

6. *In retrospect, reevaluate the problem and the solution.* This step is very important in learning and involves three questions:

- What caused the problem in the first place?
- How can a similar problem be avoided in the future?
- Was the problem solution satisfactory?

As she ponders these questions, Melissa's self-esteem remains intact and her ability to solve problems has grown stronger.

## Part 3. Jane Nelsen and Lynn Lott ENCOURAGEMENT AND SUPPORT

### Nelsen and Lott's Fundamental Hypothesis

Discipline occurs best when teachers provide classrooms that are accepting, encouraging, respectful, and supportive. Such classrooms enable students to behave with dignity, self-control, and concern for others.

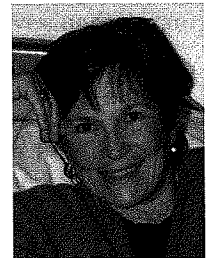
### Nelsen and Lott's Positive Discipline

Jane Nelsen and Lynn Lott contend that almost all students can learn to behave with dignity, self-control, and concern for others. The key to fostering this development is providing structure that allows students to see themselves as capable, significant, and able to control their own lives.



#### About Jane Nelsen and Lynn Lott

Jane Nelsen and Lynn Lott are educators who share their views on discipline through lectures, workshops, printed material, and video material. Their goal is to help adults and children learn to respect themselves and others, behave responsibly, and contribute to the betterment of the groups of which they are members. Their book *Positive Discipline in the Classroom* (1993, 2000, 2006) explains how to establish classroom climates that foster responsibility, mutual respect, and cooperation. They believe such climates do away with most discipline problems because they teach students the value of respect and helpfulness. Nelsen and Lott have authored a number of books and teaching materials that can be viewed on the Positive Discipline website, [www.positivediscipline.com](http://www.positivediscipline.com), and the Empowering People website, [www.empoweringpeople.com](http://www.empoweringpeople.com). Their former coauthor H. Stephen Glenn died in 2002.



## Relationship Barriers and Relationship Builders

Nelsen and Lott identify five pairs of contrasting teacher behaviors they call barriers and builders. **Barriers to relationships** prevent good relationships because they are disrespectful and discouraging, whereas **builders of relationships** foster good relationships because they are respectful and encouraging. Here are some examples of barriers versus builders (the barrier is shown first, followed by the builder).

1. *Assuming versus Checking.* Too often teachers *assume*, without checking with students, that they know what students think and feel, can and cannot do, and how they should or should not respond. Teachers then deal with students on the basis of those assumptions. Rather than assuming they know what students think and feel, it is better that teachers *check* with them.

2. *Rescuing/Explaining versus Exploring.* Teachers think they are being helpful when they make lengthy explanations, rescue students from difficulties, or do a portion of students' work for them. Students progress better, however, when allowed to perceive situations for themselves and proceed on the basis of those perceptions. Elementary teachers explain and rescue, for example, when they say, "It's cold outside, so don't forget your jackets." They help explore when they say, "Take a look outside. What do you need to remember in order to take care of yourself?"

3. *Directing versus Inviting/Encouraging.* Teachers do not realize they are being disrespectful when they tell students, "Pick that up" or "Put that away" or "Straighten up your desk before the bell rings." But such commands build dependency while suppressing initiative and cooperation. In contrast, teachers should *invite* and *encourage* students to become self-directed. They might say, "The bell will ring soon. I would appreciate anything you might do to help get the room straightened up for the next class."

4. *Expecting versus Celebrating.* Teachers should hold high expectations of students and believe in their potential. Students become easily discouraged if they are judged negatively when they fall short of expectations, as when teachers say, "I really thought you could do that" or "I thought you were more responsible than that." Students respond far better when teachers look for improvements and call attention to them.

