

MONTESSORI (AND ALFRED ADLER) BELIEFS ABOUT CHILDREN

Contributor: Jane Nelsen

Building Confidence, Courage, & Life Skills through Positive Discipline.

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Greensboro Montessori School, Greensboro, NC

Shared Beliefs about Children: Maria Montessori and Alfred Adler

- Children are universal
- All children can learn
- Children are capable
- Independence and self-reliance are critical for healthy development
- Children are social beings
- Social behavior is learned, and is important for a healthy sense of connection to ones community
- A misbehaving child is a discouraged child
- Children have a need to connect, and gain belonging through responsibility and service to their community
- Every child is unique
- Children are spiritual beings [spiritual embryo] as well as emotional, physical, cognitive, social
- Montessori acknowledges: child's self-construction, self-creation, and spontaneity
- Respect
 - Children deserve utmost respect because they are developing who they will become
 - Children learn respect when respected
 - Children learn respect when respect is modeled
- Seek to follow the child
 - Follow the nature of the Child
 - Understand child through observation
- Children need to be trusted
- Believe in basic goodness of the child
- Children absorb/incarnate their environment
 - Environment most important
 - Children do what adults model
 - Children have innate desire to learn; innate curiosity
 - Children enjoy work
 - Children develop inner discipline through purposeful work
 - Children have an inner sense of order/structure
- A carefully prepared environment supports full development:
 - Problem solving is inherent in environment and daily activity
 - Quiet, respectful environment
 - Child-sized
 - Non-competitive; cooperative
 - Choices available
 - Movement encouraged: child learns by doing

- Active work with manipulatives: child learns through senses
 - Child needs repetition
 - Child needs consistency
 - Child needs time for uninterrupted work, concentration
 - Children learn from each other in multi-age groupings based on developmental plane
 - Environment & activities designed to encourage exploration, problem solving, conflict-resolution
 - Environments & activities encourage cooperative learning, individual & group responsibility/awareness
- Freedom within limits
 - Freedom of choice, time, space, movement, communication
 - Conflicts viewed as teaching moments
 - Natural consequences/solutions utilized
- Freedom of movement; freedom within limits
 - Movement necessary component to learning
- There are sensitive periods (critical periods) for development/learning
- Children are intelligent and competent. Children are capable of:
 - self-control
 - making appropriate choices
 - developing independence
 - constructing their own meaning
 - being self-directed
 - developing self-reliance
 - being in charge of their own learning
 - developing responsibility for themselves, others, & the environment
- Montessori appeals to child's imagination at the elementary age and reality in the early years
- Modeling is critical for learning appropriate behavior
- Children learn from each other by modeling
- Montessori learning environments encourage the child's development of
 - Order
 - Concentration
 - Coordination
 - Independence
 - Problem-Solving
 - Conflict-Resolution
- Children are not miniature adults
- Mistakes are an opportunity to learn:
 - Children learn from mistakes
 - Mistakes are allowed
 - Child capable of self-correction
- Teacher is preparer of environment, facilitator, model, observer, catalyst, learning-director (directress)
 - Allows child to construct their own reality within respectful limits
 - Children are respected to learn from their own experience
- Children learn from doing, not being told
- Early childhood education is critical for healthy development
- Children love to learn
- Children love purposeful activity

Popular (Non-Adlerian/Montessori) Beliefs about Children

- Children are empty vessels extrinsically motivated (have no inner discipline) dependent on others disrespectful
- Children need to be controlled/managed
- Children need to be constantly entertained to be controlled
- Children need no discipline or consistency
- Children need constant adult help
- Children follow the teacher
- Rewards are external, not intrinsic
- Unfettered independence or dependence
- Children should be
 - indulged
 - seen, not heard
 - told what to do
- Standardized test measure child's capabilities/knowledge
- Some children can learn ("get it"),
- Some children can not ("will never get it")
- Culture based on competitiveness
 - quick fixes
 - extrinsic motivation
 - external rewards,
 - consumerism
 - conformity
- Real teaching (learning) begins in grade 1 (children don't learn until later age)
 - includes grouping children by chronological age (single age or grade level), or skill
 - usually incorporates homogeneous grouping
 - occurs from direct teaching
 - group dictated teaching/activities preferred
 - is teacher or curriculum centered
 - free choice is nonexistent or limited
 - set schedules for activities
 - fewer opportunities for self-correction
 - little time for repetition
- Learning environments not as important (not carefully prepared, maintained)
- Learning environments structured/controlled: space, time, activity
- Every minute should be scheduled
 - teacher is controller/leader
 - children should be seen & not heard
- Children learn by being silent
- Children learn from lectures
 - environments have rows of desks
 - workbooks
- More work -- more learning
- Extracurricular acts -- well rounded child
- Children need lots of "things"
- Children need to be
 - managed
 - controlled
 - directed
 - molded
 - rewarded & punished (with candy, toys, activity, food)

