

Love and Discipline

For more than 40 years Dr. Smiley Blanton listened to people share their hopes, fears, likes, and dislikes about themselves and the world. He heard mature people trying to mend ragged ends of troubled lives; adolescents telling secret resentments and anxieties; little children indirectly describing troubles; and the elderly sharing failures, successes, and dreams of the future.

Universal Need for Love

After many years Dr. Blanton discovered one important fact: “As I look back over the long, full years, one truth emerges clearly in my mind—the universal need for love. Whether they think they do or not, all people want love.”¹

Jean Dunaway, an elementary school teacher in Memphis, works wonders with her children: “I love my profession; I enjoy children. I’m happy in my school. I haven’t lost my mind; I’ve found a method that works for me that helps both the children and me enjoy school. I know it’s not the answer for everyone, but it has cut discipline problems in my class by more than half.”

Of the 30 children in her class, 80 percent are black. She claims she is not an expert; in fact, she is a low-seniority teacher who is placed in a new school and a new grade every year.

“I discovered the ‘secret’ when I taught first grade,” says Dunaway. “I used to let the children know I liked them by a revolutionary means—I touched them.”

She did a lot of hugging that year. One of her colleagues asked how she could tolerate children all around her, hugging her knees, standing on her toes, and following her the whole day. “To me, it was one more little reward of teaching children,” she says.

As she moved to the fourth grade and then to the sixth, she realized how sensitive children were about feelings, bodies, and peer approval. Believing that expressing love was embarrassing for the sixth-grade children, she taught her class in the conventional way. She became cross, the children became hot and argumentative, and she began to yell.

Finally, she told the class she had to drive 35 miles to school every day in the peak of traffic and needed help. Each day she needed two

things: a smile from each child to get her started in the morning, and one before dismissal to take home with her. The children were wary at first, but she went around the class collecting their smiles. If a child did not respond, she hugged a smile out, a method she does not recommend for a fiercely angry or resentful child. Though she realizes that this method is not for everyone, for her it works. It is her way of saying “I love you.”²²

Effective Teaching

Effective teaching is an art that is motivated by love for students. Some teachers show their love in an emotional way, like Jean Dunaway; others in a more unobtrusive manner. However it is shown, love must be demonstrated for a harmonious learning atmosphere.

A young girl kicked, screamed, and had tantrums to such an extent that her private tutor labeled her a “wild little creature” and a “little savage.” While eating breakfast, the girl reached into her teacher’s plate to grab some food, but the tutor stopped her. The girl went into a tantrum—threw herself on the floor, kicked, gave out unearthly screams, and tried to jerk the teacher’s chair from under her. Undaunted, the teacher kept eating. Then the girl pinched her teacher; but every time she pinched, the teacher slapped her. When the girl sat down again to eat breakfast, the teacher gave her a spoon. She refused to eat with a spoon and threw it on the floor. She wanted to eat with her hands. The teacher forced her off the chair to pick up the spoon, replaced her in the chair, and kept insisting that she eat with a spoon. Finally the student yielded and finished her breakfast.

The teacher persisted in order to gain her obedience and to overcome the permissive policy of her parents. The girl was so wild that she even assaulted members of her family, who had black and blue marks to prove it.

The pupil? Helen Keller. The teacher? Anne Sullivan Macy. At 19 months of age, Helen contracted a serious disease that left her blind and deaf. For almost five years she grew, as she recalled, “wild and unruly, giggling and chuckling to express pleasure; kicking, scratching, uttering the choked screams of the deaf-mute to indicate the opposite.”

To secure a teacher for Helen, her father contacted Dr. Alexander Graham Bell. Dr. Bell directed him to Perkins Institute for the Blind in Boston, where he found Anne Sullivan. Anne came to teach six year-old Helen, and until her death remained with Helen. Anne’s plan was to start slowly and win Helen’s love. “I shall not attempt to conquer her by force

alone,” she declared. She soon discovered otherwise. Helen was not a pale delicate child. She was large, strong, ruddy, and determined as a wild horse. Sometimes for days she refused to have her hair combed. Force was needed even to get her to do simple things like buttoning her shoes or washing her face. Anne Sullivan, recognizing that her biggest problem was to gain control over Helen without breaking her spirit, had to revise her teaching plans. Helen was so cold and self-willed that she refused to let Anne caress her, and everything Anne did for Helen was accepted as a matter of course.

