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Conscious Discipline for Parents

Amber Brown

Capstone Project: A School Improvement Plan

Northwestern College, Orange City, Iowa

Abstract

Conscious Discipline is a universal comprehensive program combining social-emotional wellbeing into our everyday lives by enhancing the social-emotional skills of administrators, teachers, students and families. Collaboration is the key for Conscious Discipline to be effective. In order to change others, we must first change ourselves. This program uses evidence-based research to help overall improvement for all people involved. It has been known to be a trauma-informed approach to learning about ourselves in others to the best of our ability.

Keywords: positive reinforcement, collaboration, classroom management, success

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Conscious Discipline for Parents

The problem in the United States is children often argue, are aggressive, or act angry or defiant around adults. When children act out persistently it causes serious problems at home, in school, or with peers. Conscious Discipline is the solution. Conscious Discipline is a social-emotional learning program for parents, educators and mental health professionals where they emphasize behavior modeling and problem solving rather than punishment for misbehavior. It's a way of understanding the behaviors we use everyday through science. "Conscious Discipline is a transformational change, which is very different than traditional or transitional change." (Bailey et al., 2021, pg. 25) After thorough research performed in the early 90's, Dr. Becky Bailey figured out our brains have three states of functioning and put together her model of positive behavior in 1996. "Believing we must change ourselves first and model our expectations for others through self-regulation creates classroom climate and culture that teaches us values." (Bailey et al., 2021, pg. 15) The Survival State is the most basic state for human brains to be in, which is activated when it perceives a threat to the well-being of a person. "Stress and trauma in children have been called a hidden or invisible epidemic in the United States." (Bailey et al., 2021, pg. 8)

The purpose of this school improvement plan is to hold parental classes and provide materials on Conscious Discipline to teach to students' parents. With the success of using positive reinforcements in schools, imagine if parents were using it at home also. The hope is for parents and teachers alike can collaborate to ensure student success both at home, school and in the future. Research shows parents have used Conscious Discipline within their own homes as

well. “In addition to programs for children, research suggests programs geared specifically toward parents are effective in promoting children’s SEL.” (Darling et al., 2019, pg. 86)

Peer-reviewed research for this school improvement plan was found online through Northwestern College’s DeWitt Library, primarily through the ERIC & Education Database. The research reviewed was action-based and not limited to any specific geographic location. I also used scholarly journal articles when searching for using positive reinforcements for and with parents rather than just with educators, using articles discussed any type of connection between classroom management and positive reinforcements. The literature review will help show the connections between parents and teachers working together to implement Conscious Discipline strategies to help students and children receive the consistency needed for them to learn and grow.

When asked about using the program, parents saw positive changes in regulating their own emotions by taking deep breaths and remaining calm and using every situation as a teachable moment. When the parents are able to remain calm, they can model this behavior to their child(ren). “When parents were asked how they responded to challenging situations with their children, an increasing number of parents reported trying to calm themselves down before responding to their children’s behavior.” (Darling et al., 2019) More research needs to be done from a parental side in order to expand the usage of Conscious Discipline within our homes.

Teachers using Conscious Discipline within their classrooms are seeing good results from positive reinforcements. This is a tough day and age for teachers due to changes in children and their entitlement but also due to parental involvement decreasing. Teachers are fleeing from their professions and it is not good. Conscious Discipline is a classroom management tool that needs

to be implemented in early childhood but can work up through any grade level. For whatever reason, children aren't being taught how to manage their own emotions. It is also our jobs as adults to model this for them to have effective problem-solving skills. "Various parenting programs focused on SEL have demonstrated significant positive links to both parent and child outcomes." ((Darling et al., 2019, pg. 86)

Using both quantitative and qualitative data will show a positive correlation between using positive reinforcements and decreasing challenging behaviors in children. Data will also show a decrease in challenging behaviors when parents and teachers collaborate for the best of the student. The types of positive reinforcements being taught to parents will be easily understood and have the ability to implement them in their homes. Parents will also learn how to collaborate with teachers in their school districts to ensure that consistency is being used both at home and at school. The data will show how the expectations of students can change when a positive reinforcement technique such as Conscious Discipline is used. Rewards will be seen physically, emotionally and mentally in both parents, teachers and children.

