



ConsciousDiscipline®

The Theoretical and Scientific Basis of Conscious Discipline®

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Conscious Discipline is my life's work. It arose out of over 30 years of experience, research and learning. It came from my own personal desire to:

- Live a happy, productive life that leaves the world a little better than when I came into it.
- Be a responsible, caring person with healthy relationships.
- Help children that seem “unreachable”.
- Integrate information from diverse fields and synthesize it into unifying, common contributions.
- Help teachers and children retain the “joy of learning”.
- Attempt to discover core principles that are helpful to the learning process regardless of ethnicity, economic status, language, cognitive ability, age or gender.
- Share what I discover with others.

In essence, I kept asking myself, “Is there a better way?” And from that question, I placed myself in learning environments that would challenge my set ways of thinking. I have been privileged to work in state departments of education, Native American reservations, migrant camps, public schools, Head Start programs, private childcare facilities and universities. I have worked with all ages of children including those with special needs, with challenging families and with difficult schools. I noticed that children who were difficult to deal with in kindergarten only became more troubled by fourth grade. I saw many families in serious crisis, unwilling or unable to seek assistance. I believed there must be a way to meet the needs of these children at school, even if they lack what is termed “the unseen assets of family privilege” (safety and belonging) at home.

During these years, my career exposed me to great cultural and economic diversity. I continued to question what I knew, what we as a society held to be true, and what would be helpful to teachers, parents and caregivers. My pursuit of a better way pushed me to read, research and find tangible ways to put research into practice. Conscious Discipline is the cumulative effect of this journey. It is an attempt to bring together the best of what we know about learning, teaching, mental health, human development and neuroscience, and put it all in concrete terms. The program is called “Conscious” Discipline because it fosters the development of a person’s consciousness of his/her own mental models of learning, of teaching and of self. Current research indicates that conscious experience does not come from passive reception of incoming information, but involves the active construction of mental models of the world. Without conscious awareness of your current mental models, change is impossible. Conscious Discipline does not force, coerce, bribe or manipulate children or adults to change. Rather, Conscious Discipline is an educational process of helping adults and children become aware of their goals, their actions and the consequences of their choices.

Conscious Discipline is a comprehensive emotional intelligence and classroom management system that integrates all domains of learning (social, emotional, physical, cultural and cognitive) into one seamless curriculum. The foundation of the program is a constructivist and relational-cultural perspective; however, the program builds on the contributions of the following theorists:



Jean Baker Miller - Miller provided the impetus for the relational-cultural theory of development. Western society has historically valued autonomy, separation and independence as the prevailing standards of mature psychological functioning. The relational-cultural model is one of many theories of development that places focus on connection and interdependence. Relational cultural theory is built on the premise that relationship and the primary biological/neurological need for connection are the forces that foster development. One of the founding concepts of the model is that connection inevitably includes conflict, and conflict is the source of all growth.

Jean Piaget - Piaget uses a cognitive developmental approach to learning where the adult takes the role of a guide and sets the stage for learning. The use of questioning is integral to Piaget's approach and is embedded in the Conscious Discipline model.

Lev Vygotsky - Vygotsky also uses a cognitive developmental approach to learning. Here, the adult takes a more prominent and somewhat directive role by providing the scaffolding children need to move through each zone of proximal development and reach their full learning potential. Conscious Discipline provides teachers and parents with the skills to maximize learning by linking personal meaning (the scaffolding) to academic content in order to enhance learning potential.

Eric Erickson, Carl Rogers, and Abraham Maslow come from a psychoanalytical and humanistic point of view where there is more emphasis on emotional and personality development than on cognitive development. The adult is an emotionally supportive entity—an interpreter of feelings, motives and actions—who assists the child in solving social problems. Processes that we have historically considered as pure thinking, we now know are cognitive and emotional components that are working synergistically. Conscious Discipline creates a synergy between the emotional and cognitive domains.

Arnold Gesell - Gesell comes from a maturationist approach to learning. The adult's role is as a guide who supports the child through growth cycles. The adult models understanding, tolerance and calm. The first skill of Conscious Discipline is composure. From a balanced nervous system, wisdom is possible. This model also gives adults an abundance of understanding of child development and the maturation process.

B.F. Skinner & Albert Bandura come from a behaviorist approach and social cognitive theory that emphasize the importance of the environment and social modeling in relation to learning. Conscious Discipline teaches adults how to structure environments instead of attempting to control children. Conscious Discipline unites the above approaches into a collective model that has, as its common element, different degrees of freedom. Living in a democracy, it is vital that our children learn responsibility alongside freedom. The cognitive development approaches (Piaget, Vygotsky) offer freedom within limits. We have choices. We use concrete materials and experiences as our basic learning activities. There are constant opportunities for social interaction, and these interactions are crucial for human development. Conscious Discipline seeks to create critical thinking, reflective, problem-solving adults who can then teach children these same metacognitive skills through modeling and interaction.