Anne was determined to succeed with Helen. Punishment, she realized, would have to be applied along with her love. Helen’s parents, however, could not bear to see their child being punished. So Anne asked to live alone with her pupil, and the parents agreed. Off they went to live in a little homestead nearby. The experiment began badly. The first night Anne put Helen to bed, a terrific tussle resulted. Anne, being just as obstinate but stronger, finally won, but only after a two-hour struggle.

The parents were permitted one visit a day, but without Helen’s knowledge. One day Captain Keller passed by and through the window saw Helen in her nightgown, the picture of despair and stubbornness. That day when Helen was given her clothes to wear, she flung them on the floor. Anne let her know: If you’re not dressed—no breakfast! Here it was ten o’clock, and Helen was still in her nightgown.

Captain Keller visited his cousin’s house and tearfully said, “I’ve a good mind to send that Yankee girl back to Boston.” His cousin persuaded him not to.

Within two weeks the “little savage” was transformed. She became gentle, happy, serene, and proud of having learned to crochet a long red chain of Scotch wool. Helen now sat on Anne’s lap for a minute or two and even let Anne kiss her, but she would not return Anne’s caresses. When Helen returned home, Anne determined to keep the ground gained by eliciting a promise from the parents not to interfere. Anne also taught Helen the manual alphabet by touching objects and by finger movements in her hand. Then one day it happened. Let Anne tell it herself:

We went out to the pump-house, and I made Helen hold her mug under the spout while I pumped. As the cold water gushed forth, filling the mug, I spelled “w-a-t-e-r” in Helen’s free hand. The word coming so close upon the sensation of cold water rushing over her hand seemed to startle her. She dropped the mug

and stood as one transfixed. A new light came into her face. She spelled “water” several times. Then she dropped on the ground and asked for its name and pointed to the pump and the trellis, and suddenly turning around she asked for my name. I spelled “Teacher.” Just then the nurse brought Helen’s little sister into the pump-house, and Helen spelled “baby” and pointed to the nurse. All the way back to the house she was highly excited, and learned the name of every object she touched, so that in a few hours she had added thirty new words to her vocabulary. Here are some of them: *Door, open, shut, give, go, come*, and a great many more.

It was a momentous day for Helen and Anne; not only because she had broken the key to language, but that night for the first time Helen of her own accord snuggled into bed with Anne and gave her a kiss.

“I thought my heart would burst, it was so full of joy,” said Anne. When Christmas came Mrs. Keller cried, “I thank God every day for sending you to us.” Captain Keller took Anne’s hand but was speechless. Before Helen was ten years old, she was world renowned. Leading educators of the deaf, blind, and seeing paid compliments to Anne Sullivan Macy. Professors at Harvard wanted all teachers to know of her accomplishments.

Helen learned not only to read but to talk, and in 1904 she was graduated with honors from Radcliffe College, a difficult school even for a normal person. In Braille she read French, German, Latin, Greek, and English. Years later Woodrow Wilson asked her why she chose Radcliffe when she could have entered an easier college. “Because they didn’t want me at Radcliffe,” she said, “and, being stubborn, I chose to override their objections.”

Her life was spent promoting better care for the blind, lecturing, and writing magazine articles and books. At 75 she told a reporter, “My birthday can never mean so much to me as the arrival of Anne Sullivan on 3rd March 1887: that was my soul’s birthday.”³

Helen’s dramatic success was due to the utilization of love and discipline. Love expresses concern for children whereas discipline expresses training by guidance and encouragement. Discipline is not punishment, but it may include it. Discipline is training someone to act properly, either positively, by encouraging good behavior, or negatively, by punishing bad behavior.

There are three common methods of discipline: authoritarian, permissive, and loving.

Authoritarian Discipline

Authoritarian discipline is when teachers or parents domineer children. Explanations are not given why rules must be obeyed—children’s duty is to obey, not to question. When rules are broken, these grown-ups view the violation as intentional, and quick discipline is administered. Authoritarian discipline rarely uses praise or encouragement; it favors punishment to alter bad behavior.

