



Positive Discipline in Everyday Parenting

COVID-19 Information Kit



Positive
Discipline In
Everyday Life

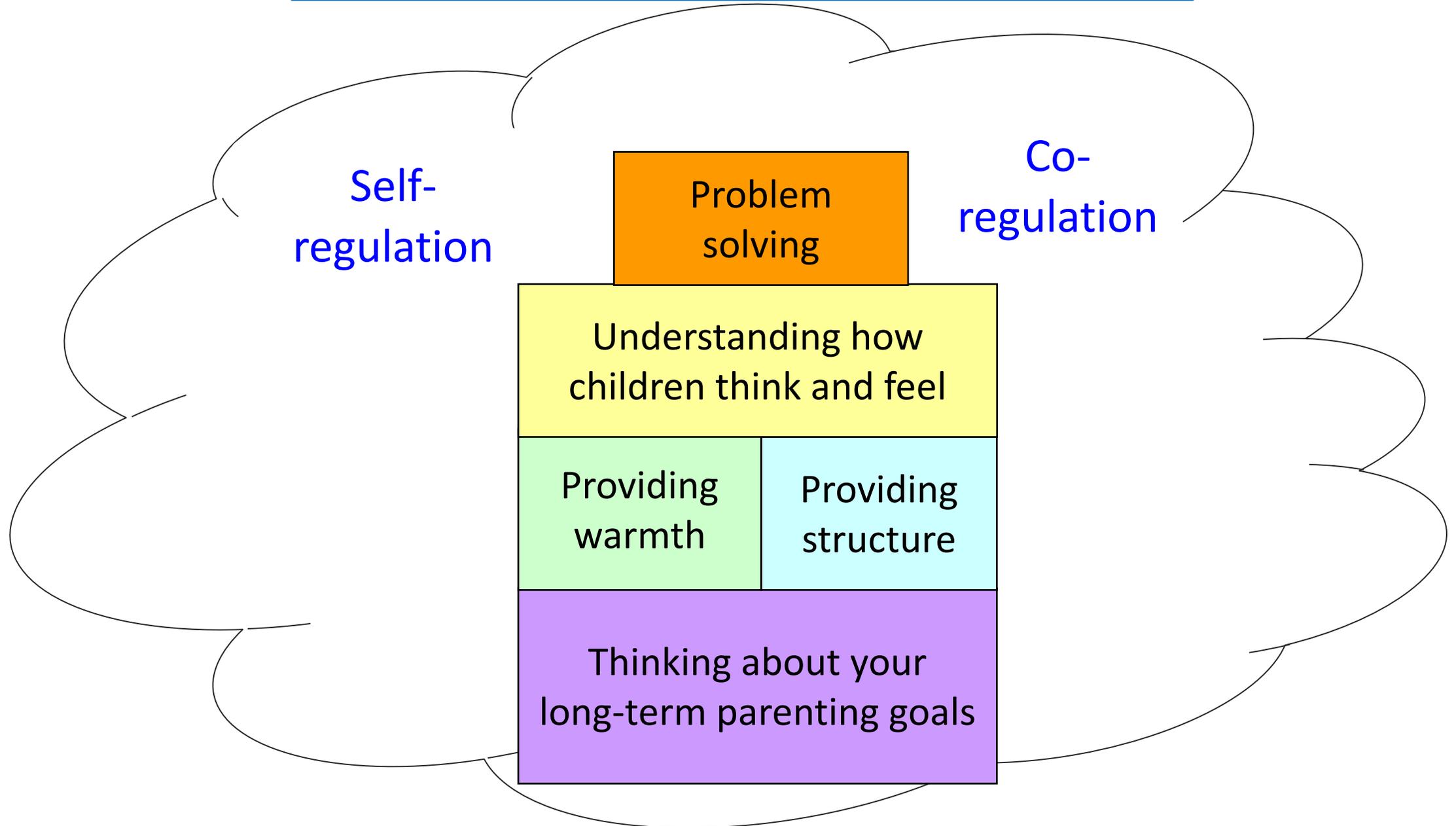


Save the Children

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The Positive Discipline in Everyday Parenting Model





Self-Regulation

It doesn't take much imagination these days to think about how stress feels. We can feel it in our bodies – in muscle tension and a faster heart rate. Sometimes, we can hear it in our voices, which might be louder and harsher. And we can see it in our responses to our children.

