

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

HANDOUT: “STEP BY STEP” SUMMARY ON WHAT TO PAY ATTENTION TO IN ANY DISCIPLINARY MOMENT



Conscious discipline is Education *with* my Child, while holding a Vision *for* my Child.

Both Education and Vision are informed by a deep listening to my Child and based on a warm, trusting, loving relationship with my Child.

1) Where am I coming from? I commit to engaging in discipline when I am centered, not triggered, when I am connected with my deeper self, and able to contain impulsive emotions and reactions. This includes me not taking my child’s behavior personally. **In order to discipline my child, I need to discipline myself.** If I am reactive, **my first step is to center myself.** If I can’t manage that, I go the route of “deal with the situation as simply as possible, while doing no harm” (suggested for such occasions are Gordon Neufeld’s 5-step guidelines on handling incidents, which are outlined at the end of this handout).

2) I get behind the eyes of my child: I am curious. I listen. I am attentive to my child’s viewpoint and experience. What is going on behind my child’s behavior? How is she feeling? What state is he in? What is she trying to achieve, to express with her behavior?

3) I connect. I reach out, make eye contact, I offer a friendly open heart, and meet my child where he is at, not where I’d like him to get to. Before any direction, always connection (time-in! not time out).

4) I am creative! From a place of Presence, I listen to what response arises. Do I respond with humor, with inquiry, with more connection, with role playing, diverting, re-directing, “re-winding and trying over”, with clear & compassionate communication, more listening, polite request, shared solution finding, changing the circumstance...?

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5) I communicate and direct clearly and calmly. I view each disciplinary moment as a teaching/learning opportunity (with the questions: “What is my child learning here? What could she be learning?” at the forefront of my awareness).

6) I offer clear agreements: My child knows what our family matrix allows and what not (where the edges and boundaries are). I listen for whether the current boundaries are too loose, too tight, or just right. As my child gets older (8 yrs. upward) family meetings are a great place to discuss if an arrangement is too tight, too loose, or just right. As the parent, I am in charge, and to be a great leader, I need to be an excellent listener. I am consistent, reliable, and attentive. When boundaries are overstepped, I take the time to discuss with my child, rather than letting it slide.

7) If ever I choose to use a consequence, I make sure it is a “benign consequence”, that it is **natural and age-appropriate** and doesn’t threaten the relationship. I only introduce this tool from age 3-4 onwards, rarely, gently and gradually, and make sure it makes transparent sense to my child. I first always give my child a heads-up, a chance for him to make a different choice, and I tell him what the consequence is. I debrief with him, and ensure that our connection is our first priority.

8) In as much as I am there to guide, direct, and hold healthy boundaries, I am also present as the comforter, the one who is there to hold and comfort my child when she doesn’t get her way. I accompany her through the frustration to the sadness, where adaptation and new beginnings can emerge.

9) As my child gets older (beginning around 7-8) I introduce the concept of freedoms and responsibilities going hand in hand, guiding her to increasing empowerment and responsibility.

10) I offer a model/script, and invitation for the integration of opposing /mixed thoughts, feelings and impulses, e.g. “I’d like to go play, **but** I first have to complete my homework”, “I’m supposed to share my toys, **but** I don’t feel like it”. From about 5-7 years old, children can begin to hold and articulate two feelings at once, and when they can stand in the middle of them, the

tempering element and choice of how to behave comes from within themselves, rather than from the outside.

11) I give thanks to my child as he listens, makes healthy choices, and shows intentions going in the right direction. I acknowledge his attempts and efforts to behave in ways that respect himself and others, even if the results are still emergent.



Gordon Neufeld’s Guidelines for Handling Incidents where emotions are involved (from DVD series “Making Sense of Discipline, session 3):

Example: Your 3-year old child is hitting another kid over the head with a shovel in the sandbox

- 1) Address the situation simply (“That’s not OK. We don’t hit other children, it hurts them”)
- 2) Preserve the connection (“We’re OK, we’ll get thru this”)
- 3) Change or control the situation, not the child’s behavior (e.g. move your child from the sandbox)
- 4) Set a time to debrief and go over what happened (“We’ll chat about this later, when we’ve both calmed down”), and keep the date.
- 5) Exit sooner rather than later, and put your focus on centering yourself.

Learning doesn’t happen when emotions are high. Most important is preserving the connection, the WE, and keeping everyone involved safe. The teaching and integration can happen later.