Authoritarian teachers are firm and forceful. They are in charge. Woe to anyone who infringes on their authority. In past years these teachers walked classroom aisles with their rattan and eagerly used it against any child for the least infraction of their rules, whether intentional or unintentional. Children sat in fear as these stern teachers passed their desks. Few today would defend this dictatorial training method.

Permissive Discipline

Permissiveness is at the opposite end of the spectrum from authoritarianism. Children should be free from external control and allowed to express their own behaviors. Few demands are presented for orderly behavior. Teachers act as resource persons when children desire help, not as an active agent to change children’s present or future conduct. Permissive teachers accept students’ actions and impulses and allow them to govern themselves and vent their desires. Reasons are used to reach goals, but if children’s actions are detrimental to others, the teacher endeavors to utilize non-punitive methods to correct misbehavior.

The strong impetus for permissiveness came shortly after World War I from the progressive movement. In 1918-19 the Progressive Education Association was formed, and one of its fundamental principles was: A child should be free to develop naturally and to develop his or her conduct by self-government.

John Dewey (1859-1952), American philosopher and educator, endeavored in an experimental school in Chicago to demonstrate a new approach to education: an educational experience based on the free and natural development according to children’s interests. In the process, educators came to stress the inherent right of children to their own self-realization and self-expression. Shortly before Dewey died he reemphasized his thesis: liberty of self-realization within the bounds of the common welfare.

In *New Ways in Discipline* Dorothy W. Baruch cites some practical illustrations of the children’s right to self-realization and self-expression.

According to Baruch, this method allows the children's "badness" to come out and allows the "goodness" to come in.

Five-year-old Mike is returning from a school excursion. While crossing the street he stops in the middle.

Mike's teacher says, "Get out of the street, Mike; a car's coming."

Mike stands his ground stubbornly.

Quickly the teacher takes Mike by the hand and pulls him firmly onto the sidewalk.

"You dummy," Mike screams.

For two blocks he keeps repeating, "Dumb teacher! Old dummy!" The teacher mirrors his feelings. "It looks as though you're mad at me, Mike, for having made you do something you didn't want to."

She also shows her acceptance in the good, easy tone of voice which she reinforces by saying, "It's all right for you to show me how you feel."

Baruch says a teacher or parent should see how a child feels, accept how he feels, and reflect how he feels. She presents an illustration of a father whose son, in spite of many parental implorings, goes on a hunger strike.

Today father approaches with the new look in his eye. Inside he is thinking, "Yes, I know how you feel, kid, and I'm prepared to really take it with understanding. When you tell or show me, I'm not going to scold or argue you out of it. I'm going to *accept*." To Heinie he says very simply, "You don't want to eat," reflecting what Heinie has shown.

"It's stinkin' food. I hate it. I'll throw it under the table."

"You want to throw it." Father nods.

"Cause I won't eat it," defiantly from Heinie.

"You just don't want to," from father. His tone holds neither the sting of sarcasm nor the patience of martyrdom. He speaks with sincere kindness and his air is one of waiting, which at this moment is far better than any invitation to tell or show more.

"It's nasty. It smells. I can't stand it. I'll throw it down the drainpipe. I'll throw mom down too. I'll drown her. And you, too."

You all smell, you do.”

“You fell mean-mad at us.”

“I’ll throw all this stuff in your face.” “I know you’d like to, you feel so mean. . .”

Heinie nods and then, truculent still, eats a few spoonfuls. Gradually day by day, as he keeps on bringing out more and more of the “badness,” the “goodness” increases. He eats more and eats more cheerfully, and the tirades give way to fun and laughter and a friendly recounting of recent events.

Many times this is the way it happens. When enough of the hurt and fear and anger have been released, they diminish. They stop pushing from within. They stop springing out in compulsive ways, disguising what lies underneath so that it can not be dealt with. After enough of the “badness” has come out, the “goodness” appears.⁴

It is a beautiful theory, allowing all this “badness” to come out. But strangely, children act the worst in permissive schools.

Loving Discipline

Between the extremes of authoritarianism, with its emphasis on control, and permissiveness, with its insistence on individual freedom, is loving discipline, also known as authoritative discipline or democratic discipline. It is middle-ground approach stressing control *and* freedom. Goals are set and children are expected to maintain socially accepted behavior, yet within the bounds of proper behavior they are free to express themselves.