Review of the Literature

Understanding Positive Reinforcement Benefits

In the study done by Sumiati (2019), he proved motivation is really important because it is a complex part of human psychology and behavior influences how individuals live and have an important influence on a learner's attitude and learning behavior [1-6]. Students with no motivation to learn, possibly cannot follow the learning instruction properly, because motivation is the desire to enable, activate, channeling and directing the behavior of individuals in carrying learning attitude. When trying to motivate any human being, you have to make it sound like a

positive and not a negative. This is the same as with young children. They need to see any kind of learning whether it is academics or social-emotional learning, it can be fun.

According to a study done by Hardy (2019), positive reinforcement is sometimes misunderstood or misapplied, including in early childhood settings which are those who serve children from birth to age 8. One common mistake is to refer to reinforcing a person instead of reinforcing a behavior. With this being a common misunderstanding, the idea of positive reinforcement may have a negative impact on some people. Another common mistake is seeing challenging behaviors as the child's fault. Using Conscious Discipline allows you to change reactions in both adults and children. There are simple ways to implement positive reinforcement at home, school or in public. These consist of:

1. Use a predictable visual schedule for all children.
2. Use a routine within a routine within a routine so there are no surprises and it is embedded into the daily curriculum.
3. Teach children social skills needed to be a good student, friend and person in general.

When taught properly, children learn what is expected of them and this decreases challenging behaviors.

According to Santrock (2011), learning at home is just as important as learning at school. "Parents are responsible for forming the children's regulations and self-control in the home setting, and these can be taught by giving direction, regulation, warmth, and stimulation through activities at home (Santrock, 2011). When this is done at home and school, it doubles the

effectiveness for the child. The positive reinforcement techniques taught in the classroom can be implemented at home and vice versa.

In the study done by Helliker (2011), positive reinforcement can help create a child's character for life. "Young children who are encouraged to behave appropriately by means of positive reinforcement tend to show more positive results in terms of character development than children who are motivated out of fear of punishment." (Helliker, 2011) Using positive reinforcement creates a stable, learning environment which then can create confidence and self-efficacy for oneself.

Establishing parent/teacher relationships

According to Chai & Lieberman-Betz (2016), when parents collaborate with their child's teacher, it is the best thing for families and students. "Providing families with information regarding potential behavioral strategies, offering choices, and ascertaining family members' preferences will increase the likelihood teachers and families will develop a behavior support plan that is meaningful and readily implemented in the home." (Chai & Lieberman-Betz, 2016) Establishing a routine can help create a trusting relationship with families and is important for the child involved. When a good collaboration is made, the educators can then help to coach the parents on how to implement positive reinforcement techniques.

In the study done by Lang (2020), parents teach their children so much before their child goes to school and transfers some of the responsibility to a teacher. "Therefore, teachers may have a wealth of information to share with the child's parents may affect how parents and their children function. Thus, it is also important to understand if and how parent-teacher relationships are associated with the parent-child relationship". (Lang et al., 2020) When

parents are involved in their child's education, it can help the child succeed higher in their academics.

In the study completed by Dearing (2017), children tend to thrive on consistency so when similar routines and techniques are used in multiple places in their lives, they function more appropriately. "Communication and cooperation between parents and teachers allows for bi-directional information sharing across home and school, providing both the teacher and parent opportunities to learn from each other about the child's learning and behavior strengths and weaknesses as well as build their knowledge, capacity and skills for supporting child growth". (Dearing et al. 2017)

Chai & Lieberman-Betz (2016) found research proving that when parents trust their child's teacher, then they feel like they can be more involved and want to become more involved in their child's education. It is important for a child to feel this support in their life. "Involving parents in the positive behavior support process will help the child generalize newly acquired skills to the home and community, and lead to positive child and family outcomes." (Chai & Lieberman-Betz, 2016)

