

Conscious Discipline is based on unity. It is about valuing all children equally and valuing their individual strengths as important contributors to the School Family. It is about creating a healthy "we" from which each diversely gifted "I" can flourish and offer his gifts back to the community. The School Family is created on the foundational concept that all living things are interdependent. Every skill, power, structure and ritual supports the notion that we are all in this together. These two stories illustrate this point:

I was visiting a self-contained classroom of children with exceptional needs in Miami, Florida. As with all School Families, each child had a meaningful job that contributes to the success of the classroom. One little girl with muscular dystrophy could barely support her body and had great difficulty speaking. At circle time, the children were doing stop and go movement activities. This little girl, harnessed tightly in her supportive chair, had a red stop sign in her lap. When the music stopped, she hoisted the sign high into the air, as if deadlifting 500 pounds, took a deep breath and eeked out the word "Stop." All the children came to a stop. Later, it took her about fifteen minutes to share with me how holding up the stop sign helped her School Family learn to control themselves so they could be helpful instead of hurtful to others. She understood how valuable she was to her School Family.

Being of service to others stimulates our executive state, fostering the development of our ability to set goals and keep them, get along with others, and solve problems. Just before entering this little girl's classroom, I was getting down on myself and feeling discouraged, thinking maybe Conscious Discipline was too hard for people to grasp and that my teaching of it was lacking. I watched this little girl lift that sign to help others and I was reminded we are all here for a reason. We all make a difference, including me.

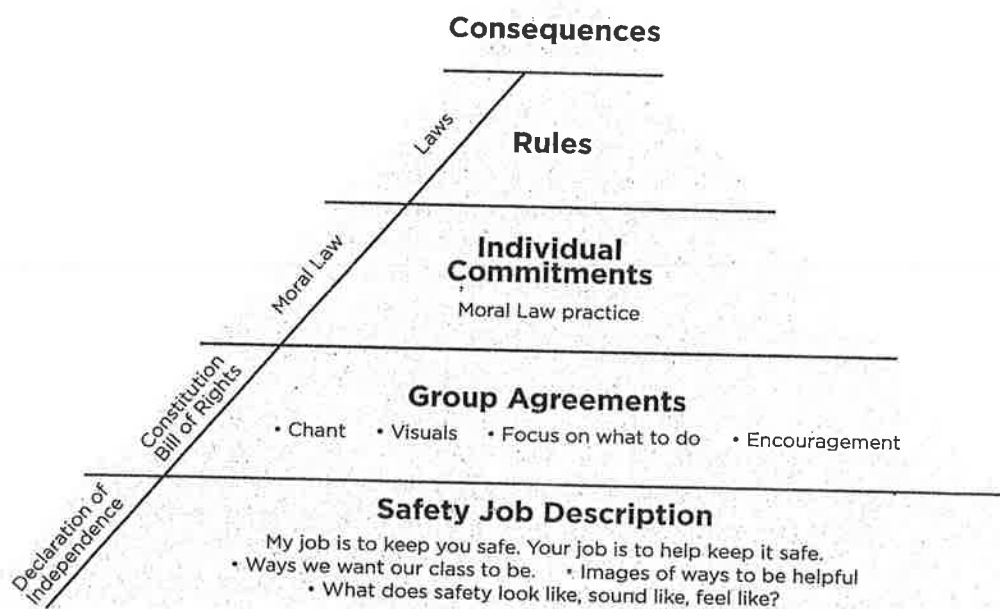
Romone took home many notes about his behavior at school. His mother had gotten used to being called into the school due to his behavior and would punish him at home in hopes it would help. In second grade, Romone had a teacher who used Conscious Discipline, and he joined the Shining Star School Family. His first note home that year read, "Romone was angry with his friend Darnell today and instead of pushing him, he took a deep breath (we call this being a S.T.A.R.), managed his anger, and asked Darnell to move. We celebrated him at school and were hoping you could join us in sharing Romone's success. Tomorrow he will be teaching others how to be a S.T.A.R. We hope you get a chance to drop in on our class sometime."