Today’s Child reports: “Authoritative parents (as opposed to authoritarian) seem to produce kids who are self-reliant, self-controlled, explorative and contented, the results of an 8-year study of middleclass pre-schoolers suggest.

“Firm and demanding yet warm and responsive, authoritative parents ‘encourage verbal give and take, and share with the child the reasoning behind a family policy,’ reports Univ. of California research psychologist Diana Baumrind. ‘They exert firm control at points of parent-child divergence, but do not hem in the child with restrictions.’”⁵

Dr. Baumrind also found: “Whereas the parents of relatively alienated pre-school children tended to use inhibiting control, the parents of exceptionally mature children exerted even firmer control, used reason

to explain their directives, and encouraged independent expression. This latter group of parents certainly did not exhibit the authoritarian personality syndrome. They were open and receptive although highly authoritative in their requirement for compliance.”⁶

Grace Langdon and Irving W. Stout, in *These Well-Adjusted Children*, brought out this fact: “In one way or another all of the parents of these children echoed that statement, ‘and they needed discipline.’” Of the 261 children chosen for their study these authors said, “Punishment evidently played a considerable part in the lives of all these children.”⁷

Proper Balance Between Freedom and Discipline

In my research I have not found any author who supported a totally permissive or an authoritarian approach to discipline. In the example given by Dorothy Baruch, the teacher used her power to force the child onto the sidewalk away from an approaching car. Even A. S. Neill had rules in his permissive Summerhill school. Everyone recognizes some need of control. The problem is to strike a healthy balance between authoritarianism with its dictatorial control and permissiveness with its laissez-faire freedom. One can also lean lightly or heavily toward permissiveness or toward authoritarianism. The problem is the placement of the pivotal point.

The pivotal point is where freedom and discipline meet. Discipline without freedom is brutal. Freedom without discipline is license. Discipline or freedom alone is not the answer; both must be united with love. It is love that balances the delicate scale of freedom and discipline.

There are many misconceptions about love. To many people it means license, but this is a false notion; love can be firm. Anne Sullivan made tremendous sacrifices to help an unknown deaf and blind six-year-old child. Although Helen was obstinate, self-willed, and cold, Anne Sullivan’s love overcame these obstacles even though she used corporal punishment. Though love may punish when necessary, it is more eager to pat a child or shake a hand. It delights to say, “Very good. Clever. Terrific! That was a good explanation. Keep up the good work.”

Preventive Discipline

Loving teachers practice preventive discipline. They aim to make lessons so interesting that students are not prone to misbehave. Interest and discipline are related. As interest increases, difficulties decrease; as interest decreases, difficulties increase. Effective teachers present

knowledge in an efficient and interesting manner.

Putting children into classes where they can function is an important step in preventive discipline. Automatic promotion and heterogeneous grouping greatly increase discipline problems because children with varied educational abilities will have trouble learning together. Some will find the work too easy, others too difficult. And it is often the low achievers who cause the greatest class disturbances.

Since young children need more diversion than older ones, wise teachers who see children beginning to wiggle will know it is time to change the lesson or activity. Effective teachers understand children's nature; they are always one step ahead.

Though the ideal situation is for teachers to strive for programs that prevent the need for discipline and punishment, not every lesson is so absorbing that students' tendency to misbehave will automatically be eliminated. Successful teaching trains children how to work in spite of difficult and unmotivated lessons. Once children are trained to persist in spite of difficulties, their proneness to misbehave will markedly decline.

A few hard-core rebels will refuse to behave in spite of all compassionate help. They need to be removed from a regular school because they cause untold hardships on both teachers and other students. Most often it is these hardened ones who ruin the schools and become teachers' nightmares. Control these hardened students and the schools will have harmony; let them gain the upper hand—disaster. Because a few defiant students are permitted to roam at will and to create all sorts of discipline problems, many borderline students imitate them. Placing these incorrigibles in reform school would send a strong message to all students: Schools demand discipline. Reform schools need a strict program of discipline. They need to have the image of being fair, extra firm, and loving. If a student still insists on engaging in antisocial behavior—then prison. Schools *must* demand proper behavior.