When we're under stress, we feel a strong need for control. But almost everything is outside of our control during this COVID-19 pandemic. So, our frustration and need for control might become directed at our children, and it could lead to hitting, yelling and punishing. Those reactions won't help us reach our long-term goals. They can damage our relationships, create fear in our children, and model hurtful behaviour.

One of the most important things we can do is learn how to manage our own stress and frustration. This is called 'self-regulation.' It involves being aware of our stress and how it impacts our bodies, our thinking, and the emotions we're feeling. Learning to self-regulate means learning ways to calm our mind and body before acting. Two of the best ways to self-regulate are **deep breathing** and **movement**.

It can be challenging to self-regulate when we're frustrated or angry. So it helps to practice for a few minutes every day to build this habit. With practice, it gets easier to remember to take some deep breaths and/or move our bodies – even when we're feeling stressed.

There are many ways to practice self-regulating. These activities only take a few minutes, they don't cost anything, and they don't require space. If you practice them every day, they will start to become habits.

You can find short videos of self-regulation activities on [PDEL's website](#).



Co-Regulation

Most of us are feeling a lot of stress due to COVID-19 and the many changes it has brought to our lives. So are our children. When two stressed people must live together all the time, there can be conflict. Often, this conflict arises over things that really don't matter very much. But every time we argue, we damage our relationship a little bit. Over time, this can take a toll on all of us.

As adults, one of the most important things we can do is learn how to self-regulate when we feel ourselves getting frustrated or angry. When we can calm ourselves, we can think our way through and find a solution to the conflict without getting caught up in power struggles.

When we can regulate our own emotions and body responses, our calm, regulated nervous system will influence our child's emotional state and can help them regulate their own body and emotions. We do this by:

- providing **Warmth** - being with our child in a calm, kind, empathic, manner; listening to and understanding their feelings, not judging them, not 'telling' them to calm down, being kind so our child can self-regulate,
- and**
- providing **Structure** – giving them information to help them understand and learn.

This is called '**co-regulation.**' This process is what helps our children – gradually over time – to learn how to regulate themselves, even when we're not there. Remember, the keys to co-regulation are to: 1) regulate ourselves, and 2) respond to our child with Warmth and Structure.

Identifying Your Long-term Goals

Now more than ever, our days are filled with trying to meet our short-term goals – trying to get children to focus on their schoolwork, to get children to keep themselves busy, to get teenagers to stay indoors. It's easy in this challenging time to lose sight of our long-term parenting goals.

When that happens, we can easily resort to shouting, hitting and punishing. Those reactions however can easily make a stressful situation worse and scare or hurt your child. When you feel your tension rising, it's a signal to self-regulate so you can refocus on your *long-term* goals.

Why is this important? Well, think of it this way: Imagine that you're guiding your child along a pathway. If you focus on their feet, all you can see is the step they're taking *right now*. It's hard to guide them because you can't see where they're going.



But if you look up, you can see where your child is going. You can guide them on their journey more easily because you can see the big picture.

Focusing only on the child's behaviour is like focusing only on the child's feet. We can't see the big picture. We lose sight of where the child is headed. The foundation of positive discipline is to look up so you can see your child's destination. Here's a way to start:

Imagine your child as a grown up and ask yourself:

- What kind of person do I hope they will be?
- What kind of relationship do I hope to have with them?

Like parents around the world, you likely hope that your children will:

- be resilient and able to manage stress
- be good problem solvers who can resolve conflict without hurting anyone
- trust you and come to you with their problems
- feel confident and secure; happy and optimistic
- have strong relationships with you throughout their lives



As families, we're having lots of short-term challenges right now, but if we can stay focused, we can turn these challenges into opportunities to work toward our long-term goals. We can show our children how to manage stress and solve problems without hurting others; build their trust, confidence and optimism; and strengthen our relationships.

In this way, we can guide our children to their destination and help everyone come out of this challenging time stronger and more resilient.