Expectations & Feedback

In the study done by Bailey (2021), the expectations of Conscious Discipline being used as a positive reinforcement strategy are clear. Young children depend on adults to model and teach them how to act. When parents, children and teachers are all on the same page, the effectiveness increases. Punishment may stop the behaviors temporarily but will not change for the long-term. "Discipline isn't something you do to children, it's something you develop within them" (Bailey, 2021)

According to Atkinson (2021), children who have challenging behaviors receive less praise and positive reinforcement reactions within feedback. If feedback is specific and explanatory, children get a better understanding of what is expected of them. “Feedback is the main technical component of coaching, a momentary tool for purposeful reflection on a concrete learning situation. Feedback is most likely to help learners change their behavior if it is delivered in a constructive and actionable fashion, aimed at the task that the learner has performed.” (Atkinson et al., 2021)

Hattie (2009) did a study on feedback which showed the importance of giving effective feedback to children to help improve their reactions. This plays an important role with positive reinforcement. “In part, this is because feedback can be delivered on a number of different levels. Specifically, feedback can be related to the *task*, involving basic performance feedback about correctness or incorrectness; the *process*, providing information on how the task was completed; *self-regulation* with the aim to make the learner more aware of learning processes; and finally, the *self*, including direct praise and criticism of the learner, often directing attention away from the task, processes, or self-regulation” (Hattie, 2009).

In a study done by Peifer (2020), negative feedback can increase bad behaviors and positive feedback can enhance effectiveness but isn’t always as easy to do with our reactions when in a heated situation. Giving specific feedback to children is not enough. The feedback needs to be positive and encouraging in order to make a difference within children. “Research has identified moderators of the feedback-performance relationship, with findings suggesting positive feedback is more efficient than negative feedback.” (Peifer et al., 2020)

Rewards

According to Powell (2010), when parents remain involved in their child's education, it allows connections to be made within their home life and in their school life. "An emphasis on parent involvement in pre-K and other ECE settings responds to evidence that it contributes to children's academic motivation, language development, school readiness, and social development (Powell et al., 2010). Such outcomes are considered critical to later achievement and school success. When parents remain involved in their children's academics, the child remains motivated and encouraged to achieve success in their future.

Juvonen (2004) claims that a child's academic success is created by positive relationships within every student's life. "Most educators and parents believe that a child's academic success and adaptive functioning in school are related not only to how well principals run the schools and how capably teachers teach but also to the degree to which parents get involved in their children's schooling." (Juvonen et al., 2004) Using Conscious Discipline as a way to implement positive reinforcement can make a difference. If parents are trained and coached in effective ways to use positive reinforcement aligns with whatever program their child's school is using, students will benefit academically, emotionally and mentally.

In the study done by Domino (2005), having parents involved gives all parties more information on how to help students. Parental involvement has been studied so much over the years and all research indicates there are more benefits to being an involved parent than not. It has been used as a positive reinforcement strategy with success. "Parental involvement gives parents access to insider information. When children have problems at school, involved parents learn about these problems earlier and know more about available solutions." (Domina, 2005)

In the study done by Boyer (2011), when parental involvement and positive reinforcements collaborate together, the intrinsic rewards are just the beginning. The child will gain confidence, self-worth and self-efficacy in their home and school life. “Parents who are active at their children’s schools demonstrate the attitude that education is important and they actually care about what the children do in school.” (Boyer, 2011) This keeps the children motivated and encouraged to stay in school and do their best. School violence remains at a lower percentage when parents are involved as well.

School Profile

Located in East Central Iowa, Muscatine is on the banks of the Mighty Mississippi River. The city of Muscatine, once a busy river port, revels in the river today. In fact, Muscatine is nestled on the banks of the Mississippi along the only place where the north-south river runs east to west. It was once known for being the top producer of pearl buttons. Muscatine is rich in history, activities, amenities, as well as natural beauty. From the perfect position on the Mississippi, to our bluffs and park and recreational facilities, you have plenty of options to choose.