The psychoanalytic and humanistic view (Erickson, Rogers, Maslow) holds that the environment has therapeutic aspects and freedom of emotional expression is to be encouraged. Conscious Discipline teaches children how to express their emotions in socially acceptable ways, and suggests classroom centers that may be implemented to support social and emotional expression. A basic example of a Conscious Discipline classroom center is the “We Care” center, where a child may write a “get well” card to a friend who is ill. The relational-cultural view (Miller) holds that the source of all suffering is chronic disconnect. Human development is dependent on and fostered by the health of the relationships we have with one another. Conscious Discipline creates the “School Family” as a way of enhancing all the relationships in a school. These relationships are building on authenticity, mutual empathy and respect, healthy conflict resolution strategies.

The maturationist approach (Gesell) emphasizes that the limits imposed on a child’s freedom should meet the age level of that child. The behaviorist view (Skinner, Bandura) supports shaping a child’s freedom and choices by environmental reinforcement and punishment. Although Conscious Discipline does not encourage rewards in a tangible sense, it does utilize social reinforcers to make caring a reward in and of itself.

In addition to the educational learning theories already mentioned, Conscious Discipline includes information and skills that foster healthy relationships in both the workforce and the classroom. Our ability to “get along” is a foundational requirement of survival. The areas of mental health listed below are all integrated within the Conscious Discipline process. The researchers and theorists listed form a brief list, and there are many more individuals from whom I’ve drawn.

Attachment – John Bowlby, Mary Ainsworth, Margaret Mahler, Mary Main, Ann Jernberg, and Viola Brody. These individuals deal with attachment and object relations theory. A fundamental assumption of attachment theory is that adults do not enter relationships as tabula rasas, or blank slates. Instead they bring with them a history of social experiences and unique set of memories, expectations, goals and action tendencies that guide how they interact with others. Although our mental models continue to evolve as we develop new relationships, attachment theory assumes that the relationship models that begin in early development are likely to remain influential. It also assumes that the healthy attachment of a child with significant others during the first years of life is essential for emotional control and self-regulation. Conscious Discipline is a relationship-based community model of management where each individual is valued and asked to contribute his/her gifts to the whole. Community members model and teach healthy, respectful relationships. Connection is the keystone of the program.

Child Psychotherapy – Charles Schaffer, Alfred Adler, Eric Fromm, Harry Stack Sullivan, William Glasser, and Kevin O’Conner. These individuals give us an understanding of how to effectively listen and communicate with others. Conscious Discipline uses daily conflicts to teach life skills.

Conscious Discipline is also based on the sciences. It integrates our knowledge about physics, biology, neurology and physiology. The new brain research gives us clues about how to create environments that foster the development of a healthy brain. The following areas of science and the following researchers’ findings have been integrated into Conscious Discipline.



Physics – Albert Einstein (Relativity), Michael Faraday (Field Theory), Karl Pribram (Hologram), David Bohm (Intricate Order), Rupert Sheldrake (Morphogenetic fields). These individuals agree that we are energetically connected. Conscious Discipline operates on the premise that we “are all in this together.” This brings the realization that, “what you offer to others, you strengthen within yourself.” Classrooms built on this premise result in children who ask, “What can I give to make a contribution?” instead of, “What do I get for being good?”

Neuroscience – Allan Schore, Bruce Perry, Joseph LeDoux, Elkhonon Goldberg, Daniel J. Siegel, Eric Jensen and J. Douglas Bremner. These individuals have researched and outlined the negative impact of threat and stress on the brain and on higher thinking skills. Conscious Discipline builds the classroom on a foundation of safety. The teacher’s job is explained, “My job is to keep you safe.” The student’s job is “to help keep the classroom safe.” From a basis of safety, we arrive at class principles. These governing class principles lead us to draw up rules. Each class evolves into a democracy and repeats the process America’s founders went through in 1776. A better understanding of the inner workings of the brain (neuroscience) will help us to better understand how to maximize the brain’s potential. For this reason, Conscious Discipline presents a simple brain model as a metaphor to help teachers and students successfully understand and manage their own unique brains states. The model is based on a modified outdated triune model as a way to understand the beginning relationships between the perception, internal states, the brain and behavior. Even though the triune model is outdated it is currently accurate in that the brain is hierarchically organized from the top down. Conscious Discipline uses a brain model that demonstrates the top-down and left-right integration of the brain.