- constantly stimulated (involved in activities 24/7)
- treated the same
- Children don't think before they act
- Children are not responsible
- Children have brief attention spans
- Adults have to be "in charge"
- Adults teach children
- Adults should be tolerant to avoid conflict with children

Use Your Words

From Positive Discipline for Preschoolers by Jane Nelsen, Cheryl Erwin, and Roslyn Duffy

Scenario: Two children fighting over an object.

One child is working/playing with something, when the second child reaches over and grabs the item from the first child. The children have a tug of war and the second child hits the first. The first child begins to cry.

1. The teacher offers comfort to the hurt child and encourages the other child to do the same. "What can we do to help our friend to feel better?"
2. The teacher respectfully asks to hold the item until a solution can be found. If child resists giving up the item, empower the child by offering a limited choice: "Would you like to hand it to me or put it over here?" If the child does not take one of the choices offered, the default goes to the teacher. "I will put the item over here until we find a solution, and the teacher firmly but kindly removes the item from the child and places in a safe place.
3. Cooling Off before finding a solution: The teacher asks both children to spend a moment cooling off and getting themselves calmed down. (If Positive Time Out place has been created, teacher may invite the children to go there to cool off.) Most children under four will need modeling of calming the body by breathing, gently stroking their backs or asking if they need a hug.
4. When both children are calm the teacher rejoins them. He/she asks the children to each take a turn telling him/her exactly what happened. He/she listens respectfully and does not allow either child to interrupt the other while each child relates his/her version of what took place. The teacher acknowledges the stories and makes a comment such as "I see that you both want to use this _____."
5. The teacher invites both children to help think of ways that they can ask to have something that another child is using. "It is important to learn to use our words." The children come up with several ideas. Be sure that all of the following ideas get mentioned: "I can say I want to use/play with _____ and ask to have it." "May I have a turn?" "I can offer to trade a toy I have for the one the other person has."
6. After these ideas are generated, consider responses the second child might use. The teacher asks, "When a child asks to have the _____ that you have, what might you say?" Or "If another child asks to play with you, what might you say?"
7. (Teachers of children aged 2 – 4 will need to model words that can be used. For pre-verbal children a simpler version of this can be modeled. Teach without expecting understanding, but notice that with modeling and repetition, children will soon be solving problems on their own.)

Be sure the following are included in the suggestions. "Yes, you can have this _____." "We can take turns." "Maybe you can use it later." Or "I can say yes and give the item to the other child." "I can say no I am still using it."

It is important to help children know that they can say "NO." This teaches assertiveness and is a very important part of training.

If saying "No" is the choice then what else might be said? "When can I have a turn?" "You can use it when I am through." Or "I will bring it to you when I am through with it." Or "I will be done with it in five minutes or when I count to 10. If the child offers such a time limit, the teacher may ask if he/she needs help in knowing when the time is up, or would like to count down the time. Offer to come over and remind the child at the end of the time. (This is rarely necessary as most children will relinquish the toy long before the time limit.)

8. Ask children if they would like to practice any of these ideas. The teacher hands the item to the first child and then the children act out a new way of using words effectively. Help the children recognize that they both end up with some way to share the item and no one was hit or hurt.
9. Thank the children for "Using Their Words" to help solve their problem.

What Does a Positive Discipline Class Meeting Look Like?

