

“A Respectful Team”

A Personal Model of Discipline
by Christine Ammirati

As a parent of two adult children and as a preschool administrator for a decade, I have invested considerable time reflecting on a model of discipline with which I feel personally comfortable at home and that I can support and promote to staff and families in my work environment. Over the years, this low to moderate control model has altered slightly but has always maintained its emphasis on mutual respect, problem solving, and natural enthusiasm; a focus on logical consequences; and a rejection of shaming and physical contact. In my future classroom, I aim to apply such a philosophy to the instructional environment and to create a nurturing and respectful setting where students develop intrinsic motivation to achieve academic and social success.

Parents and teachers often naturally draw upon personal experiences when considering the discipline model to embody with our students and with our own children. While living in Hong Kong, my children entered their first schools in the very low-control atmospheres of two British institutions embodying a philosophy that valued adult-child conversation and problem solving and that placed overwhelming emphasis on maintaining student enthusiasm and motivation for their own learning. Over these three years, I observed the benefits of bolstering children’s natural interests and communicating the logical consequences of their actions. In late elementary school, my children were enrolled in a low-moderate control Manhattan public school that implemented the Responsive Classroom approach. Through the school’s outreach and parent education, I learned about and observed the benefits of a non-shaming and collaborative classroom atmosphere, group rule setting, communication through morning meeting, and a culturally responsive curriculum. I

also worked closely with a fellow parent who was an author of parenting books and a parenting workshop coordinator who advocated a low-moderate control discipline model. These multiple influences contributed to my strong personal viewpoint that children and adults can work together to create and maintain a respectful and productive instructional environment that builds students' confidence and skills in both the academic and social domains.

I successfully implemented such a model as director of a [64-student cooperative preschool](#). Our school had only three rules: "I follow directions, "I listen to instructions," and "I don't hurt people or things on the inside or the outside." During a particularly taxing behavior and safety situation, I was greatly challenged in this discipline model and found Ross Greene's Collaborative Problem Solving approach to be an effective means to maintain a respectful team relationship in even the most trying circumstance. I have now seen Dr. Greene speak twice and am a frequent visitor to his website. He offers a specific method for partnering with students to determine a mutually agreeable game plan to address even the most contentious discipline problems. Using this approach, I believe it is possible to build a collaborative relationship with even the most obstreperous student *if* the adult is willing to listen and to commit to finding a middle ground from which to move forward as an adult-child partnership toward a solution.

In sum, I intend to implement a discipline model that promotes a respectful team environment focused on academic achievement and social success. I aim to build upon my personal belief of adult-child respect, embrace the social focus of the responsive classroom approach, and use the collaborative problem solving of Dr. Greene when needed. In such a classroom, manners and respectful attitude and behaviors are fundamental. I have twenty-two years of experience modeling and expecting good manners *every* time a request is made ("please") or an object is received ("thank you") and have been successful in using a non-verbal gesture (a touch to the ear) to

embed a habit in my students. In addition, when people feel comfortable and supported, their learning potential is optimized. To that end, while I cannot mandate that all students “be friends,” I will expect that all students “be friendly” and include all peers in classroom discussions and activities. Ostracism at recess or taunting on the bus is within my purview as a classroom teacher because such demeaning actions adversely impact classroom cohesion and thus inhibit learning.

In my classroom placement at Matoaka, I have found many aspects of my preferred discipline model. The class is respectful, nurturing, fun, and focused on recognizing positive contributions and behavior. I remain somewhat uncomfortable with the use of publicly displayed behavior color cards because it involves the redirection of students in front of their peers. I prefer private conversations and, if needed, individual, shielded behavior charts. I believe that these alternatives can be effective in redirecting undesirable behavior and promoting desirable conduct.

Finally, I see the goals of education to include not only building knowledge and fostering understanding but also stoking innate curiosity and creating enthusiasm for future learning. I believe a respectful classroom that welcomes student input nurtures such an attitude and promotes future success in school and in life.