Persistent Problems

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Course Goals

We expect to help participants:

- appreciate key principles of effective discipline
- explore the concept of wise rule-making
- distinguish realities from problems
- consider what can make changing persistent problems difficult
- define several basic steps necessary to address a persistent problem
- consider five possible outcomes when problems exist
- appreciate two tips when resistance is part of the problem
- understand categories of consequences and ways to apply each
- recognize five potentially healthy outcomes when a problem or conflict occurs each
- become familiar with ten options for dealing with persistent problems
- consider NPTI’s umbrella image of Effective Discipline
- note the importance of teamwork when disciplining
- end by considering more key concepts and principles
Key Underlying Principles

There are many key principles educators should incorporate in their disciplining, such as:

- Intentionally maintain a strong, safe and healthy connection with children.
- Change takes time.
- Expect children to make mistakes.
- Regularly remind yourself that discipline is more about teaching and guiding than about being harsh and punitive.
- Discipline is about building a trustworthy relationship and character.
Wise Rule Making

- Can help educators be clearer about the importance of rules, ways to approach developing and using rules in their classrooms, the benefits to children and educators and to the overall functioning of each classroom and the school when rules are fair, respectful and meaningful.

- Take the time needed to determine the specific rules that are reflective of their own and their school’s values.
Definition & Principles for Wise Rule Making

Adapted from: Growing Up Again by Clarke and Dawson, How to Discipline without Feeling Guilty by Silberman and The Family Virtues Guide by Popov

- According to Clarke and Dawson, rules are long term decisions governing very important areas of coexistence and cohabitation. They give a structure to life and to how a group functions.

- Popov suggests that when children break a rule, they are “called to the virtue.” The educator describes the action that breaks the rule and identifies the virtue connected to that behavior.
According to Clarke and Dawson, rules can also be made around the following areas:

- Movement
- Belongings
- Responsibilities
- Relationships
- Living habits
Rules Provide…

- children with a secure world.

- help for educators to get in touch with their values and priorities.

- allow educators to become more proactive and less reactive.
Suggestions for Applying and Enforcing Rules

1. Be sure the rules are clear to both you and the children.

2. Assess whether the rule is enforceable. Know how you will respond if rule is broken.

3. Ask yourself:
   – “Do I break this rule?”
   – “Is this behavior reasonable to expect?”
   – “Am I in a position to check?”
Suggestions for Applying and Enforcing Rules

Have a plan for the times when rules are broken.

Prepare one or more plans if the rule is not obeyed.

Keep in mind that some rules are not forever (unless they are based on virtues).

Negotiable and non-negotiable rules

Rules are more effective when stated in a positive, “What is expected” format versus a “What not to do” format.
Is It a Problem or a Reality?

Source: In *Kids Are Worth It* by Coloroso

- Differentiate between problems and realities when choosing if and how to respond to a situation. Sometimes people put a lot of energy into trying to change or solve a reality when it is not something that can be changed or solved.
- Realities need to be accepted.
- When there is a problem, there is an opportunity to do something to change someone or something.
Addressing Persistent Problems

Key source for much of following information: Mel Silberman, *How To Discipline Without Feeling Guilty*

Sometimes educators must be the ones to change because:

- Educators are more mature and experienced.
- Educators may discover that their expectations are not fair or reasonable.
- Educators may need to stop a pattern they are locked into.
- Educators may need to remember that groups operate as systems.
- Educators need to be careful not to cast children in roles.
What Can Make Changing Persistent Problems Difficult

- It can be hard for educators to make helpful changes. As a result, they sometimes:

  • Marshmallow: Are not appropriately firm
  • Lack energy: Decide to take the path of least resistance
  • Are pessimistic: About child’s ability or willingness to change
  • Feel guilty: About previous mistakes
Basic Steps When Addressing a Persistent Problem

To help a child change, follow three key steps:

1. Establish a specific goal. Be very clear about exactly what behavior must change.

2. Select one of the 10 Options for Dealing with Persistent Problems (more detail following).

3. Make a commitment to stick to the chosen approach for a week or two being confident the child can change over time.
When Working with Persistent Problems

- Focus on the essential. Decide what is really important and what is negotiable and non-negotiable.
- Once it is decided to enforce a rule, the educator must “win” or succeed.
- If angry, educator may need to take a time out to model self-control.
- If angry or upset, educator may need to use I-messages to express feelings, needs and perspectives.
- Educators need to increase awareness of physical symptoms that can sometimes signal a problem.
When Working with Persistent Problems

- Educators may need to be less patient.
- Educators should not yell long distance. Instead move in close and speak at an appropriate volume.
- Educators should stick to the present (not past or future).
- Educators should be brief.
- Educators should avoid physical threats or use of force.
- Educators can put things in writing to make them clearer for all concerned.
- Educators should restore good feelings at some point by letting the child know how to make amends.
Five Possible Outcomes