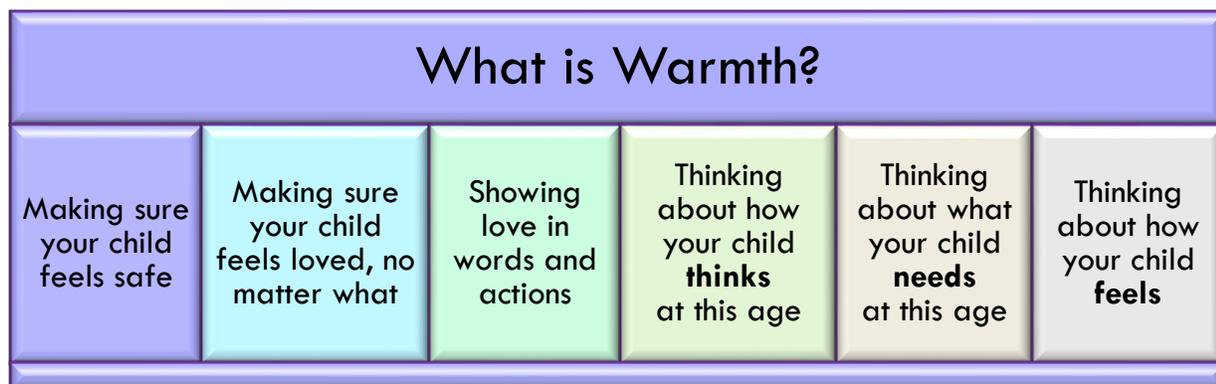
Providing Warmth

The tools that will help us reach our long-term goals are Warmth and Structure. They need to be present together, in all our interactions with our children – not just the challenging ones. Here, we will talk about Warmth.

We all learn best when we feel safe and secure. When we're relaxed, we can listen, focus and think. When we feel anxious or afraid, it's hard to focus on anything but our fear. We can see that happening to us as the COVID-19 pandemic worsens in many countries. It's much harder now to focus our minds on anything but our worries.

It's the same for children. When they feel worried or afraid, it's hard for them to focus on anything else. The world *outside* has suddenly become a frightening place. The world *inside* needs to provide the security that children need to grow and thrive.

What children need is Warmth. This means ensuring that children feel safe, loved, listened to, and understood.



During the pandemic, when everyone's stress level is heightened, it is even more important that we provide a safe space for children. They won't feel safe if we use punishments like slapping, time-out or 'consequences' such as isolating or ignoring them, or taking away the things they love. Warmth is key to children's sense of security – and it is even more important in times like this.

Love, security and empathy are key ingredients in resilience. They also build our relationships with our children and strengthen their trust in us. Warmth shows our children that we will be there for them when they need us, today and every day.

Warmth is one of two powerful tools that help us reach our long-term goals. The other tool is Structure. We can use these tools effectively when we are self-regulated.

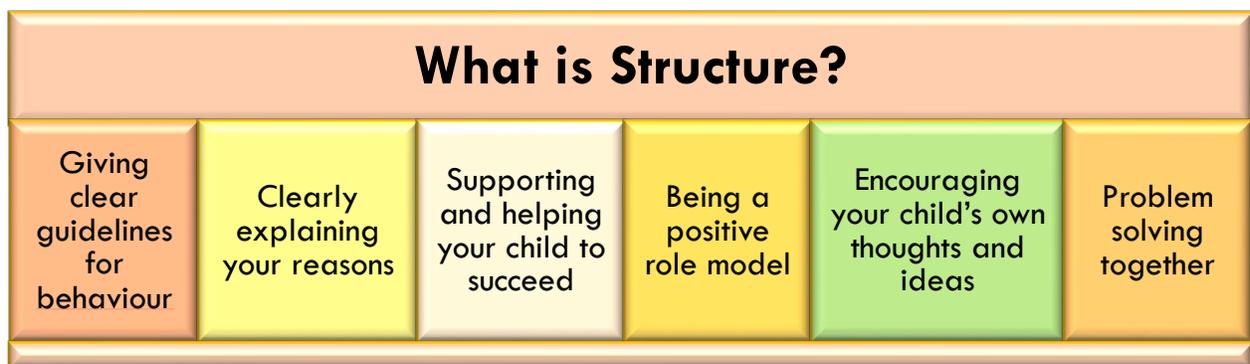
Providing Structure

The tools that will help us reach our long-term goals are Warmth and Structure. They need to be present together, in all our interactions with our children – not just the challenging ones. Here, we will talk about Structure.

We all are more likely to succeed if we have the information we need. We learn when someone talks calmly with us about our mistakes and shows us how to do better next time. We gain skills when others speak kindly to us, explain their reasoning, and involve us in solving the problem. When we fear being punished for mistakes, we stop trying and lose opportunities to learn.

It's the same for children. Fear of punishment interferes with their learning. Under the stress caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, we might find it hard to be patient and we might find ourselves punishing, rather than teaching, our children. One of the most important things we can do is to help children understand, rather than punishing them.

This is Structure. It's ensuring that children have the information they need to understand, learn, develop skills, and contribute to problem solving.