According to the 2010 Census, there were 22,886 people, 9,008 households, and 5,923 families residing in the city. There were 9,830 housing units at an average density of 568.2 per square mile. The racial makeup of the city was 87.8% White, 2.3% African American, 0.5% Native American, 0.8% Asian, 6.4% from other races, and 2.2% from two or more races. Hispanic and/or Latino people of any race were 16.6% of the population. The median age in the city was 36.1 years. 26.4% of residents were under the age of 18; 8.6% were between the

ages of 18 and 24; 25.7% were from 25 to 44; 25.7% were from 45 to 64; and 13.6% were 65 years of age or older. The gender makeup of the city was 49.1% male and 50.9% female.

Data was gathered from an Early Learning Center that consists of 320 children ages 3-5 years old. This center is only used for preschool and the resources needed to be successful. Resources consist of AEA members, a special education teacher, and behavior interventionists. The student population is made up of 49% female students and 51% male students. The school enrolls 38% economically disadvantaged students. There are 14 equivalent full-time teachers. The teacher/student ratio is 14:1. The minority enrollment is 41% with 59% being white, 32.1% being Hispanic/Latino, 6.1% being two or more races, 2.4% being Asian or Asian/Pacific Islander and .5% being African American. At the Muskie Early Learning Center, 67% of students scored at or above the proficient level for math, and 57% scored at or above a certain level for reading.

The school holds a reputation for hard-working teachers and they all have a special education degree in early childhood and all have an integrated classroom. There are seven general education kids and five special education kids in each class. The Muskie Early Learning Center curriculum is designed to meet each child's social-emotional, physical, and academic learning needs. It provides opportunities for students to learn in a play-based environment which supports whole-child development. They currently follow Teaching Strategies Creative Curriculum and Engage New York Math to meet the needs of our students.

Parent involvement is good at this center, compared to other schools in the district. Due to preschool being a rather large milestone for most families, the parents want to be more involved at the preschool age. The school holds many events and gives many opportunities for

families to be involved with their child's education. Monthly events are held to bring in families and other members of the community. These events are educational for all ages and many resources are provided for families during these events. With this school improvement plan in place, parent involvement will continue to increase.

The students are taught three basic rules in the building. These rules are to be kind, be respectful and keep trying. Students learn independence is their goal but asking questions is okay. It is important this age group of children be taught in detail so keeping things basic but specific is important to all staff members. The children are taught they have a community within their school and are made comfortable and safe while in this building. Everyone who attends or works in the building are a part of the mission statement.

The school mission statement and vision is simple, "At the Muskie Early Learning Center, our team builds positive connections with students and families to promote personal success for all." This ensures that education remains a solid foundation for our students, families and staff. This mission statement shows how important personal growth is for the students who attend the early learning center. Personal growth for preschoolers mainly falls within social-emotional skills that are taught roughly 90% of the day. These skills build upon their academic skills to create a successful start to the children's educational journey.

To close all of the gaps in each child's education, teachers are trained to use Specially Designed Instruction (SDI) and make it work for all of the children. All students are taught the same material while making small accommodations for the higher needs students. Integrated instruction keeps all of the students at the same level and working on the same things. This is important for the children to see. Teachers are also being trained with a program called

Conscious Discipline. This is a positive reinforcement technique and has research-based evidence on how to teach children social-emotional skills. This can be used for any age child and adults as well.

Assessments used in the building all coincide to work in the best interest of the students. The three year old teachers use assessments that prepare the students for the four year old program and the four year old teachers use assessments to prepare the students for kindergarten. The assessments align with Teaching Strategies GOLD and are from the Get Set For School website. Teaching Strategies GOLD is the way all of the teachers collect data and documentation for each of the students. This information will then help guide the teachers what needs to be worked on more or less for each student as an individual and also the class as a whole.

