

Promoting Discipline & Learning

by Dr. Marvin Marshall

Eliciting vs. Punishments

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Eliciting a consequence is not imposing a punishment.

Discipline without Stress has a mailing where people post questions and others respond. The site is at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Disciplinewithoutstress/>

The following were recently posted:

1. I am not sure how eliciting consequences has a place in an approach that is moving away from reward and punishment. Getting kids to choose their punishments=consequences still promotes a thinking of "This is what happens when I do...." Because a behavior looks like it is internally motivated, the kid is choosing a consequence but is being controlled, being compelled by the system to choose. I don't see any healthy normal person choosing to punish himself. So I see the approach bringing the punishments through the back door because kids are encouraged to participate in choosing consequences.

2. My second point: A lot of inappropriate behavior may be due to poor coping skills or unmet needs. Where is the focus on the child's concerns, not only his wants or solutions?

Joy Widmann, Crosscreek Charter School, posted the following as a response:

1. Your points are things that I struggled with when I began implementing [*Discipline without Stress*](#) (DWS) six years ago.

Let me see if I can help you.

Without eliciting, DWS just isn't as effective. The students learn they have choices; it makes them more reflective, that they can handle or figure out problems, and that I respect their ideas (even though I don't always agree with them). Respecting your students is the fastest way to get them to respect you.

DWS isn't against consequences. A consequence is different from a punishment. A punishment is something that is imposed by a second or third party. It usually has no connection to the behavior, and frequently belittles or shames the offender. It is coercive in nature and is designed to make the person feel bad or lose value in themselves. The idea behind punishment is to make the person "pay" for their mistakes, regret what they did, and change. Punishment usually does not help the person figure out how to change; it may make them want to but doesn't give them any tools for making the change. Punishment has very little instructive value, and I want my students to get as much instruction in as many arenas as possible.

When we elicit a consequence, we are asking the student to take a critical stance and look at their behavior from another point of view. It also allows them to weigh their options. This gets to conformity. Conformity to social norms is what keeps our society going. Let's face it; the thought of getting a speeding ticket keeps my eye on the speedometer in a local town known for its many speed traps.

The student may select consequences that are harsher than you would select. This puts you in the position to build a relationship with the student. Just this week I told a student whose choices for herself included going to the principal, "Now, do you think this is a situation the principal needs to become involved in? Can you think of different ways you could solve this on your own?" We discussed the different things she had tried, along with other options, and decided that going to the principal was a good idea after all. She now knows I will listen to her and help her learn how to control herself, rather than being a person to fear or hate.

I find that positive relationships with children in behavior situations help them be more open in academic situations. I'm not saying I'm their friend; that would be inappropriate. I am, however, a person

they can trust, even if they make a mistake, whether it is academic or social.

2. As far as the poor coping skills, eliciting helps when nothing else will. For example, I had an explosive student. Every teacher he had from preschool on couldn't get through a day without this boy's melting down in an angry, violent tantrum. I had a private talk with him about the situation. He told me he didn't feel he had control over himself and felt embarrassed about the outbursts later, which made him nervous, and sparked new outbursts. I asked him what could I do to help him so he could learn to calm down when he felt this way. We worked out a plan for what to do when he felt this coming on that could help him from escalating, what he could do if it was too late, and what he could do afterward. We only had 2 incidents the entire year after that. One was soon afterward this was new to him; the other occurred the day before his mom remarried and he transferred to another state. It was his best year ever, and I have the letters from mom to prove it. It is one of the things I'm most proud of, and it was the first year I implemented DWS.

I've used this with very impulsive students with ADHD, with students who have varying degrees of autism, and students who are going through trauma (parents in the line of fire in Afghanistan and Iraq, parents who are facing life threatening illness, and parents who are in the middle of a messy divorce).

Our school has seen a tremendous difference since changing to eliciting. Our referrals are way down (almost nonexistent). My principal is amazed. I can't say enough about eliciting, except it is worth the time and effort to change your frame of mind and begin practicing it!

More on the approach can be viewed at www.MarvinMarshall.com.