Many schools have students on drugs. Attorney General William French Smith declared that drug addiction is a major cause of crime in the United States. "I think one thing stands out for sure," said Smith concerning crime: that one of its principal "known causes is drugs."⁸ The goal to reduce crime must have as its primary objective the incorporation of methods to prevent crime, and we need to start with school children.

Texas Governor Mark White favors a mandatory prison term for anyone convicted of selling drugs on a school campus.⁹ What would happen if state legislators all across America passed bills making it

mandatory to send every school drug pusher either to a reform school or to prison? Drug trafficking would quickly halt in schools as students witnessed drug peddlers being convicted and sent away. To protect children and to stem the rising tide of school drug use, schools must send out an uncompromising message: *We will not tolerate drugs.*

Successful Teachers

Many adults can recall teachers who always had disciplined classes while others did not. One teacher can rave and rant without results; another whispers and children respond. What is the secret of the successful teacher? Successful teachers are firm but fair. They know first impressions are important; immediately they aim at having a disciplined class. There is a firm insistence on proper behavior without bitterness. They realize that if the first troublemaker cannot succeed, the effect on the entire class will be tremendous. These teachers are consistent and self-controlled. When they issue an ultimatum against student misconduct, it is carried out. They do not fluctuate because of unclear objectives. They know that one of the best discipline deterrents is certainty of punishment. However, some teachers tolerate certain actions one day, vacillate the next day, and demand something else a week later. The moods of unsuccessful teachers determine their actions which lead to discipline breakdown.

Successful teachers despise favoritism. Reasonable, not arbitrary discipline is used. They are always ready to give an intelligent reason for their actions. Their speech does not cut and insult students. A spark of love radiates from all their conduct, including times of discipline. It is a love that chastises to help, not to retaliate.

Successful teachers always maintain eye contact with their students. They are extremely observant to prevent misbehavior, and they are always on guard to take immediate corrective action. If pupils get drowsy, windows are opened. If two children talk frequently, seats are changed. When a child does misbehave, these teachers get more response with one look than others do with their earthshaking shouts. It is the look of firmness and love; when any misbehaving child looks into those eyes, he or she had better stop or else!

Realizing the importance of gaining immediate control, a teacher shared his secret with me. He flew into a rage over the slightest infraction. He reasoned that students would react with fear thinking that if the teacher lost his temper over a small infraction what would happen if something really tragic occurred? Another method used is never to

smile at the beginning of the term. Both ways are objectionable. Good teachers do not bluff students (students are quick to spot a phony); when they do, they take advantage of the situation. Wholesome teaching has a pleasant atmosphere, not fearful. Smile? Why not? Do teachers have to frown to prove they are serious? Successful teachers maintain a healthy balance. They know when to be serious and when to have a sense of humor. Their constant motto is:

FAIR—FIRM—LOVING

Lee Canter traveled around California teaching an unusual group of students: school teachers. They sat with alert attention as Canter explained his two-day “assertive training” program to help them maintain disciplined classes. “All the behavior problems in this country could be ended if you went into class one day and said, ‘I’m not taking it anymore,’” said Canter.

For two years Canter, age 31, an instructor from the extension faculty of California State University, has trained hundreds of mostly elementary school teachers of southern California. He plans to instruct 3,000 other frustrated teachers throughout the state. “Never argue with a kid,” Canter admonishes. “You’ll lose—and they lose in the long run.” Instead of debating, he counsels, repeat an order until it is obeyed. Also, a teacher should appear forceful by using the child’s first name and should maintain eye contact when issuing commands. His firm methods have proven successful. After 18 principals and 287 Pasadena teachers were trained in using assertive authority, there was a 29 to 8 percent decline in time devoted to school discipline.¹⁰

It is important, in taking a no-nonsense discipline approach, that legitimate student complaints not be ignored, such as dirty lunchrooms, bad teachers, boring classes, arbitrary decisions, and overly harsh discipline. Some educators invite discipline problems because they use unrealistic standards. One mother complained to me about a principal who did not allow his elementary students to whisper in the lunchroom. She went to the principal and asked, “Why can’t the children whisper?”

“If they start to whisper,” the principal reasoned (most of the children whispered anyway), “then we have a whisper; then we have a yell; before you know it—we have a riot.”