In the time of COVID-19, it's so important that we support and guide children, not punish them. Many children are frightened by the crisis outside. So *inside*, we need to show them how we can manage stress and uncertainty. We can strengthen their optimism and confidence by creating space for talking, listening and problem solving together in a climate of Warmth.

Understanding How Children Think and Feel

The world is a complicated place. It has become even more complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic. It's hard for us to understand what's happening, to sort through our emotions, and to predict what will happen next. This is even harder for children. They don't have our knowledge or experience. To them, this situation can feel even more frightening and even more unreal.

In our daily interactions with our children, we often get caught up in reacting to their behaviour. We might think that they are being 'bad' or 'stubborn' or 'lazy.' But our behaviour is simply an expression of our thoughts and feelings. Our children are trying to tell us something, but they don't always have the words to explain it.

If we start to look at things through *our children's eyes*, we begin to understand the real reasons for their behaviour. Then we can support, guide and teach them with Warmth and Structure.

How Young Children Think and Feel

Young children have only lived a few years on this planet. In these early years, they gain amazing skills and an incredible amount of knowledge. They learn how to talk, walk, run, jump, play - and express love, sadness and anger.

But their skills and knowledge are still very limited. They don't yet have words to explain everything they're feeling. They don't yet understand danger, sickness, or what a pandemic is. They don't yet understand time, so they can think that what's happening right now will go on forever. It's very hard for them to understand why they can't play with their friends, why they can't see their grandparents, or why their parents are so worried, tired and distracted.

This situation can lead to frustration and fear.

Frustration

Young children have very high energy levels. They *need* to run and play. In fact, playing is the most important way for them to learn. They need an outlet for their energy, and they need to play with other children. When they can't play outside or with friends, they can get very frustrated.



Because they don't yet have words for their emotions, young children express what they feel through their actions. Frustration might show up as tantrums, shouting 'NO!', or stamping their feet. This isn't 'bad behaviour.' It's a young child's only way to express frustration.

Punishment only makes things worse. Young children don't understand why playing outside was fine a short time ago, but now it's not allowed. Or why they suddenly must be so careful about coughing and sneezing. Or why their parents suddenly have no money for treats. Or why their birthday celebration was cancelled. Punishment only adds to their hurt and frustration.

As we move through this crisis, it's our job to help children understand and learn. This is our opportunity to show them how we can manage **our** frustration. It's also our opportunity to help them learn about **their** feelings by giving their feelings a name. When young children start to realize that their feelings are normal and that we have them too, they can start to learn how to regulate them. Just remember that this takes time - and that they learn how to do this from watching us.

Fear

Young children have very limited experience with how the world works. They don't understand what money is. So, they don't know why their parents are suddenly so deeply worried. They hear us talk about our fears around job loss, housing and food. They see our anxiety in our faces and hear it in our voices. They might see more arguing between their parents, or even violence. They can't make sense of it, so they become very frightened.

Young children don't understand what a virus is or what death is. They just see the frightening images on TV, hear the death counts, and see our reactions. They hear

us talking about staying away from people so that we don't get sick or die. They see our fear of touching things. They hear us say that *they* could make people sick and even die. If someone close to them does die, they might think they caused that death.

This can be a terrifying time for children because they don't understand medical science. In fact, most adults are scared because we don't understand either.

When we're scared, we seek the comfort of those we think can protect us. Children do this too. They might cling to us and not want to let go. They might not want us to leave them. They're asking us to keep them safe.



When we can't control the causes of our anxiety, we can get physically sick, have trouble sleeping, and get upset more easily than usual. This happens to children too. They might get headaches or stomach-aches. They might refuse to go to bed because they're afraid of being alone in the dark; wake up in the night needing to be held; have nightmares; or wet the bed.

Punishment, like spanking, time-out and taking things away, will add to their fear because it will make them afraid of *us*. It's crucial that we do everything possible to ensure that our children feel safe with us. We need to be a stable, reassuring, constant lighthouse in this storm. We must maintain their trust in us by providing Warmth and Structure. We are their protectors.

How Older Children Think and Feel

Children who go to school have built complex social networks. They're learning how relationships are built outside of their families, how to deal with peer conflict, and how friendships can end. They likely have a few close friends who share their worries, fears, hopes and dreams. They depend on their friends. And their friends depend on them.



The sudden and urgent need for physical distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic has severely disrupted our children's social worlds. They've lost the social

contact that is so important in their lives. And they've lost the special time they spend with their friends, away from their families.