- There are potentially healthy outcomes for problems.
- This knowledge can provide alternative expectations and goals that are more realistic and practical.
- The first potentially healthy outcome when conflict occurs is **solving the problem**. Making whatever changes that mean the problem no longer exists.
- The second outcome is **resolving the problem**. Making whatever changes that lessen the problems’ most unacceptable attributes to where everyone can let go of it as a problem.
Five Possible Outcomes

- The third outcome is managing the problem. Figuring out ways to change things enough that, with continued attention, the problem is kept in a state of reasonable acceptance.
- The fourth outcome is back-burnerning the problem. Deciding to postpone making any decisions and letting things sit for awhile.
- The fifth outcome is redefining the problem as not being a problem at all. The process of problem exploration may clarify things so much that no solution or decision is necessary.
Ten Options for Dealing with Persistent Problems

- Main source for this information is Mel Silberman, author of *How to Discipline Without Feeling Guilty*.
- Educators benefit from having a variety of options for dealing with persistent problems.
- If none of these options is effective over time, perhaps the problem is more serious than first thought and professional help may need to be sought.
- Each of the 10 options have advantages and disadvantages. Some are more appropriate than others for particular situations.
- Options sometimes work well in combination.
Ten Options for Dealing with Persistent Problems

1. **Requesting**: Describe to the child the specific behavior that is a problem, why it is a problem and ask the child what he or she may be willing to do to help with the problem.

   Necessary Attitude: Nothing is really lost if child has no interest in changing. Educator simply takes a more “take-charge” stance.
Specific Steps in Requesting Process

- Approach the child and state the facts of the situation.
- Ask child what he or she is willing to do.
- If child’s solution is acceptable, warmly accept it.
- If child’s solution is too vague, ask for exact details.
- If offer is specific but unacceptable, say so.
- If you have the time and child is unwilling to contribute ideas, tell him or her you’d like him or her to think about it and that you can talk again the next day.
- Ask child to write down specific ideas.
- If doing a more formal problem exploration process, educators goes through a step-by-step process.
Ten Options for Dealing with Persistent Problems

2. **Persisting:** When the behavior you have assertively described as unacceptable to the child continues, you can decide to remind the child in a systematically repetitious way what behavior is expected. The child may eventually learn that you plan to persist regardless of any attempts to distract or change the educator’s mind.
Specific Steps of Persisting

- Select a specific behavior.
- Communicate expectation about this behavior on some fixed schedule.
- Decide that you will not discuss your feelings about child’s previous lack of cooperation nor will you respond to objections.
- You can persist by being silent, refusing to argue or discuss something until the expected action is taken.
- This is a slow but steady method based on systematic, quiet repetition.
Ten Options for Dealing with Persistent Problems

3. **Monitoring**: A way to provide close supervision. It means staying with the child to see that the behavior is being accomplished. It is not spying, the child should know the behavior is being monitored. You and the child need to see you as the external control.
Specific Steps for Monitoring

- Actually stay with the child the entire time or check in with a specified regularity.
- Gradually you can extend the amount of time between checking.
- Describe to child specifically what you are planning to do.
- Tone must be respectful, interested, caring. Monitoring is not a punishment, it is a way to help a child who needs some external control.
Ten Options for Dealing with Persistent Problems

4. Ignoring: Adult changes behaviors by not responding to them and attending instead to acceptable ones. This approach must be planned. Ignoring must be done calmly and without dramatics.
Specific Steps for Ignoring

- You must know that if the behavior is ignored, no truly harmful effects will occur to child, others, or property.
- The goal is to communicate calm indifference, not disapproval.
- Your attention must mean enough to the child to have him or her choose to alter the behavior. If he or she does not choose, use another option.
- Ignoring is good for educators who tend to overreact in general to problems.
Ten Options for Dealing with Persistent Problems

5. **Charting**: This involves a system of keeping a record of the number of infractions and to share the results with the child. It helps a child more clearly see the extent of the problem.
Specific Steps for Charting

- Tell the child how the chart will be kept.
- Tell child you are doing this because you are tired of scolding and just would rather track the behavior this way.
- Quietly encourage improvement.
- Respect child’s need to have the chart be kept private.
- If this approach seems too negative for educator or child you can keep a chart with only positive behaviors or keep a chart that reflects both positive and negative.
Ten Options for Dealing with Persistent Problems

6. **Rewarding**: Involves providing tangible rewards for positive behavior. Different from bribery which involves enticing a child to stop negative behavior, rewarding is done when educators are in charge and want to promote positive behaviors that are replacing negative ones.
Specific Steps for Rewarding