Needs Assessment

One need this school needs to improve on is parental involvement and teaching the parents about the curriculum and instruction used in the building. Early childhood education can be put off at times because not all parents think it's important. These parents need to see why it is important in all aspects of learning to be involved in their child's education. They just don't know how to do this. My school improvement plan will be able to do just that. When an entire building makes the effort to use a certain curriculum and then creates modules and trainings on every professional development day to implement them, it must be important.

Parents are a huge role model in a child's life and is why this school has a family engagement team. This specific team works on monthly family activities and events to pull in the parents to support the school and their children's education. When the family can see the way the school operates and then also meet the staff, they can feel more involved. By holding these

events and sending home activities for the family to do together and then send back to the school, it creates a connection between family and school. It is so important to create this community and have it be a positive thing for all involved.

This school in particular also has a social media portal. It involves parents and teacher interactions. It allows teachers to see what is going on in the classroom and the school building. However, this is optional and parents can choose a different line of communication which then gives them the opportunity to dismiss interacting with the staff at the school. Home and school relationships are important for any school program, but particularly so in programs for young children. Forming partnerships with parents and primary caretakers means supporting them in their role as parents and involving them in their child's educational program in meaningful ways.

Because parents exert a major influence on their children, parents are treated as partners. Classroom goals are shared with parents and their input invited. Parents are invited to extend their child's learning in the home through discussion and home-based activities that utilize the arts. Their experiences provide valuable insights to teachers are essential to responding to each child's individual needs. Parents are also provided with relevant and age appropriate children's literature suggestions to read aloud and discuss with their child to further develop their child's skills.

Frequent and regular communication with parents can advance the child's learning. Teachers should share with parents the classroom goals which are planned with the child, and invite their input. Creating good rapport with a child's family not only helps families and children, it also provides teachers with insights that are essential to responding to each child's individual needs.

The school improvement plan in place would prioritize positive staff-family relationships and develop strategies for two-way communication with families at the district and school levels, provide regular opportunities for family partners to build understanding of child's education and experience the district's approach to learning, offer meaningful opportunities for families to participate and collaborate in goal-setting, decision-making, and reflecting on data for continuous improvement, and regularly collect feedback about families' experiences and changing needs, and use these data to improve family partnership strategies.

Data Analysis

The school uses many different tools to track parent involvement for each year. Each classroom gets Teacher Tracking Tool sheet and the teacher is responsible for filling this out throughout the entire year. Look at figure A1 in the Appendix. It keeps track of family involvement for home visits, both fall and spring parent-teacher conferences, all health screenings, and every family event the school holds. This includes the preview day or step up day, fall and spring family nights, the end of the year picnic party and anything else could be recorded to help gather this data. There are blank spots on the form to make it more specific to each teacher.

When looking at each classroom, the data shows that on average about 50% of the students' do have parent involvement. The building principal collects these sheets and gives the percentages to the Family Engagement Team and then the team tries to come up with more activities to get parents involved in the school. This also means the team comes up with resources and events going on in the community to also gain more parental involvement. The school and the community work together as a team.

One way this system may not be super helpful is because one classroom may have almost 100 percent of parental involvement but another class may have 20 percent involvement so when averaging out all of the classrooms together, it doesn't give a whole lot of reasoning on why one class has a higher percentage than the other. It may be that a teacher forgot to write down the parent involvement for activities and then give an estimate. This will then mess up the accuracy in which the tracking tool was created for.

On the other hand, the tracking tool is a good concrete option for data collection. It is a simple and clear visual that allows for accuracy when used properly. I also feel that the majority of the activities on the sheet appear to be more mandatory than optional so assessing alongside the fun, optional activities may throw off the actual data and results as well.

The school also uses a PowerSchool app used to unite both teachers and parents in the modern world. The app/website has a plethora of information regarding the school, its district and resources. The resources include curriculum and instruction, data, attendance and so much more. The teachers use this for attendance, seating charts and can even upload personal information about their students. Parents can then sign on and see all of this about their child and whatever else is shared publicly.