Disconnection from school also means a loss of contact with teachers. For many children, teachers are important people in their lives. Teachers who have created safe spaces for children to talk, express ideas, and 'hang out' after school will be deeply missed.

For many children, these losses are felt as grief.

Some children will express their grief as sadness. For some children, this can happen right away; for others, it may be a more delayed response. They might cry frequently or interact less with their families. They might spend a lot of time alone, just being sad. They might sleep a lot, and have trouble waking up in the morning. Their grief might feel like a weight pressing down on them. They might feel broken-hearted.

Other children will express their grief as anger. They might be short-tempered and moody. They might resist physical distancing, going out to meet their friends against our advice.

All these behaviours are signs that children's worlds have been suddenly turned upside-down. They're still young; they haven't lived through anything like this before. They don't know when it will end – or what will be left of their friendships when it does end. They're worried about their friends' and teachers' health.

They're experiencing sudden, drastic and painful losses. Social isolation can have a powerful impact on their emotional well-being.

Punishments like taking away phones or other valued items won't help. This only makes children feel that we don't understand what they're going through, so they'll miss their friends even more. They need connection more than anything. As parents, we need to regulate our own responses and then:

- focus on our long-term goals,
- ensure that their homes are places of safety and support, and
- problem solve with them to find ways of connecting meaningfully with their friends.

Many school-aged children are experiencing profound emotional upheaval that feels like a storm is raging inside of them. It's our job to provide them with a safe port in the storm and guide them through these challenging times. We do that with Warmth and Structure.

How Teenagers Think and Feel

Teenagers' friendships are central to their lives. Their need for social connection is intense. Their worlds revolve around making short- and long-term plans with their friends and sharing joys and sorrows with them. Many teens have also developed passions for things like sports, music, science or art. They are discovering their talents, interests, and identities.



COVID-19 has interrupted teens' lives without warning. They're expected to stay home all the time – but much of their world exists outside their homes. They're disconnected from their friends, teachers, coaches and others who inspire them. They don't have access to things like soccer fields, science labs, musical instruments or art supplies. They're missing the places where they socialize, fall in love, learn about themselves and others, and discover their values. Suddenly, they're living in a state of uncertainty and isolation, losing their independence and privacy.

Many teenagers with jobs will have lost them due to the pandemic. They might have been saving for their education, travel, or something else important to them – or they might have been contributing to the family's finances. They might feel that their future is at risk, and that their dreams have been destroyed.

Students will have suddenly stopped going to school, without closure or saying goodbye. Those who are graduating or reaching other milestones will miss the celebrations they have looked forward to for years.

For many teenagers, this situation will create emotional upheaval. They might grieve these many losses, feel frustrated by a lack of privacy, or push back against the controls suddenly placed on them. They might resent having their homes made into temporary schools, and having their parents become their substitute teachers.



They might be filling their need for connection by spending many hours each day on social media. All of this can lead to resistance, anger and conflict.

It's common for teenagers to feel invulnerable, like nothing bad can happen to them. This is because the part of the brain that assesses risk is not fully developed yet. Many teens don't fully understand that they could get sick – or that they could make others sick. They might try to meet these needs for social connection by meeting up with their friends or ignoring physical distancing advice.

This isn't bad behaviour or selfishness. It's a combination of very strong needs for independence and an inability to fully understand the risks.

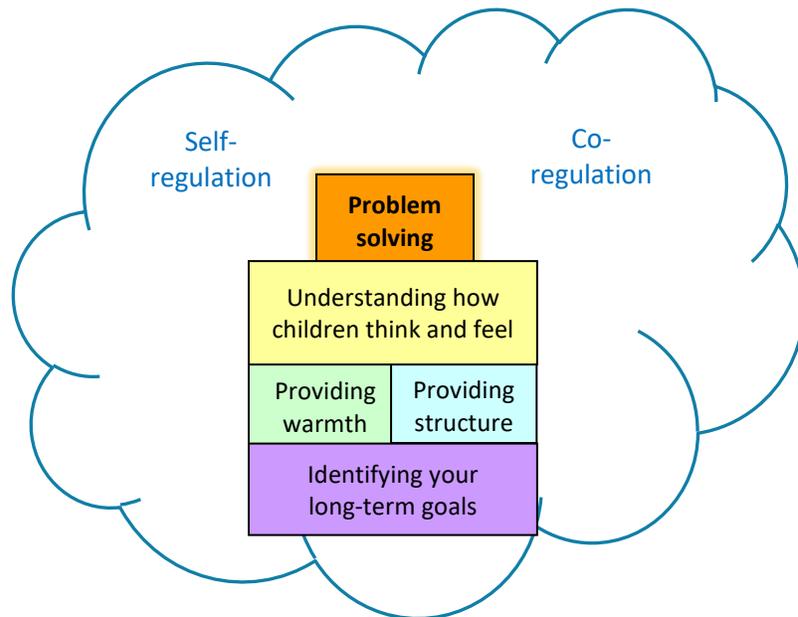
Parents may feel tempted to punish by hitting, grounding, or imposing 'consequences' like taking things away. But punishment does not work; it will only make things worse. When teenagers are punished, they feel misunderstood, misjudged, and controlled. This creates resentment against their parents and intensifies conflict.