- With young children rewards can be spontaneous and immediate.
- Explain that a reward is a way to show appreciation or to act as an incentive.
- With children over 4 explain the way the system will work, including that the reward system will have a specific ending time.
- Rewards are not always monetary, tangible or materialistic. They can be extra time together, a chance to go somewhere, try something new.
Ten Options for Dealing with Persistent Problems

7. **Encouraging**: A specific plan to compliment any actions that are steps toward desired results. Uses social reinforcement rather than tangible ones (praise rather than treats). Involves catching them when they are good and commenting on that.
Specific Steps for Encouraging

- Identify the expected behavior.
- Whenever some positive action is taken, a sincere compliment is paid.
- If there are any mistakes, there is to be no criticism.
- Keep remarks straight-forward and sincere.
- Over time child will internalize the positive messages which encourage continuing positive, appropriate behavior.
Ten Options for Dealing with Persistent Problems

8. **Compromising**: Involves lessening, but not eliminating, your expectations. It is a decision to re-negotiate the situation.
Specific Steps for Compromising

- You must decide first if you can live with compromise.
- Decide what is acceptable to you (your bottom line).
- Approach child confidently.
- Compromising teaches children that sometimes it is a viable and appropriate way for people to cooperate.
- It does not lessen the child’s respect if done in a positive and assertive way.
- Don’t overdo it.
Ten Options for Dealing with Persistent Problems

9. **Disarming**: Used when you feel the child is delighting in the fun of giving you a hard time. It is a way to shift gears. It may force the expectations for change onto the child.
Specific Steps for Disarming

- You can tell the child “the choice is yours” and that you are no longer going to demand a certain behavior.
- Tell the child that you have observed that he or she is unable to do the behavior so you are no longer going to insist on it.
- You must feel okay for the behavior to stay for a while.
- You must be relaxed and calm, deciding as an authority from a position of strength.
- It is a way to disarm a power struggle.
Ten Options for Dealing with Persistent Problems

10. **Withdrawing privileges/Using consequences:** Most often used response to negative behaviors and should be used the least. Educators need to avoid having children focus on their resentment at feeling deprived or overpowered by adults. It is a way to work to deter unacceptable behaviors. It is not a way to get even or express anger.

- Recall the differences between natural and imposed consequences.
- Also the difference between consequences that are reality based (unemotional, detached and objective) and relational consequences (emotionally based).
Specifics for Withdrawing Privileges or Using Consequences

- Clearly and objectively identify the behavior that is to be changed.
- Have a consequence that is immediate and if possible is somehow connected.
- Use “R.S.V.P.” to decide on a consequence (Reasonable, Simple, Valuable and Practical (Coloroso)).
- See yourself as a referee or umpire who will simply enforce the rules, including the specified consequence, for the behavior.
- Have consequences planned ahead of time.
Credit and thanks to Rosemary Melnick who designed the original umbrella analogy.

Effective discipline is like an umbrella, covering both prevention and intervention.
Umbrella Image

Prevention
- Nurturing*
- Preparation**
- Limit Setting
- Clear Expectations
- Teaching
- Rules

Intervention
- 4 C’s
- 3 D’s and 3 F’s***
- Handling Protests
- Handling Persistent Problems
- I-messages
- Team Parenting

*Nurturing: a critical foundation for authority
**Preparation: information, skills, 4 C’s
***3 D’s & 3 F’s: Deny, Demand, Delegate while being Firm, Fair and Flexible
Assessment and Attitude Check

- In order to determine the primary direction to take, do a quick assessment and attitude check.
- Ask yourself “Have I determined the situation requires me to become the authority, executive in charge of the situation?”
- Use the Discipline Report Card. “Am I calm, clear, compassionate and confident? Am I confident of my right and responsibility to deny, demand and delegate? Am I prepared to be firm, fair and flexible?”
- Decide if the discipline needs an emphasis more on connection or correction.
Connection or Correction?

Connection → Correction

- Emotional Coaching
  - Attend
  - Accept
  - Appreciate
- Acquiesce
- Appeal
- Affirm

Accountability
Consequences
Amends
How aware am I to avoid:

- Being out of control, excessively angry?
- Vengeful behavior, desire to get even, get revenge?
- Purposely inflicting pain as a punishment?
- Humiliating, shaming, insulting, ridiculing?
- Terrorizing or inducing fear?
- Caving in, giving up, bribing, begging, overindulging?
- Disconnecting, neglecting, avoiding?
- Being unwilling to reassess the situation?
Categories of Consequences

- Punitive vs. Disciplinary Consequences (goal of punitive is to cause suffering; goal of disciplinary is to teach, encourage change and insist that rules be followed)
- Consequences can be more or less active and physical with or without verbal exchange.
- Consequences can be more or less formal.
- Consequences can address simple, single-issue situations or complex situations with secondary issues.
Healthy Disciplinary Consequences

