

### Jane Nelson: Labeling Children vs. Parenting

Read: Being a great parent requires love, skill, and the ability to shrug off most medical ideas about your child. To take one example, there is no scientific (no medical/biological) base for a physician, teacher, or counselor telling you your child has “Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder” or ADHD (ICD-10). There is no blood test, EEG, or MRI “imaging study” that diagnoses what is called ADHD. Rather, it is a loose checklist of behaviors that physicians have come to call ADHD. The same is true for “depression,” “anxiety,” etc.

Consequently, the idea that a drug from a physician is treating a brain disorder is simply untrue. Mind drugs like methylphenidate (Ritalin) or dextro-amphetamine (Adderall) will stimulate the central nervous system of anyone who takes them. They certainly do not treat a brain disease or nervous system imbalance. Further, there is no research proving that these drugs help children do better in school over a period of years (McDonagh). *Stop with “there’s something wrong with my child.” Instead, ask “what just happened?” and “how can we improve this?”*

The clear alternative to drugs for children is to create home and school environments that support success. Methods to achieve this are surprisingly simple, although they require consistent practice. Jane Nelson’s Positive Discipline is filled with parenting skills, lists of what to avoid, and concrete examples. Below are some of Dr. Nelson’s best practices that apply to both children and teens and can help at both home and school.

1. Understand the goals of your child’s behavior. Children who are discouraged, feel insignificant, or as if they don’t belong will misbehave in predictable ways. These are: try to get undue attention, struggle for power, try to take revenge, and display inadequacy.
2. How to respond?
  - a. Best response to attention getting: Ignore the behavior. Stop lecturing, scolding and threatening.
  - b. Best response to a power-struggling child: Lovingly withdraw. “Son that’s not what we decided on. We’ll leave it at that for now.”
  - c. Best response to a child’s “I hate you”: “That’s interesting, because I love you.”
  - d. Best response to a child displaying inadequacy: Work closely with the child and support *any* initiative they take. “Here, I’ll draw half the circle. Now, you can draw the rest.”
3. Strive to be kind and firm. Smile as you remind the child what was decided on earlier.

4. Set up “positive time-outs.” Nelson emphasizes that punishing a child’s mistake does not improve the situation. Often, the mistake itself has taught the child. When emotions run high, she recommends parents direct the child to a quiet place that can include tools for play or writing where the child can calm down before exploring next steps.
5. Nelson urges parents to take “time-outs” as well. Confronting a child while upset often deepens the confrontation.
6. Family meetings are a must. Once a week the family gathers, a leader and secretary are appointed, and time is spent with shared compliments and an agenda (posted on the fridge) where the operations of the family (meals, laundry, morning/bedtimes) are discussed and plans made. Children should be talking/deciding as much as adults.
7. Always try for a “solution orientation.” “How can we fix this?” questions are much preferred to assigning blame and asking why something went wrong or who failed.
8. Strive to “empathize without condoning” (p. 29).
9. Both parents and children/teens can recover from mistakes with “the three R’s.”
  - a. Recognize- “Wow! I made a mistake.”
  - b. Reconcile- “I apologize.”
  - c. Resolve- “Let’s work on a solution together” (p. 41).
10. All principles outlined above apply perfectly well to single/divorced parenting situations. Children know perfectly well that rules may vary from one house to the next.

A few words about power struggling: Try to avoid bossing children. When conflict arises, the first thought should be a “positive time-out.” Next, sincerely acknowledge that you cannot force the child. Ask for help. “Don’t fight and don’t give in.” Be kind and firm. “Act, don’t talk. Decide what you (the parent) will do. Let routines be the boss. Develop mutual respect. Give limited choices. Encourage” (p. 71). Refer to the family meeting.

Children who feel inadequate give up and want to be left alone. Sometimes they elicit overdoing by parents. Instead, “show faith, Take small steps. Stop criticism. Encourage any positive attempt, no matter how small. Focus on assets. Don’t pity. Don’t give up. Set opportunities for success. Teach skills/show how. Enjoy the child. Build on his/interests” (ibid.). Then encourage some more! Never give up.

- Nelson, Jane. (2006). Positive Discipline. (Revised). New York: Ballantine.
- McDonagh-[https://www.ohsu.edu/xd/research/centers-institutes/evidence-based-practice-center/drug-effectiveness-review-project/upload/ADHD\\_final\\_evidence-tables\\_update-1\\_MAY\\_06.pdf](https://www.ohsu.edu/xd/research/centers-institutes/evidence-based-practice-center/drug-effectiveness-review-project/upload/ADHD_final_evidence-tables_update-1_MAY_06.pdf)