The only negative about this is the parents may not be able to access the website right away. It does take some getting used to. This may turn parents off from using it and then obviously does no good. The idea of this app/website is very good and an easy way to get information to parents but the format does need some work, according to users. Once this program gets better understood by schools and families, it can save so much time.

Implementation of School Improvement Plan

The timeline for this school improvement plan would be done in two academic years but would continue year after year once implemented. Conscious Discipline would need to be taught to all of the teaching staff in the building. This means they would have completed all of the modules and workbook trainings as well as implementing any strategies chosen by the teacher to use to support positive reinforcement. This would take a full academic teaching year. Starting the next year, it would be explained to parents at home visits and open house with resources explaining how Conscious Discipline works at school and then also how it can be used in their homes.

As the second year progresses, modules and trainings will be offered both online and in-person for parents to use. This helps make it be self-paced so parents do not feel like this is an obligation but a privilege. Throughout the year, the school will hold family night events and activities and more resources will be available for parents. The principal will play an active role in providing the materials and information needed to make these events a success. These resources will include the Conscious Discipline workbooks and worksheets along with the online modules and presentations to be watched at home or in a group setting.

Teachers will be responsible for sending out weekly and/or monthly newsletters with a quick recap of what each module means and with key points for parents. These modules are so interactive so parents will enjoy them enough to keep coming back to them as a resource. Another resource would be for the family engagement team. They will have had all of the trainings completed so would be very knowledgeable and ready to answer any and all questions.

Surveys would be given at the beginning of the year, after each module training and at the end of each year. This would help collect data and see how well parents were actually involved.

It would take awhile to get this plan implemented so it would be the main barrier. The setup is easy but actually getting parents to give this a try would be the most difficult part. The teaching staff would have to be hyped up and excited about teaching this to the parents to make it successful which can also be a lot to ask for teachers who are already maxed out. The end results would hopefully make the students act out better for both parents and teachers so it would be worth it.

Conclusion

Conscious Discipline is a great program used to help implement positive reinforcements in the classroom and at home. Conscious discipline can be effective by understanding the benefits of positive reinforcement, establishing parent-teacher relationships, providing expectations and feedback to all involved, and enjoying the rewards of collaboration. The problem in the United States is children often argue, are aggressive, or act angry or defiant around adults. When children act out persistently it causes serious problems at home, in school, or with peers. Conscious Discipline is the solution. Children's behaviors improve when parents are involved in their child's education and positive reinforcement decreases challenging behaviors.

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Appendix

Teacher Tracking Tool

Classroom: <u>Miss Amber</u>		Number of families and/or students who participated in the following:	
Total Number of Students: <u>17 total</u>			
Home Visits: <u>17</u>			
Family Goals Sheets Completed with Families <u>17</u>			
P/T Conferences	Fall	<u>17</u>	
	Spring	<u>14</u>	
Health Screenings	Dental	.	
	Vision	<u>9</u>	
	Hearing	<u>15</u>	
Family Events	Event	Number of families who participated:	
	Preschool Preview	<u>12</u>	
	Fall Family Night	—	
	Winter Family Night	—	
	Spring Family Night (<u>NOTYC</u>)	<u>3</u>	
	End of Year Picnic		
	Family Creation Projects		
Other			
Health Practices in Classroom (Please list)			
Community Resource Connection			
As you connect families with resources (i.e. therapy, food security, health, etc.) please list the resource and update the number of families that have been referred			
Name of Resource	Number of families Referred	Name of Resource	Number of families Referred
MCS D Transportation	(# who use):		
Muscatine Y Before/After School	(# who use):		
Non-Emergency Transport	(# who use):		
Parents as Teachers	(# who use):		
Muskie Locker	(# who use):		
Bags of Blessings	(# who use):		
Therapy (play, food, behavior, etc.)	(# who use):		

Figure A1. Family data tracking tool.