We can only live our highest values such as helpfulness, integrity, honesty and respect when our brain is in an integrated, executive state. In the School Family, members are offered the opportunity to live our highest values through:

- Being of service to one another
- Focusing their attention on daily acts of kindness
- Learning to resolve interpersonal conflicts effectively
- Experiencing being indispensable through daily jobs
- Authentically connecting face-to-face with friends
- Offering empathy on a daily basis
- Integrating music, movement and brain breaks into the daily schedule to foster optimal learning states

7. Models Shared Power and Democracy

We can create school cultures where children are motivated by being goal-oriented or stimulus-driven. A goal-oriented School Family moves control from external forces (reward and punishment) to internal resources relying on self-regulation and problem solving. Democracy means to self-govern. Without self-regulation, democracy cannot fulfill its potential. Autocracy is a government of a single person with unlimited power over others. It relies on outside forces to govern individual choices. The rights of an individual are delegated by those in power and earned for some but not others. Examples of autocratic countries include North Korea and China. Attending autocratic school systems to prepare youngsters to live in a democratic country encourages a population that has freedoms without the skills necessary to manage those freedoms responsibly. The School Family relies on self-governance and self-regulation, insuring the best opportunity for creating a safe culture where freedoms are infused with responsibility. The following pyramid shows how the School Family is governed.



The foundational governing job description in the School Family is one of safety. You will hear the phrase “My job is to keep it safe; your job is to help keep it safe” repeatedly in this book. For years, safety has focused on the physical environment; now we turn our attention to social and emotional safety. This requires dialogue with children and with adults. What does safety look like, feel like and sound like? Growing up in my house, safety meant yelling without hitting. Growing up down the street meant problem-solving instead of yelling. Many children (and adults) grow up without any conscious notion of what safety looks like, sounds like or feels like. A felt sense and collective understanding of safety is your starting point.

The next step is to condense your understanding of safety into a set of School Family agreements. These agreements are guiding principles each member (including the teacher) commits to upholding with the rest of the School Family. These group agreements unify and encourage responsibility. Next on the pyramid is an individual daily commitment. Discovering what it feels like to make a commitment and be successful in keeping it is an essential prerequisite to following rules. It also allows us to practice living our own morals.

Agreements are promises we make to our School Family; commitments are promises we make to ourselves. Common School Family Agreements include keeping it safe, being helpful, doing your personal best, practicing active listening and breathing.

The next tier of the pyramid is occupied by rules. Rules do not teach expected behavior; rules hold us accountable to that behavior. They are made when they are needed and are designed to be enforced. In the last few years, the average number of new laws (rules) created in the United States was approximately 40,000. Two decades ago, most of these laws were not perceived as necessary. In schools, we often start near the top of the pyramid and post our rules the first day of school. This approach requires working from the top down instead of the bottom up, creating a culture of bias and confusion as we seek to apply and enforce rules that have no foundation. Instead, the School Family begins with a firm foundation of safety, progresses through group agreements and individual commitments, and then creates rules as they are necessary. The very top of the pyramid is reserved for consequences.

Co-creating classroom and school governance in this fashion shifts cultures from a power-over system to one of shared power and responsibility, re-enacting our own journey toward democracy. When power is shared within a connected community, all stakeholders have both greater autonomy and greater responsibility. Tying free will to responsibility is essential for collaborative working environments and successful democracy. Freedom without responsibility creates chaos. Freedom with responsibility creates abundance.

Rules do not teach expected behavior; rules hold us accountable to that behavior.

8. Reignites the Inherent Joy of Teaching and Learning

Optimal learning requires high challenge combined with low stress. We have successfully been increasing the challenge through high stakes testing, but we have not simultaneously lowered the stress. The School Family is scientifically and practically designed to reduce stress and create optimal learning states. One of the founding principles of Conscious Discipline is: "What you offer to others, you strengthen in yourself." **Getting** children to behave all day exhausts us with effort. **Giving** children the skills to behave feels rewarding.

Every classroom and every school has a culture that is integrally linked to the school's motivation system. A reward and punishment motivational system relies on externally applied, tangible consequences. The external consequence sets the behavioral expectation instead of teaching the responsibility inherent in shared power. Research conducted by Hoffman, Hutchinson and Reiss concludes that as a teacher's reliance on rewards and punishment increases, so does negativity in the school climate. Shifting to the safety, connection and problem-solving approach of Conscious Discipline reduces discipline referrals while simultaneously improving the school climate (Hoffman, Hutchinson & Reiss, 2009).