What is wrong with children whispering or talking in a lunchroom? One of the important aspects of loving discipline is that it is reasonable.

When discipline is necessary, a student's intelligence is respected by a willingness to give an explanation. The lordship mentality of "Obey me because I said it!" is abhorrent. Some angry pupils will reject reasoned discipline and endeavor to engage in a lengthy, heated debate. Wise teachers do not yield to the temptation to force their reasoning upon a rebellious child; they know it will only increase resentment. These teachers know that reasoned discipline, even though it is rejected, does not cause lasting bitterness.

Dr. Diana Baumrind reported, "Under normal conditions, adolescents do not rebel against all authority by any means. They differentiate quite accurately between authoritarian and authoritative parental control." Baumrind told of a Swedish survey with 656 adolescents showing that "significant differences occurred in their acceptance of parental authority depending upon the reason for the directive. Authority which was based on rational concern for the child's welfare was accepted well by the child, while authority which was based on the adult's desire to dominate or exploit the child was rejected."¹¹

Fear that when discipline is demanded it will cause student rebellion is ungrounded. Indeed, the opposite is the case: Discipline administered justly and firmly is appreciated. Teachers "must be the figures of authority without being authoritarian," wrote Muriel S. Karlin and Regina Berger in their book *Discipline and the Disruptive Child*. "It has been our experience, dealing with hundreds of children, that this type of teacher is what they want and need. Many, many times youngsters have come to us requesting a change of class. Perhaps three or four times this has been 'because the work is too hard.' Most of the others have words to the effect, 'I'm not learning anything. The class is too noisy.' When the discipline is lax and disorder is rife the children lose a sense of security."¹² James Dobson wrote in *Dare to Discipline*, "Teachers who maintain order are often the most respected members of the faculties, provided they aren't mean and grouchy. A teacher who can control a class without being oppressive is almost always loved by her students."¹³

A Total Disciplined Educational Environment

Schools need to implement a total disciplined system from kindergarten until graduation. As with the solutions for the educational crisis, in the early grades it is imperative to insist on a disciplined environment. The best teachers belong in these early grades to instill in children proper work and behavior habits. Theodore Roosevelt said, "If you are going to

do anything permanent for the average man, you must begin before he is a man. The chance of success lies in working with the boy and not the man.” If children fail to learn early how to behave, they will carry their defiant attitudes throughout their school life. My aged barber, conversing about training children, said, “I got this tree here. If I don’t put a stick there, it would grow crooked.” Discipline is putting a stick beside the child to assure proper growth.

Unfortunately, society and government show great concern over crooked trees and willingly spend untold billions to correct the situation. However, at the point where the sapling could have been easily straightened, they are indifferent.

Much teacher training time is spent on subject knowledge and little on classroom management, yet the latter often presents the greatest teacher difficulties. Yet the little training they receive is likely to offer the ineffective permissive approach. Teaching can be delightful, but the constant pressure to maintain order without having the needed means makes it a frustrating experience. Teachers must be provided with proper means and support to preserve a disciplined environment. Even with suitable rules and administrative support, one must recognize that there are different types of teachers. Some can handle students, some need training, and others lack the ability. Everything should be done to help failing teachers; only after all efforts are unsuccessful should they be dismissed. The wisest approach is to screen teachers carefully before employment as to their competence to teach and to maintain a disciplined class.

Effective schools require a chain of command: administrators supervising schools by periodically visiting them and insisting that *all* maintain a disciplined atmosphere; principals overseeing teachers that they *all* have orderly classes. Administrators and principals should be experts in maintaining a disciplined learning environment. The National Institute of Education (NIE) made a study on school violence. Repeatedly these researchers found that the primary factor distinguishing safe schools from violent ones was a strong, dedicated principal who governed with “firm, fair and . . . consistent” discipline.¹⁴

Authoritarian discipline is universally rejected. However, often in the legitimate rejection of authoritarianism many reject proper authority. The pendulum then swings to permissiveness. History shows this pendulum swinging back and forth. Though today authority is becoming popular with the American public, many schools cling tenaciously to permissive

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discipline policies. Educational leaders need to implement the proven system of love and discipline, which will transform chaotic schools into institutions of learning.