healthy development and what is not. As our child grows from one developmental stage to the next it is our task to guide him as to **what is included and transcended from the former stage of his development (which also involves discerning what needs to be excluded)**. Having a clear dynamic vision helps us stay on track. What kind of qualities would you like to encourage, nurture in, and teach your child? As you reflect on this question, consider what kind of a future our children might be living in and what skills and capacities they may need? We will be exploring this in more depth in Week 7.

7) EXPANDED RELATIONSHIP TO TIME: Having a flexible, expanded relationship to time makes a huge difference when parenting, especially with a young child! Keeping in mind the **long-term** view, being present in the actual moment and considering the **next step**... You could call it '**Evolutionary VISION**' – embracing where our child is at and guiding her toward her next evolutionary step. Discipline, or education is a long-term endeavor. Have a long-term *vision* for your child (for example, to raise an empowered, authentic, discerning, respectful, thoughtful, creative human being). This vision is made up of various *goals* (*from* learning to say "excuse me" when there is a pause in a conversation rather than interrupting *to* being in touch with and being able to express their feelings, *from* learning the importance of honoring agreements *to* practicing self-regulation and discerning when to follow through on with a creative project or not). And then realize that you are helping your child take the *next step* toward that goal. And then the next, one step at a time. Also, enfold discipline in an understanding that we are **all on a journey**, we are all practicing. We parents are not perfect, it is OK to make mistakes, we'll just keep on practicing.

8) MODELING THE BEHAVIOR we wish to see in our children. This is a wonderful incentive to keep growing up and waking up so that we can help our children do the same. Children learn so much more from what we offer as examples than through what we say (classic example of yanking a toy from child while telling him not to grab!). Our children absorb how we orient to life, how we respond to challenges, how we communicate, how we relate to our selves and others. Modelling the behavior we would like our children to learn is one of the most direct and natural ways of teaching healthy behavior.

9) KEEPING THE COMMUNICATION CHANNELS OPEN. As long as your child can communicate with you and you can communicate with your child, you can get through any bumps and challenges. To keep the communication channels open, make time for connection, offer a consistently safe place for all and anything to be shared, and let your child know that no matter what she does, she is always invited and welcome to come talk. This practice is especially handy throughout the teenage years. It builds upon a foundation of healthy attachment and safe discipline that doesn't jeopardize the WE.

10) ADAPTATION HAPPENS THROUGH EMOTIONS. We think that behavior changes when we understand something intellectually. However, knowing something cognitively is usually just a first step. Real change, real adaptation happens when something sinks in emotionally, when we actually *feel* it. For this reason, especially during first 5 years, it is important that when we discipline our children, we don't put all our efforts into reasoning with our children, and trying to convince them with logical sense, but that we are there for them emotionally and help them feel the sadness or disappointment that happens when they hit a boundary, a "no". If we don't help their frustration turn to sadness, by offering comfort while upholding the boundary, their hearts may harden. When their limbic system registers that they are up against a wall, that as much as they wish and want, they can't change something, and we are there to comfort them, it triggers tears, cleansing tears that help the brain adapt by looking for a new way forward.

11) WATERING THE SEEDS and FLOWERS. When we think of discipline we often think of what behaviors need to be changed or corrected. Just as important, and usually much more frequent, is the task of nurturing emergent behaviors that are desirable, that will serve your child's unfolding in relationships with self and others. This can be as simple as acknowledging and thanking when your child picks up his clothes, or commenting on her thoughtfulness when she draws a picture for a sick friend, or encouraging the emergent capacity of communicating what is going on for him when he feels grumpy instead of stuffing it down, or appreciating her honesty when she tells you she broke a promise.

12) CHANGE THE ENVIRONMENT. Sometimes a child's behavior is not changeable through clear communication, direction, intention, through his will, or her choice. Then it is important to look beyond the child's behavior to see what needs changing in his environment. For example, if your 3-year old is misbehaving at preschool, hitting other children and having a hard time settling down during nap time, and you have tried everything else, including speaking with the teacher, perhaps the best solution is to take him out of preschool, perhaps he is not ready yet to be away from home for that much time, or needs more attention and guidance than the preschool teacher can currently provide. Considering a child's environment is also a wonderful preventative measure. Keeping her environment orderly facilitates a 5-year olds sense of ease. Toddler-proofing ones' home makes for so many more "yes's" and just an occasional "no". Making sure your 12-year old eats a nourishing healthy breakfast goes a long way in helping him stay centered and focused throughout the day.