With Conscious Discipline, motivation comes from the connections we build with each other, the passion for the school mission and constant ongoing feedback called “noticing.” Noticing is the attunement and feedback mechanism Conscious Discipline utilizes to encourage internal motivation. Noticing is a way of describing that encourages eye contact and promotes both conscious awareness and connection. Volumes of research show that effective feedback is accurate, specific, timely, nonjudgmental and offered in the context of goals. Noticing meets all of these criteria. It is an optimal form of feedback that serves as brain food while also nourishing relationships and motivational systems. Moving from judgment (“Good job!”) to noticing (“You walked in, greeted your friends and began doing your School Family job just like this.”) is foundational to creating safe classrooms and schools. Because of its importance, noticing will be covered in its many forms and applications throughout this book.

3

D.J. Batiste is a former gang leader who was repeatedly expelled from school (starting in Head Start) and caught in the juvenile justice system. He credits a Conscious Discipline teacher who noticed him as the turning point in his life. Watch a portal video where he articulates the motivational power of noticing as the center of his personal transformation from gang leader to graduate.

Once we move from factory to family, from control to connection and from judgment to noticing, our bodies relax, our fears dissolve, our joy for teaching rushes back and our love for our students returns. One teacher who came to the Conscious Discipline Summer Institute put it this way, “I was going to leave teaching. I had lost heart. I was not making a difference. Every day was a struggle. But now, I know I make a difference. I see the children caring for each other, contributing to everyone’s success. I leave work inspired. I’m changing their lives and they’re changing mine for the better, too. I’m going to teach forever!”



Welcome parents to the School Family

Creating Your School Family

We've already talked about the reciprocal nature of the powers and skills of Conscious Discipline and the School Family. The powers help us make the necessary perceptual shifts, the skills help us to upgrade to our skill set and the School Family creates a safe, connected culture where problem solving is possible. The more tangible aspects of the School Family are seen in the routines, rituals and classroom structures we explore at the end of each chapter. The structures, routines and rituals of the School Family, coupled with the powers and skills, will guide your journey. They also provide the opportunity to use the social-emotional components of your classroom to add depth in meeting common core standards. Discover ways to integrate Conscious Discipline and the common core on your portal.

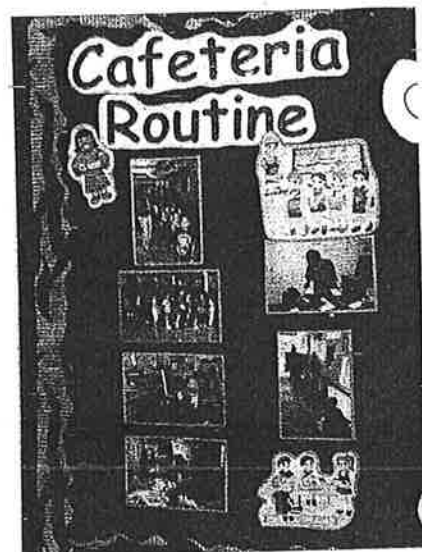
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Caring relationships create an optimal environment for learning, alter our physiological state and prime the brain for plasticity.

Routines

Routines are how we teach expected behavior in classrooms and schools. If we were physically building a school, we would start with blueprints. Routines are like blueprints; they contribute to safety by telling others what is expected where and when, providing consistency and predictability. One basic routine is the hand-washing routine: 1. Squirt soap, 2. Rub hands, 3. Rinse with water, 4. Dry with a paper towel, 5. Wipe up any splashes, 6. Throw away paper towel. We visually post routines throughout the school and classroom. The hand-washing routine would be posted at the sink. The lining-up routine would be posted at the door. We also create class books about routines for children to read and to check out library-style to read with their parents. Children who have a difficult time with certain routines require individual routine books or social stories to help them through the day.

How many pictures in your classroom or school show children what to do in various situations? The more pictures we display to clearly demonstrate our expectations, the more compliance we will experience from children. Most chapters in this book will ask you to add to your existing routines and put them all in pictures.



