Conscious Discipline

“Discipline is not something you do to children. It is something you develop within them.”

– Dr. Becky Bailey, Ph.D.

Part of our role as parents is to be there for our children when they are learning to cope with life’s challenges. No matter how trivial their problems may seem to us (“There aren’t any blue ones left. Would you please just take the red one, so we can move on??”), they are very real to them. As children learn to deal with curve balls thrown at them in life, we are going to see some less than pleasant behaviors. Whining, screaming, hitting, full-on temper tantrums, door slamming, and yelling at adults are just a few. Obviously, these aren’t behaviors we want them practicing and perfecting into adulthood.

So, what’s a parent to do?

That’s where Conscious Discipline comes in. Conscious Discipline is a system based on current brain research that teaches adults how to respond and not react, so children can learn to better monitor their feelings, emotions, ways of thinking, and actions. It’s about developing our children’s *emotional* intelligence.

Conscious Discipline research reveals that there are three brain states and each one can be observed by an individual’s behavior. They are the *Executive State* (which occurs in the frontal lobes at the top of the brain), the *Emotional State* (which occurs in the limbic system or middle of the brain), and the *Survival State* (which occurs low in the brain stem). Check out the cheat sheet below to help you navigate through these states!

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| When your child is in this state… | His/her behavior may look like this… | When he/she behaves this way, he/she needs and is *really* asking… | After you take some deep breaths and discipline yourself first, helpful ways to respond to a child this state include… |
| **Survival State** | **Fight** (*hitting, pushing, running, screaming*) **or flight behaviors** (*withdrawn, dissociates, spacey behavior*) | **I need safety.**  **Am I safe?** | **\*Say to the child quietly, “Breathe. You’re safe. You can handle this.”**  **\*Be the calmest you at that time.**  **\*Provide predictable routines.**  **\*Use visuals.**  **\*Don’t talk much. Just be there and be that safe person.** |
| **Emotional State** | **“All about me” verbal behaviors** (making demands, blaming, refusing, name calling, back talk, sass) | **I need connection.**  **Am I loved/connected?** | **\*Establish eye contact.**  **\*Physical connection (e.g., hug, rub back, but *only* if child indicates this is comforting).**  **\*Be 100% present.**  **\*Provide playful situations (jokes, humor).**  **\*Notice and name the feeling (“I noticed…” and “You seem…”)**  **\*Give encouragement (“You’ve got this! I believe in you!”)**  **\*Provide special, important jobs.**  **\*“Breathe. You’re safe. You can handle this.”** |
| **Executive State** | **“Executive functioning skills”** (attention, time management, organization, working memory, impulse control, empathy, flexibility) | **I need problem-solving.**  **What can I learn from this?** | **\*Provide consistent and fair consequences.**  **\*Show positive intent (no blaming or assuming ill will on the child’s part, give the benefit of the doubt).**  **\*Say, “You wanted…” or “You were hoping…”**  **\*Offer possible solutions.**  **\*Breathe. You’re safe. You can handle this.”** |

As a parent, I know that when my children have had a problem responding to a challenge, I have often responded by providing solutions and trying to “fix it.” But, what Conscious Discipline tells us is that unless we meet children’s needs by appropriately responding to the state they’re in, they will not be able to access higher levels of brain functioning where true learning and problem-solving takes place.

For more information and free parent resources on conscious discipline, feel free to visit [www.consciousdiscipline.com](http://www.consciousdiscipline.com)

Happy parenting!

Kristy Laine

School Psychologist