5. *Adult-isms versus Respecting.* Nelsen and Lott use the term adult-ism for teacher statements that suggest what students *ought to do*, such as: "How come you never . . . ?" or "Why can't you ever . . . ?" or "I can't believe you would do such a thing!" These adult-isms produce guilt rather than provide encouragement. Instead of handing an unacceptable paper back and saying, "You knew what I wanted on this project!" a teacher could say, "What is your understanding of the requirements for this project?" In 1993, Nelsen, Lott, and Glenn flatly stated:

We guarantee 100% improvement in student-teacher relationships when teachers simply learn to recognize barrier behaviors and stop demonstrating them. Where else can you get such a generous return for ceasing a behavior? And when the builders are added, the payoff is even greater. (p. 18)

## The Role of Classroom Meetings

Nelsen and Lott believe **classroom meetings** are uniquely suited to implementing the tactics they suggest for building positive discipline. Those meetings promote social skills such as listening, taking turns, hearing different points of view, negotiating, communicating, helping one another, and taking responsibility for one's behavior. Academic skills are strengthened in the process, as well, because students must practice language skills, attentiveness, critical thinking, decision making, and problem solving.

In addition, class meetings help students see that teachers and other adults need support as much as students do. When teachers involve themselves as partners with students in class meetings, a climate of mutual respect begins to grow. Teachers and students listen to one another, take each other seriously, and work together to solve problems for the benefit of all. Antagonisms often seen in many classrooms tend to fade away.

## Building Blocks for Classroom Meetings

Nelsen and Lott suggest **eight building blocks** for effective class meetings, each focusing on a particular skill. It takes about two hours to introduce the eight building blocks. After that, about four additional class meetings are required to give adequate attention to what they entail.

Before putting classroom meetings in place, introduce the concept and get students to buy into the activity. Explain that you would like to begin holding class meetings in which students can express concerns and use their power and skills to help make decisions. Elementary students seldom hesitate to try class meetings, but middle school and high school students may need some persuading. A way to begin with them is to initiate a discussion about power, how problems are usually handled in school, and how power involves teachers' telling students what to do.

Next, ask students, "Who has an example they would like to share about what happens when someone tries to control you? What do you feel? What do you do? What do you learn?" Students usually say that they feel angry or scared and manipulated, and feel like withdrawing or rebelling. Ask them also, "Do you, yourself, ever try to control or manipulate others, including teachers? If so, how do you do so?"

Continue by asking students if they would like to be more involved in making decisions that affect their lives at school. Would they be willing to do the work to come up with solutions they like? Point out that some students actually *prefer* having adults boss them around, so they can rebel or so they don't have to take responsibility themselves. Make it clear that you don't intend to waste time teaching and learning a respectful method if they prefer continuing with the usual way, in which the teacher is in control and students' only options are to comply, rebel, and/or spend time in detention. Once students indicate support, decide together when the classroom meetings will be held. Preferences vary from weekly half-hour meetings to three shorter meetings per week. A meeting every day is advisable for the first week, as students learn the process.

**Building Block 1. Form a Circle**

A circular seating arrangement works best because it allows face-to-face contact. Ask students for suggestions about how to form the circle. Write their ideas on the board and make a decision based on their suggestions.

**Building Block 2. Practice Giving Compliments and Showing Appreciation**

Begin class meetings on a positive note, which can be done by saying complimentary things to each other. Many students have difficulty giving and receiving compliments. Practice helps. Ask them to recall when someone said something that made them feel good about themselves. Let them share their examples with the group. Then ask them to think about something they would like to thank others for, such as thanking a classmate for lending a pencil or eating lunch together. See if they can put their feelings into words.

Receiving compliments is often as difficult as giving them. The best response to a compliment is often a simple thank-you. Giving and receiving compliments seems especially embarrassing to some middle school students. When that is the case, use the term *show appreciation* instead of *compliment*.

**Building Block 3. Create an Agenda**

All class meetings should begin with a specific agenda. When students and teachers experience concerns, they can jot them down in a special notebook. This can be done at a designated time and place, such as when students leave the room. The class meetings will address only the concerns that appear in the notebook.

**Building Block 4. Develop Communication Skills**

A number of activities help develop communication skills, such as taking turns speaking (begin by going around the circle and letting each person speak), listening attentively to what others say, learning to use *I-statements* (saying "I think," "I feel," and so forth), seeking solutions to problems rather than placing blame on others, showing respect for others by never humiliating or speaking judgmentally about them, learning to seek and find mutually acceptable solutions to problems, and framing conclusions in the form of "we decided," showing it was a group effort and conclusion.

**Building Block 5. Learn about Separate Realities**

In this building block, help students understand that not everyone is the same or thinks the same way. Nelsen and Lott describe an activity that poses problem situations faced by turtles, lions, eagles, and chameleons. For example, the animals might need to cover a distance quickly, contend with weather, or hide from enemies. Students discuss how each of the animals might feel or deal with the problem. This can lead to helping students see that different people feel and behave differently in various situations.