Neurocardiology - HeartMath Institute, Karl Pribram, John and Beatrice Lacey, and Doc Childre. In recent years the concept of emotional intelligence has emerged claiming that emotional maturity is an important as mental abilities in both personal and professional spheres. Emotional competencies often outweigh the cognitive in determining success. Conscious Discipline is an emotional intelligence program. A key site in the brain for the integration of cognitive and emotional systems is the frontal lobe of the brain. Conscious Discipline seeks to stimulate this system. It does so by asking adults to discipline themselves first and children second. When encountering conflict or obstacles that require we develop new strategies we either can take an external action to control others or self-manage our internal systems. Conscious Discipline teaches adults to self-manage before attempting to discipline others. In doing so, teachers and parents then begin to model appropriate behavior instead of perpetuating the “Do what I say not what I do model” of discipline and guidance.

I have woven many more components for optimizing learning into the tapestry called Conscious Discipline. The following is not a complete list, but will give a flavor of the integration of the model.

- Cooperative Learning – Lillian Katz, Sylvia Chard, Kagan
- Temperament – Stella Chess
- Cultural Diversity – Carol Brunson Phillips, Ruby Payne
- Literacy – Regie Routman



- Motivation – Alfie Kohn
- Intelligence – Howard Gardner, Carol Gilligan
- Teaching for Democracy - John Dewey, Joanne Hendrick, Polly Greenberg
- Developing Consciousness - Institute of HeartMath, Institute of Noetic Sciences
- Moral Development - Kohlberg, Carol Gilligan
- Kinesiology – Paul and Gail Dennison, Brain Gym

Conscious Discipline blends all of the information discussed above into a comprehensive, life-changing program for adults that provides them with safety, connectedness and empowerment. For children, Conscious Discipline provides a positive school climate that fosters academic achievement and pro-social skills. Conscious Discipline teaches and models the following skills, and the application of these skills results in the following values:

- Skill Taught Resulting Value
- Anger management Integrity
- Helpfulness Interdependence
- Assertiveness Respect
- Impulse control Empowerment
- Cooperation Diversity
- Empathy Compassion
- Problem-solving Responsibility

Finally, Conscious Discipline is about the personal growth of the adult first and the child second. It raises the emotional intelligence of the adults in the child’s world. It does this by presenting the Seven Powers for Self-Control that, when adopted, change the adult’s relationship with conflict in order to create proactive rather than reactive moments. The adult’s increase in higher order thinking skills (critical thinking, reflection, problem-solving) is apparent in all of that person’s relationships. The Seven Powers for Self-Control empower the adult to utilize the Seven Basic Skills of Discipline. These skills help children become productive members of a social group. In class, this social group is called the “School Family.” Conscious Discipline uses the School Family as the foundation for it’s motivation system. Conscious Discipline builds intrinsic motivation into the class climate by meeting every child’s need for security, belonging and contribution. Teachers systematically create a family climate through routines, rituals, safety and classroom centers that support social-emotional learning and add meaning to academic content.

The profound impact of Conscious Discipline on a person’s life is self motivating. Conscious Discipline positively transforms a person’s interactions with coworkers, skills as a parent, relationships with significant others, and connections with the children and families he/she serves as a teacher. Adults embrace the knowledge that there is a better way, that we can get along, that children who are hurting can be helped, and that the school is an exciting place where we can look forward to working each day. I invite you to explore the Conscious Discipline process more closely by attending a Loving Guidance workshop, visiting our website ConsciousDiscipline.com, and contacting our office for additional information.



FAQ

Why does Conscious Discipline reduce aggression, hyperactivity and difficult behaviors in children?

Conscious Discipline is successful with difficult children because it actively teaches adults how to establish a healthy relationship with relationship resistant children. Once connection is made, the biochemistry of the child and the neurological functioning of the child's brain can become more aligned to support self-regulation. Once self-regulation is established, the child is free to use developmental energy for academic and social success.

Why does Conscious Discipline increase academic achievement?

Conscious Discipline increases academic achievement through adding personal meaning to academic task. The classroom becomes a school family where emotions are integrated with cognitive demands on a daily basis. This not only increases school success, but also fosters the development of the frontal lobes of the child's brain. This healthy brain development then imbues increased success both academically and emotionally.

Why does Conscious Discipline work?

Conscious Discipline works because consciousness is a better teacher than consequences. Through the conscious awareness of others and ourselves, we can consciously choose the consequence of our life's actions.