Rituals

Rituals are an expression of unity. Just as they hold a family together, they also hold the School Family together. They are sacred spaces designated for togetherness and connection. Holiday rituals like gathering on Thanksgiving bond the family in gratitude. Birthday rituals like preparing a favorite meal honor and connect us. Athletic teams build rituals and research shows the teams who connect the best win the most. Street gangs also create rituals as they bond. Connecting rituals are essential because connection fosters willingness.

Rituals are sometimes hard for teachers who feel pushed for time in the constant race toward cognitive gains. It may be hard to release the “teaching” and begin allowing moments where the number one goal is connection, not learning, per se. The good news is that these rituals require very little time and often ask children to apply their academic learning in meaningful ways. They also soothe the lower centers of the brain, wiring children’s brains for impulse control and willingness, and creating an optimal state for learning.

My mom used to say, “Night, night. Don’t let the bed bugs bite.” She always said it standing by my bedroom door just before she clicked the lights off. Fifty years later, she was wandering around one night as often happens with people with Alzheimer’s. She wandered into my room. I sat straight up in bed, startled awake and thinking she was probably lost in an agitated state. She flicked on the lights and said, “Night, night, don’t let the bed bugs bite.” In the midst of 15 years living with this horrible disease, both she and I found each other for one more moment through this loving nightly ritual.

All cultures create rituals. There are many different ritual styles, some of which are no more reassuring than the, “Have a nice day,” offered by a bored clerk at the mini mart. To be successful, your School Family rituals must be authentic expressions of togetherness and joy. The following are different ritual styles seen in homes, schools and classrooms. What types of rituals are promoted in your school? In your classroom? In your home? Take some time to really reflect.

Minimized Rituals: These rituals are not emphasized. Academic achievement is the goal. Little attention is placed on the whole child or social-emotional intelligence. Holidays and birthdays might be celebrated if time permits, work is complete and children have earned the break by demonstrating good behavior.

Interrupted Rituals: Interrupted rituals usually indicate some sort of crisis has taken precedence. This crisis could be the changing of teachers, state-mandated program changes, natural disasters, bomb threats, and human tragedy.

Rigid Rituals: The teacher creates and conducts rigid rituals the same way each year. Roles are highly prescribed. The emphasis is on doing the ritual correctly instead of connecting.

Imbalanced Rituals: Imbalanced rituals occur in classrooms that conduct only a small range of rituals. Instead of having good morning rituals, absent child rituals and the like, they only celebrate birthdays and holidays. These rituals usually represent one ethnic heritage.

Obligatory Rituals: Obligatory rituals exist because they “should.” They lack true connection. The class sings the good morning song as a way to start the day, not as a way to connect. Rituals feel more like routines that mark the passage of time than meaningful events. A tired flight attendant robotically saying goodbye to 400 people exiting a 747 is an obligatory ritual.

Authentic Rituals: Authentic rituals are true rituals jointly created by the teacher and students. Authentic rituals are flexible. They capture and reflect the current needs of the group. They offer a sense of continuity and connectedness through time, bringing cohesiveness to the School Family. They emerge and dissolve with spontaneity and delight. They are a sacred space for putting the classroom values into action. They help establish relationships, mark life changes, heal wounds from hurtful experiences, voice the beliefs of the School Family and celebrate life itself. In the School Family, the goal is to create authentic rituals.

What Rituals Are Needed in Your School Family?

The beauty of using a healthy family as a model for creating your class culture is we all have some past references from which to draw. We can simply ask ourselves, "What would a healthy family do?" If a family member is sick, a common ritual is to send him a card that wishes him well. There are generally some structures to support the ritual (art supplies, card store, etc.) and it's someone's job to organize the task on behalf of the family. The same will be true in your School Family. Most class or school rituals will have tangible structures to support them and jobs distributed among the students to follow through with the task.

Not only are your School Family rituals the glue that builds connectedness, they also provide children practice in the social skills needed for life. Rituals occur day after day, in the same location, at the same time and for the same reason (connection). Patterning them in this way contributes to establish social trust. Without trust, children will not relax their defenses enough to be guided. Without guidance, there is no discipline, just various forms of coercion.

We will discuss several rituals within the chapters of this book, especially in the Encouragement chapter. If you work with infants and toddlers, you will conduct many of the rituals for the parents. For example if an infant is sick, the Wish Well card comes from the staff to the family, left in the child's cubby to be discovered by a tired parent upon the infant's return.