- May allow safe, natural consequences to occur
- Remains calm, clear, compassionate and confident
- Listens to appreciate child’s perspective
- May deny a request
- May delegate
- May demand or insist agreements are fulfilled
- May teach
- May suspend non-essential activities
- Stops, interrupts, calls time out to restore safety
- Encourages or insists on amends
- May use more formal problem processing
- Remains focused on relationship repair and restoration
Unhealthy Punitive Consequences

- Allows less safe or unhealthy natural consequences
- Does not allow safe, natural consequences to occur
- Refuses to allow child to talk
- Threatens harsh actions, pain, loss
- Blames, attacks, shames, humiliates, criticizes
- Inflicts physical pain
- Has emotional outbursts
- Uses loss of privileges to cause pain, loss, frustration humiliation
- Uses time out or grounding to shame
- May be vindictive, vengeful, attempt to get even
- May be operating from unhealthy power or control issues
Disciplinary Consequences

- When based on healthy authority as opposed to unhealthy intimidation, disciplinary consequences can involve:
  
  ~ Natural consequences
  ~ Imposed consequences
  ~ Relational consequences
Disciplinary Consequences

- Disciplinary consequences can include one or more of the following:
  
  ~ Denying a request
  ~ Demanding, insisting on certain changes or behaviors
  ~ Delegating
  ~ Stopping, interrupting or suspending non-essential activities
  ~ Teaching
  ~ Enforcing or restoring safety
  ~ Enforcing or restoring rules/boundaries
  ~ Amend-making
  ~ Participation in a problem exploration process
  ~ Shared accountability for relationship repair and restoration
  ~ Clarity is achieved with regard to specific changes that will prevent the problem from recurring
The Importance of Teamwork When Disciplining Effectively

- Children are not raised just by their parents or caregivers; educators are part of the team who raises a community's children.
- Within a school system, all educators belong to the team that nurtures and provides structure and discipline for children.
- Disciplining will be most effective when all members of these teams share commonly held beliefs and approaches.
- To accomplish effective teamwork, it is helpful to have processes that allow everyone involved to openly discuss values, beliefs, and philosophies in order to create shared language and approaches.
- Educators are encouraged to appreciate the value and basics of building a sense of teamwork among all the adults who care for children.

Adapted from Dr. Mel Silberman
(How To Discipline Without Feeling Guilty)
Team Parenting

- Crucial components of team parenting:
  - Team members are mutually supportive and share basic philosophical positions about disciplining.
  - Effective ways are in place to maintain communication.
  - Attitude of mutual respect, appreciation, flexibility.
  - Team members:
    - support one another, help out, listen to feelings, appreciate efforts.
    - give feedback and constructive criticism.
    - plan together ways to deal with major issues or persistent problems.
Why Can Team Approach to Disciplining Be Difficult?

- Fear of discussing problems because of potential conflict
- Children can sabotage team effort
- Coming from different values
- No role modeling for team approach
- One member may feel inadequate
- One member may feel he or she knows better ways to discipline
- Parents/caregivers prefer school handle problems without them
Some Key Concepts Regarding Effective Discipline

Children misbehave because:
- They often lack judgment
- They often are impulsive
- They often are ego-centric, self-centered
- Certain ages have developmental needs
- They can react aggressively when feeling powerless
- Temperament factors
- They are attempting to meet needs
The Messages of Healthy Discipline

- When you misbehave -- break a rule, do something that is potentially harmful to you or others -- I will stop you.
- I am in charge, but will always respect your feelings and needs.
- I will not shame, embarrass, or humiliate you even when I must limit your behavior. You can trust me to keep you emotionally safe even though I may be firm with you.
- I understand that you misbehave because you are a child, not because you want to make me unhappy or upset. I appreciate the nature of children: often having poor judgment, being self-centered, impulsive, working on tasks that may need limits but not punishment.
The Messages of Healthy Discipline (cont’d)

- Even when you misbehave, I will not abandon or reject you.
- I will give you ways to make amends and to rebuild trust.
- You are always a lovable person even if you do make mistakes.
- There are consequences for certain behaviors. Like everyone else, you are expected to learn to be responsible for yourself or experience the consequences of not behaving responsibly.
- My disciplining of you is to help you become self-disciplining. Ultimately I expect you to learn to behave properly because it is morally right, not because you want to avoid punishment.
“Think About” Homework

- Consider which of the principles of effective discipline relate to your circumstances; regularly review these principles as a way of maintaining high levels of professionalism and integrity when disciplining.
- Increase the number of helpful tools at your disposal to deal with persistent problems as related to children.
- Continue considering ways to enhance and enrich your awarenesses, understanding and abilities to discipline effectively, to manage your anger well, and to serve as role models to your students.
Recommended Reading

- *Yes, Your Teen is Crazy! Loving Your Child without Losing Your Mind*. Michael J. Bradley, 2002.