Jane Nelsen, co-author of *Positive Discipline in the Classroom*

Many teachers use circle time, morning meetings, or what they may call class meetings. Most of these meetings are “teacher generated.” In other words, the teacher decides what should be discussed or follows a program with suggested topics designed to teach children about these topics. Positive Discipline class meetings are designed to be “student generated,” and to “focus on solutions,” meaning that it is the students who put their concerns on an agenda (although teachers can too) and then everyone brainstorms for solutions. Through this format, students learn from the inside out. The root of education is educaré, which means “to draw forth.” When adults “teach” by “drawing forth,” students feel capable, belonging and significance, and more motivated to follow the solutions they help create.

Positive Discipline Class Meetings provide an opportunity for students to learn valuable social and life skills for good character:

- Listening skills
- Brainstorming skills
- Problem-solving skills
- Mutual respect
- The value of cooling off before solving a problem. (Problems are put on the class meeting agenda so a cooling off period takes place before focusing on solutions to the challenge.)
- Concern for others
- Cooperation
- Accountability in a safe environment. (People don’t worry about admitting mistakes when they know they will be supported to find solutions instead of experiencing blame, shame, or pain.)
- How to choose solutions that are respectful to everyone concerned
- Social interest
- That mistakes are wonderful opportunities to learn

Class Meeting Format for Elementary and Middle School Classrooms

1. Compliments and appreciations
2. Follow up on prior solutions
3. Agenda items
 - a. Share feelings while others listen
 - b. Discuss without fixing
 - c. Ask for problem-solving help
4. Future plans (field trips, parties, projects)

Class Meetings Format for Early Childhood Classrooms

1. Compliments and appreciation
2. Empower children to help each other (“Does anyone need help from the class today?”)
3. Solve problems that affect the group
4. Plan future activities

Take time for Training

Students need training before they can be effective in Positive Discipline Class Meetings. Without training they may use the “skills” they are used to: blame, punishing others, avoiding accountability for fear of receiving punishment. The book, *Positive Discipline in Classroom*, by Jane Nelsen, Lynn Lott, and H. Stephen Glenn, include activities to help children learn skills in:

Eight Building Blocks for Effective Class Meetings

1. Form a circle.
2. Practice compliments and appreciations.
3. Create an agenda.
4. Develop communication skills.
5. Learn about separate realities.
6. Recognize the four reasons people do what they do.
7. Practice role-playing and brainstorming.
8. Focus on non-punitive solutions.

Guidelines for Effective Class Meetings

1. Students sit in a circle, and the teacher sits in the circle at the same level if possible.
2. In classes where the students are old enough, students will eventually lead the meeting.
3. The teacher (or student in charge) will start the compliments by passing an item (such as a talking stick or Kush ball) around the circle so every student has an opportunity to give a compliment, pass, or ask for a compliment. It is effective to have Elementary School students use the words, “I would like to compliment _____ for _____.” (When students say, “I like the way _____”, it is more about them than the other person.) Middle and High School students seem to prefer, “I would like to acknowledge _____”, or “I appreciate _____.”
4. When students ask to “get” a compliment, they have two or three seconds to choose someone (several students will raise their hands) to give them a compliment. Otherwise it starts looking like a popularity contest.
5. The receiver of a compliment will say, “Thank you.”
6. The teacher or student in charge will handle the agenda and read off the next item to be discussed.
7. After the agenda item is read, the student who placed the item on the agenda can choose between, a) sharing feelings while others listen, b) discussion without fixing, or, c) asking for problem-solving help.
8. If the student asks for discussion without fixing, or for problem-solving help, the item will be passed around the circle again for students to discuss without fixing, or to brainstorm for solutions. (Short comments are also allowed.)
9. The teacher refrains from commenting on the students suggestions (except to make sure the student is giving a suggestion. It may be necessary to say, “How could you turn that into a suggestion?”). When the item reaches the teacher, he or she can make a comment or suggestion – but only then.
10. Each suggestion is written in a notebook or on a flip chart.
11. In the beginning, the students may suggest things that sound more like punishment than a solution. If this is the case, the teacher or student in charge can request that they go over each suggestion and delete those that are hurtful, not helpful, or not practical. This should be done at the end of brainstorming, not during.
12. In most cases, the item will go around the circle twice to give children an opportunity to make a suggestion they didn’t think of before listening to others. (This doesn’t take as long as some fear.)
13. A vote will be taken only if the problem involves the whole class. Otherwise, the student who put the problem on the agenda can choose the suggestion he or she thinks will be most helpful.