Here is a top ten list of suggested rituals for your classroom. As you implement Conscious Discipline in your School Family, you will find opportunities to create many more. *Creating the School Family* and Shubert's School provide additional detail for rituals.

Top Ten Suggested Rituals

1. Greeting / Goodbye Rituals
2. Safekeeper Ritual
3. School Family Agreement
4. Connecting Rituals
5. Kindness Rituals
6. Absent Child Ritual
7. Welcoming / Leaving Rituals
8. Wish Well Ritual
9. Testing Rituals
10. End-of-Year Rituals

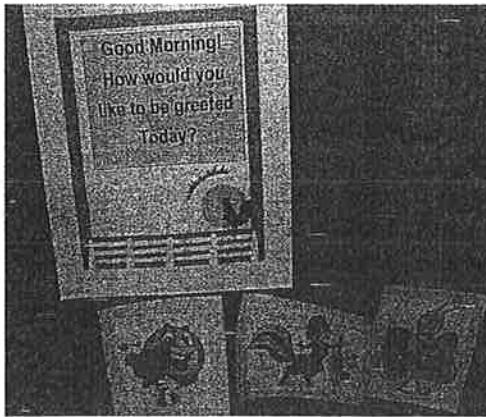


Andrew and Ramy like to greet each other with the "Snake."

Greeting / Goodbye Rituals: The goal of these rituals is real connection, not just the process of saying, “Hello.” In connection, you are hoping to achieve eye contact, touch and presence in a playful situation. This ritual affords you the opportunity to assess a child’s inner state (survival, emotional, or executive) and upshift if necessary.

Select a location you will stand every morning to greet the children. You could have greeting choices from which they can choose. These choices can change and are limited only by your imagination. You can make up snake, skunk, superhero or seasonal greetings. Older children can create addition, subtraction and fraction greetings. The goal is to connect, touch, make eye contact and have fun.

At the close of the day, send each child off with a goodbye. One kindergarten teacher says to each child, “Tomorrow I will see your smile, crocodile,” and then gives a hug. Another has a different saying for each week of school.



Greeting Choices



Skunk Greeting

Safekeeper Ritual: This ritual symbolically represents the focus on safety in the School Family. Children and adults are asked to consciously place a picture or other representation of themselves in a container to show their willingness and commitment to help keep the School Family safe. This is explained further in *Composure*, Chapter 4.

School Family Agreement Song or Chant: Each classroom can create a School Family song or chant. The song or chant represents the agreements for the classroom. Below is an agreement chant from a fourth-grade classroom.

“We are intelligent thinkers who persevere through difficult obstacles. We show compassion to people around us. We practice self-discipline in our work and actions. Together we can help each other make the world a better place.”

Connecting Rituals: At specified times during the day, take time for connecting rituals. Connecting rituals are activities that ask children to consciously touch one another and make eye contact. They are often done with music and movement. The CDs *Kindness Counts*, *Brain Boogie Boosters* and *It Starts in the Heart* contain many songs that ask children to connect. In addition, my *I Love You Rituals* book and CDs provide connecting activities for children 0 to 8 years of age.

The Brain Smart Start routine in the morning and the closing routine at the end of the day provide two excellent times for connecting rituals. You can send rituals home for homework and use them in your reading buddy program. For infants and toddlers, connecting rituals are easily worked into diapering and toileting times. Each time a child goes to the diapering table or restroom, conduct a 1-minute I Love You Ritual. Integrating connecting rituals into your daily routine helps every child receive the brain-building connections required for optimal development and increased cooperation.

Kindness Rituals: There are many ways to document and celebrate acts of kindness. A Kindness Tree encourages children to place a heart on the tree to signify a kind act. A Kindness Recorder allows older students to write kindnesses in a notebook. We will explore kindness rituals further in the Encouragement, Chapter 6.

