

49 - Using Positive Discipline to Guide Desired Behaviors

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Audience: Current Active & Enrolled Students

Episode Transcript

Host Dr. Shipley: Hello everyone and welcome to Early Childhood Chatter with Dr. Shipley and Dr. Heald. We will upload a new episode every other week on Wednesdays.

Host Dr. Heald: Twice a month, we will come to you with a 10-minute professional development that you can quickly listen to for new ideas to try.

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Today, we are so excited to have with us Dr. Michelle Simecek

who is our colleague, but also our friend. Dr. Simecek is a full-time core faculty member at the University of Arizona Global Campus, working in the Bachelor of Arts in Early Childhood Education Department.

Prior to UAGC, she worked for over 20 years in K-12 school districts throughout Wisconsin and Colorado, and as a classroom teacher and reading specialist. Michelle, thank you for being here.

Dr. Michelle Simecek Speaker: You're so welcome.

Hi, ladies. How are you doing?

****Dr. Tisha Shipley and Dr. Stephanie Heald Speakers:**** Good.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: Thanks for being here, Michelle.

So, Michelle, today we are talking about positive discipline to guide desired behaviors, and this is something that all teachers, staff, faculty, and even families could use. So, thank you for sharing. So, to start out, what is positive discipline?

Dr. Michelle Simecek Speaker: Well, positive discipline is an approach to manage behaviors, either in the classroom or at home, by teaching children to be responsible, respectful, and resourceful.

So, in positive discipline, you're not yelling, shaming, or blaming, or doling out consequences after the fact. Instead, you're responding to children, supporting them, and not reacting. So, it's about establishing and maintaining limits.

So, basically, our goal is to help children become contributing members of the community, whether that community is at home or in the classroom. So, we need to think proactively rather than reactively.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: That's so important.

And it's also important to get that social-emotional piece before you can get into the instructional piece when you're talking about these things, right? So, tell us a little bit about that.

Dr. Michelle Simecek Speaker: Well, children are just like us. We're social beings, and our primary goal in life is that we all want to feel that sense of belonging.

So, we're looking for something or somewhere to belong to. Our behavior is goal-oriented around that. So, it's trying to help us find that sense of belonging.

So, that may be a classroom, in your family, in a group, at scouts, in a club, or a sport. We all need to feel like we belong somewhere. And children need to feel that they belong somewhere, especially around their peers, and they have that sense of significance, and that they feel valued in the group.

So, they feel like they have to have friends, and they have to have their peers that value them. So, basically, a misbehaving child is a discouraged child. Kids are always moving towards finding that sense of significance.

And if they cannot find it, they're going to act out inappropriately. They end up doing the wrong things, and they do that to get noticed. So, if we don't start by making sure our children feel that sense of belonging, like that where they are matters, then it's not going to be surprising if we see them misbehaving.

So, if you think of those silly kids in your classroom, or the kids throwing a tantrum or acting out, they're trying to fit in. They're just trying to get a reaction. So, we need to really get to their social emotional side before we can ever expect to give them instruction.

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: I love how you're talking about building a classroom community together, because that's so very important. We talk a lot about that on the podcast, just establishing that culture and community in our environments. Michelle, can you talk about some of the most important things a teacher can do to start incorporating positive discipline in their classroom?

Dr. Michelle Simecek Speaker: Some of the biggest things that teachers can do, number one, when setting up the community, is taking the time at the beginning of the year to really get that sense of family, sense of community going in the classroom.

So, before you're even worried about instruction, what can you do to get the children to get to know each other, to make sure it's a comfortable place for everybody, and that everybody has a significant role? So, a big thing to do is establish classroom jobs. Teachers should have enough jobs for everyone, and it really doesn't matter if you're teaching early childhood, or high school. Have the children help and decide on the jobs you can have in your classroom.

This gives them a sense of purpose, a way for them to help out in the classroom, and you can have them help you decide on the jobs that would be available. All kids need to feel that sense of purpose. So, giving them those jobs, that gives them that sense of value.

And I would definitely recommend at home, parents also find some way for their children to be contributing. Maybe it's as simple as putting away toys at the end of the night, but having jobs really does give the children a sense of belonging, and it's also going to lead to that sense of self-esteem later, because they realize they can accomplish something. Another thing that we can do in our classrooms is classroom meetings, and either doing those in the beginning of the day or the end of the day.

It's a great place for teachers to break down any issues that may have happened throughout the day. You can have your students even sign up if they've experienced a problem with a peer. They can sign up for the class meeting, and it can be something that is addressed as a classroom community.