Six Reasons Class Meetings Fail

1. Not forming a circle.
2. Not having them regularly (3 to 5 times a week in elementary school) to give students a chance to absorb and practice the skills.
3. Not allowing time for students to learn the eight building blocks.
4. Not passing an item around the circle so every child has a chance to speak or pass.
5. Not allowing child to choose the solution he/she thinks would be the most helpful.
6. Control and expediency are seen as more important than teaching children life skills.

Guide to Resolving Conflict in a Class Meeting

1. Allow each person involved in the conflict to speak freely about their perception of the problem, encouraging them to take responsibility for their part in the difficulty.
2. Use reflective listening to validate feelings.
3. Ask the class for feedback (discussing without fixing):
 - a. Insight into what is causing the problem
 - b. Validation – have they ever felt that way or had a similar problem with someone.
 - c. Allow for respectful truth checks (e.g. “Tommy, I was there, and you did call Sandy a name.”)
4. Ask each person involved in the conflict if they would like solution suggestions from the group. If a child says, “No,” then be sure to respect their wishes. Don’t worry if they do say no, as they will get a lot from listening.
5. Brainstorm for solutions – what each person involved in the problem can do. (e.g. “Tommy can play with someone else,” “Sandy can ask Tommy nicely to not call him names,” “Sandy can just let it go,” “Tell a teacher,” etc.).
6. Omit any solutions that are consequences or punishments.
7. Allow each person involved in the problem to choose a solution that *they* can do from the brainstormed list. To keep things safe, it is vital that the children involved in the conflict know that the class is there to help them identify solutions for themselves. So, keep the focus on solutions and not blame.
8. If there are solutions for both people (e.g. “Play with each other after school,” “Each person works with someone else for the day,”) then both must agree to use the mutual solution if it is to be used (this may have to be done outside of the meeting to respect the time needed to work it out).

Four Problem Solving Suggestions

In order to keep help make sure that problems on the Class Meeting are solved in a timely manner, it is helpful for students to learn that there are steps that they can take themselves to solve the problem. These suggestions below are skills, and can be taught and role played in the Class Meeting:

1. Let it go
2. Talk to the person about it
3. Work out a Win-Win solution
4. If those don't work, put it on the agenda

The plus side of this is no one involved in a problem is surprised when something shows up on the agenda in the Class Meeting. To me, it feels like what you should do when you grow up...ignore what you can, and talk respectfully to work things out when you can't.

Helpful Hints for Focusing on Solutions

by Jane Nelson

1. **Focus on the Future instead of the past:** Suffering for 'wrong-doing' versus helping them learn for the future.
2. **Focus on solutions instead of consequences.** It is a mistake to think there is a logical consequence for every behavior and to solve every problem. Put more emphasis on problem solving.
3. **Get Kids involved in Solutions.** Kids are an amazing untapped resource for ideas. They have a wealth of wisdom. It is an opportunity to use and strengthen their skills. They develop self-confidence and healthy self-esteem when they are listened to, taken seriously, and valued for their contribution.
4. Help children **explore the consequences of their choices through curiosity questions** (instead of imposing consequences). What happened? What caused it to happen? How do you feel about it? What have you learned from this? Remember that how you say things can be more important than what you say, so really be curious. Education is derived from the root word *educare*, which means 'to draw forth'.
5. **Allow consequences (natural)** instead of imposing consequences (punishment). Show empathy, avoid rescuing. Wait for a no-conflict time or after parties have 're-gathered', then focus on solutions.
6. **Decide what you will do.** Inform in advance.
7. **Follow through** with dignity and respect. "Shut your mouth and act", *Rudolf Dreikurs* (Act, don't Talk).
8. **As soon as...** "You can choose this work, as soon as you finish cleaning up the work you have out . . ."
9. **Use consequences hardly ever.** When using consequences use the formula: Opportunity = Responsibility = Consequence. For every opportunity children have there is a responsibility. The obvious consequence for not wanting the responsibility is to lose the opportunity. An important point that is often missed is that the children have a chance to try again. Consequences will be effective only if they are enforced respectfully and children have another chance to have the opportunity (as soon as they are ready for the responsibility).