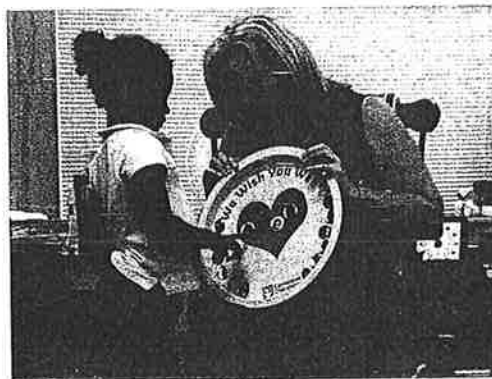
Absent Child Ritual: The School Family can brainstorm things to do for School Family members who return after an absence. Many classrooms use a Wish Well Board. Absent students are placed in the heart and wished well upon their return. The message to send is, "We noticed you were gone, we missed you and we are glad that you are back." Some classes make cards or poems. Others write songs. The following is an example of a song that could be used. It is sung to the tune of "Frere Jacques."

"We missed _____." (insert child's name)
"We missed _____." (insert child's name)
"Yes we did! Yes we did!"
"Glad that _____ is back." (insert child's name)
"Glad that _____ is back." (insert child's name)
"Now we're all together."
"Now we're all together."

Welcoming / Leaving Child Rituals: I frequently say teachers are always pregnant, they just don't know when the next child is coming. With the increased mobility of our society, children come and go frequently. Mark these transitions with rituals. A second grade classroom made T-shirts at the beginning of the year. Children decorated the shirts with their handprints, making extras in case a new child enrolls mid-year. When a new child arrives, they present him with a shirt during a welcoming ceremony. A first-grade class decided they would make a goodbye video for each child leaving the class. Similar to the process done at weddings, each child recorded a message on camera. The class then gave the recording to the leaving child.



Kindness Tree



Wish Well Board

Wish Well Ritual: The Wish Well Ritual asks children to wish others well when they are absent or struggling with a life issue from academics to death of a grandparent. We will explore wishing well further in the Composure, Chapter 4.

Testing Rituals: With increased emphasis on testing, testing rituals are needed to help ease students' anxieties and help them achieve an optimal brain state during tests. In one school, kindergartners wrote encouraging notes to older students and held a parade two days before the test. Enlisting music, movement, connection and encouragement are helpful components for rituals conducted just before test-taking time. View videos of several such rituals on your web portal.

End-of-Year Rituals: Ending the school year can be difficult and discipline issues can increase. Rituals help soothe this transition. One teacher had children create an "I will remember" book about the year. Another teacher asked children to write how each person in the class helped the School Family. The teacher collected and bound the writings into a personalized book for each child to take home.

Classroom Structures

The ultimate goal of the School Family is to provide a learning environment where all members (adults and children) spend more time in an executive state than not. We want children metaphorically asking, "What can I learn?" all day long instead of "Am I safe?" or "Am I loved?" Visual routines contribute to answering the question "Am I safe?" Rituals contribute to answering the question "Am I loved?" The classroom structures in Conscious Discipline contribute to answering the question, "What can I learn about getting along with others?"

Staying in an executive state so we can focus on what we want, see the best in others, offer empathy, solve conflict, maintain composure and utilize all our wonderful executive skills is a big challenge. The purpose of the classroom structures is to practice our social and emotional skills in the context of meaningful life events. Structures scaffold executive skill development, meet the self-regulatory and social emotional needs of class members, and provide practice living the values we are teaching. On a physical level, they also provide the supporting materials for routines, rituals and skills practice.

We know how to create effective structures. In designing our classrooms for learning, we seek to create spaces and provide materials that will enable students to be academically successful. If we are going to study insects, we plan for success with books, visuals, activities and materials. We must plan the same way for the social and emotional domains of learning. The difference is that social and emotional learning happens all year long and cannot always be preplanned. We cannot plan for a child's extended illness, the death of a family member, a divorce or a child's elation about learning to ride a bike. We must design our classroom environment so it can handle events when they arise as a natural part of life.

You might think, "That's not my job." Well, if you believe your job is teaching science, maybe not. But if you believe your job is to teach children, this definitely is your job. Classrooms harbor a constant flux of emotions that generate different internal states. Some states can facilitate learning. Others, such as anxiety and fear, can shut down the higher centers of the brain, making the achievement of academic goals impossible. If we are going to maximize learning, we must create environments where children can process their emotions and transform their inner states for optimal learning. They must be enveloped by a responsive school culture that acknowledges their inner lives as well as their external behaviors and accomplishments.