And it's a great place for teachers to model how to deal with conflict with one another, and how to come up with solutions with the students. So, classroom jobs, classroom meetings, and then for teachers to remember that modeling is extremely important in positive discipline. We are modeling all the things we hope to see from our children.

Compassion, empathy, conflict resolution, communication skills. We want to model all of these things to remember that sometimes they're not getting that modeled at home. And so, modeling that in front of them when they're in the classroom, and then also doing those role-playing experiences during the classroom meeting when you're trying to dissolve conflict is a great place for teachers to model how to handle things.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: So for a new teacher or a teacher who is wanting to start doing this, because we know discipline and behavior management is so difficult sometimes, what are the specific criteria that you would give a teacher or if you are mentoring someone that they need to do to start this today?

I know you said classroom jobs, which is great, the morning meeting, is there anything else?

Dr. Michelle Simecek Speaker: We need to remember that the relationships with teachers and peers are important. So, students need to feel a sense of connection. So really having time where the classroom gets together and do any type of those boundary breaking or get to know you activities in the beginning of the year.

Depending on the age of your kids, different ways that they can get to know each other with constant reminders that whatever the classroom is, that's your family, that is your community, that we take care of each other. We want to make sure that our classroom is respectful. It should be kind, and it should be firm.

So, there should be some rules in place, but I encourage teachers to set those rules or expectations with their students. So maybe one of those very first meetings that you do in the beginning of the year with your students, is to set out some expectations that they expect of one another and that you expect of them. But when they have a part of coming up with those classroom norms and expectations, they really feel tied to them.

So, when I was a classroom teacher, we used to do this and we would make posters of what we expected, getting in line, not talking when others are talking, whatever your classroom decides they value, and we would put them on the wall. But they had a part in designing those and then they really feel tied to them, and it means something to them. We want to make sure that our goals are not short term.

They should be effective long term. So, we want to create habits and behaviors that are positive going forward, not just for today, but for the entire year. And we want to make sure that we're teaching life skills that are important for the greater good.

So, we talked before about modeling that good communication, those conflict resolution skills, how we handle a problem with a friend at recess. If I can bring it to my classroom meeting to my teacher and my other classmates, and talk about ways to solve that, everybody in the room learns. Not just the two kids that had the conflict, but we all learn and the teacher can then use that time to model correct ways to handle conflict.

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: Michelle, I love that because we're creating a sense of ownership, we're creating a sense of independence, but we're also creating that sense of we're in this together and we're learning together and we're building together.

And I just think that's such a great way for our world to learn. Our listeners are always left with some takeaways. So, are you able to provide our listeners with three takeaways?

Dr. Michelle Simecek Speaker: Absolutely.

Number one, I think it's important for us all to remember that all of us, our primary goal, as I said before, is that sense of belonging. So anytime we're thinking about children, remember that the biggest thing they want from us is to feel like they belong. So, what can we do to create an environment in which they feel like they belong, and they are valued? Number two, remember that children who are misbehaving are generally discouraged.

In that moment, they're feeling like they don't belong. So, they're ending up doing things to try to get noticed. And number three, if we can remember that all mistakes are wonderful opportunities to learn, we can break down mistakes in those classroom meetings that we talked about, because now we're a classroom community and family and we can model conflict resolution for children.

And then they learn strategies that they can use next time around in their future. So, mistakes are always wonderful opportunities for us to learn.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: That is great.

And I think these are three so important ones, even for veteran teachers, new teachers, and parents. What is one challenge that you can leave our listeners with, Michelle?

Dr. Michelle Simecek Speaker: Well, I like to think about listing out all of the qualities that you would love to see in your children if they come back to visit you in 20 years. So, if you think for a minute and brainstorm, I've got a classroom full of three-year-olds right now.

If they came to visit me in 20 years, what would I hope to see in them? And some of the adjectives I get are compassionate, communicative, kind, successful, goal oriented. Think about what you would hope to see in your students. And now think about how can you make sure that you are now creating an environment where those characteristics are modeled and practiced daily for the students?

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: I love that.

I think some of my students are 26 and 27 now. I would love to know what they say. So, Michelle, thank you so much for being here today.

This was amazing, very eye-opening. And I think that it's information that we can take and use right now. So, thank you.

Dr. Michelle Simecek Speaker: Thanks for having me.

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: Thanks, Michelle.

Dr. Michelle Simecek Speaker: Thanks, have a great night.