### **Building Block 6. Recognize the Reasons People Do What They Do**

Ask students if they have ever wondered why different students behave as they do. Acknowledge their thoughts and then ask if they have ever heard of the primary goal of belonging and the four mistaken goals of misbehavior. Proceed by using examples to illustrate the goal of belonging and the mistaken goals of undue attention, power, revenge, and giving up. (Note: Nelsen and Lott use Rudolf Dreikurs's explanation of why students behave as they do. As you will see later, there are alternative explanations concerning student motivation and causes of misbehavior.)

### **Building Block 7. Practice Role-Playing and Brainstorming**

By the third class meeting, students are usually ready to begin considering problems and solutions. Here are some suggestions for exploring problems tactfully: (1) Discuss the key elements of the problem situation. (2) Have students act out roles involved in the problem. (3) Brainstorm a number of possible solutions to the difficulty or problem and allow students to select a solution they believe will be best.

### **Building Block 8. Focus on Nonpunitive Solutions**

Ask students the following and write their answers on the board: "What do you feel like when someone bosses you? What do you want to do when someone calls you names or puts you down? When others do these things to you, does it help you behave better?" Then ask them how their behavior is affected when someone is kind to them, helps them, or provides stimulation and encouragement. With their answers written on the board, ask students to compare them. Use the comparison to draw attention to the value of encouragement versus punishment.

Tell the students that you intend never to punish or belittle them in any way, and that when they do something wrong you will try to help them behave more appropriately. Explain that the help you provide will always be *related* to what they have done wrong, *respectful* of them as persons, and *reasonable*. These are what Nelsen and Lott call the **Three R's of solutions**.

## **Standard Format for Class Meetings**

Consistent with the building blocks, Nelsen and Lott suggest the following format for class meetings. The teacher normally initiates the meeting and makes sure everyone abides by the rules and has an equal right to speak:

1. *Express compliments and appreciation.* Each session begins in this way as a means of setting a positive tone.
2. *Follow up on earlier solutions applied to problems.* Any suggested solution is to be tried only for a week, so it is important to determine if the solution has been working. If it hasn't, the class may wish to put the issue back on the agenda for future problem solving.

3. *Go through agenda items.* When an agenda item is read, ask the person (student or teacher) who raised the issue if he or she still wants help with it. If so, ask that person what a satisfactory solution could be. If he or she can't think of any, go around the circle giving every student an opportunity to offer a suggestion. Ask the person with the issue to select the most helpful solution from the suggestions offered.
4. *Make future plans for class activities.* End the class meeting by discussing an enjoyable activity for the entire class at a future date. For example, the class might decide to set aside some time on Friday to discuss an upcoming event, view a videotape, or complete homework assignments with a friend.

### When Classroom Meetings Fail to Function as Intended

When new procedures are implemented, it often takes awhile for them to function smoothly. If students do not respond to class meetings with the expected enthusiasm, don't be discouraged. Trust in the procedure; it will eventually come together. The goal is for long-term quality, not short-term convenience. When putting class meetings into practice, be willing to give up *control over* students in favor of gaining *cooperation with* students. Instead of pontificating, ask for thoughts and opinions; doing so will improve cooperation, collaboration, and problem resolution.

Aside from that, if classroom meetings are not working as intended, it is probably due to one or more of the following:

- Not forming a circle
- Not having the meetings regularly (three to five times per week for elementary; less often for secondary)
- Censoring what students say
- Not helping students learn nonpunitive problem-solving skills
- Talking down to students instead of showing faith in their abilities
- Not going around the circle giving every student a chance to speak or pass



## KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS EMPHASIZED IN THIS CHAPTER

Linda Albert  
 belonging  
 genuine goal  
 mistaken goal  
 attention  
 power  
 revenge  
 Three C's

Five A's of connecting  
 Three C Committee  
 circle of friends  
 class code of conduct  
 consequences  
 encouragement  
 attention-getting  
 mechanisms (AGMs)

graceful exits  
 Four R's of consequences  
 Six-D conflict resolution plan

Barbara Coloroso  
 inner discipline  
 punishment  
 Three R's of reconciliatory justice