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Using Discipline to Build Relationship: A Review of "No Drama Discipline"

Abstract

"What does discipline look like in your house? Do you have an over-arching philosophy, or are you just winging it?"

Posting about the book *No Drama Discipline* from *In All Things* - an online journal for critical reflection on faith, culture, art, and every ordinary-yet-graced square inch of God's creation.

<https://inallthings.org/using-discipline-to-build-relationship-a-review-of-no-drama-discipline/>

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Disciplines

Child Psychology

Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service](#) at Dordt College.



MAY 25, 2018

Using Discipline to Build Relationship: A review of “No Drama Discipline”

Kayt Frisch

Title: **No-Drama Discipline: The Whole-Brain Way to Calm the Chaos and Nurture Your Child’s Developing Mind**

Authors: Daniel J. Siegel and Tina Payne Bryson

Publisher: Bantam

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What do you think of when you hear the word “discipline”? What about when you hear the word “punishment”?

Do you associate punishment with discipline? Many people do. In our contemporary culture, discipline and punishment sometimes seem to be synonymous. When attempting to correct a child’s behavior, we often discipline by using corporeal punishment (e.g. spanking) or removal of privilege (e.g. time-outs or grounding) to give a consequence, and then we hope that this action will elicit (or coerce) compliant behavior by the child.

The word discipline shares a root with the word disciple. In our current cultural context, disciple evokes a positive image of a mentoring relationship, while discipline is riddled with negative connotations and associations with punishment. Realigning our understanding of these two words, and introducing practical strategies to transform discipline from punishment to discipleship, is at

the heart of the book *No Drama Discipline* by Dr. Daniel Siegel (MD) and Dr. Tina Payne Bryson (PhD).

Siegel and Bryson believe that discipline should have two primary goals—1) get kids to cooperate in the present circumstance and 2) help kids become thoughtful and conscientious individuals by encouraging development of self-control and a moral compass. Before reading this book, I would have told you that my only goal when disciplining my children was the first one: cooperation— after all, for everyone’s well-being, the toddler must stop pushing the baby immediately. However, their second goal of developing self-control was not something I had consciously thought about—it was more of a hoped-for-but-not-explicitly-expressed outcome of discipline in my mind.

After introducing their outcome-oriented picture of discipline (all in the book’s introduction), the authors spend the first two chapters sharing, in an accessible way, what current neuroscience tells us about how discipline affects the brain’s development. They paint a compelling picture for why a discipline approach should focus on calming the reactive “downstairs” portion of the brain (the source of our “fight or flight” response) and aim to connect with and develop the capabilities of the thinking “upstairs” portion of the brain (the emotional regulation center).

Most of the book focuses on how to implement this “no drama discipline” approach. The authors describe a simple, two-step guideline: “Connect and Redirect.” They believe that in order to discipline effectively (that is to achieve both of the primary goals of discipline), you must first connect with your child so that they are in a receptive state of mind (connection). After the child is calm and ready to listen, you can then help the child understand what they did wrong and address their misbehavior (redirection). This style of parenting is contrary to many traditional discipline strategies, which (intentionally or unintentionally) incite the reactive “downstairs” brain by spanking or removing privileges.

Consistently applying “connection” and “redirection” requires mindful, aware, and flexible parenting. Bryson and Siegel will be the first to acknowledge that this is difficult. In fact, they have an entire section at the end of the book called “When a Parenting Expert Loses It,” in which they share some of their own mistakes. They emphasize that there is no silver-bullet—no single approach that will work every time, for every child. However, their flexible framework of techniques can be adapted to most discipline situations, and most of the book is devoted to providing concrete ways with real-life examples that will help you “connect” and “redirect” during a discipline moment.

No Drama Discipline concludes with a message of hope. There is no such thing as a perfect parent, but it is never too late to improve. We will make mistakes, but a

“no drama” approach means that we (and our kids) can learn from everyone’s failures (both theirs and ours). Strong relationships are at the heart of disciplining effectively.

By way of conclusion, here is a small snippet of my own experience with applying the no-drama principles in real life: my husband and I have been trying to use a “no drama” approach with our kids (ages 11 months and 34 months) for the last year. We do not claim to be perfect disciplinarians; in fact, we make (many!) mistakes. Last week, however, we had a glimmer of hope. The kids were in the next room when the baby started crying. My husband went into the room, calmly picked up the baby, brought her to the kitchen, and said nothing our son in the heat of the moment. A few minutes later, our son came in and said, “Mommy, Noms [his stuffed puppy] pushed her over.” I took him and his stuffed puppy into his bedroom where we sat on the bed and went through the steps of connecting (“with Noms”) and then gently redirected —talking about what they should have done and then apologizing to his sister. Has he since pushed his sister over again? Yes (more than once). But, it is a glimmer of hope that we are creating a non-threatening discipline environment that will make our discipline-life easier in the long run.

What does discipline look like in your house? Do you have an over-arching philosophy, or are you just winging it? How could applying the principles of “connect” and “redirect” give you the tools to make discipline a relationship-building activity in your home?