These are challenging times for all families, and everyone is trying to adjust. When you find yourself reacting to your teenager, try first to understand the situation from their point of view. It's easy to be continually drawn into arguments and power struggles over things that really don't matter. What does matter is protecting your relationship with your teen, so it remains intact through this very stressful time.

How we interact with our children at this time of heightened global stress can impact their thinking and our relationships for life. If we keep our eyes on our long-term goals, build on our teenagers' strengths, manage our own emotions and provide Warmth and Structure, we can help our teens find solutions to the problems they're facing today. At the same time, we'll build their capacity and strengthen our relationships far into the future.

Problem Solving

In Positive Discipline in Everyday Parenting (PDEP), we view conflict as a problem to be solved. Rather than punishing, we put all the parts of the PDEP model together to think our way through the problem.



First – Self-regulate. Whether it's building a house or raising children, to solve any problem we need to start with a calm mind. It's hard to find solutions when we're upset, angry or frustrated. So, the first step in resolving a problem such as conflict with a child is self-regulation. As adults, we need to calm our feelings and body, so that our minds can think before we approach the problem with our children.

This is not easy to do at first. It takes practice. It might help to think of these feelings of tension and stress as if they were a traffic light. Body tension, shallow breathing, rapid heart rate, and anger are like a yellow light – a signal to slow down, breathe and relax your body before proceeding.



Self-regulation is a learned skill. Once we know how to do it for ourselves, our calm presence and understanding words can help our child learn this critical life skill through **co-regulation** (see below), so together we can think about what to do next.

Then – Focus on your long-term goals. In PDEP, we are guided by our long-term goals. Shifting our focus from the immediate conflict to our long-term vision pulls us out of the power struggle. It reminds us of what we’re trying to accomplish as parents, and what we want to model for our children. For example, we might want our children to be good at managing stress and to be good problem solvers who don’t hurt other people. When we hold that vision in our minds, it helps to guide our responses.

Then – see it through the child’s eyes. In PDEP, we ask ourselves, what might our child be thinking and feeling? We remind ourselves of the child’s age and level of understanding. Maybe a young child doesn’t have a concept of time yet. Or maybe a teenager is really missing her friends. If we think of their behaviour as ‘bad,’ we get an urge to punish them by hitting, sending them to time-out, or taking away the things they love. Remember that their behaviour – just like ours – is an expression of their thoughts and feelings. When we see the situation through our child’s eyes, it can look very different.

Then – co-regulate with your child by providing Warmth and Structure to solve the problem together.

When our nervous system is calm and regulated, this helps our child soothe their stress response. This is called ‘co-regulation’ because we are self-regulating together. We help our child learn to self-regulate by providing Warmth and Structure.

Providing **Warmth** means ensuring that our child feels safe and secure, not afraid. This helps them soothe their nervous system, which makes it easier for them to learn.

Providing **Structure** means ‘scaffolding’ their learning with information, guidance and support. We listen to their point of view and provide clear information and explanations in a way that they’ll understand and that will help them learn.

Problem Solving across the Lifespan

Babies are totally dependent on their parents for regulation. By holding and rocking them, and speaking in a soothing voice, parents help their babies feel safe and secure. Babies are completely dependent on adults to solve their problems for them.



As children get older and more experienced in self-regulation, they will start problem-solving *with* us. As we go through this process together through the years, *they* will get better and better at self-regulating, thinking about their long-term goals, reflecting on what they're thinking and feeling, and finding ways to solve problems without hurting other people.

Remember. Each conflict is unique and so is each child. But each conflict can be solved using this approach – because it focuses our minds on what we want to model for our child.

And practice. You can practice problem solving at every age with the examples in the PDEP Parent Book, available for free download from PDEL's website www.positivedisciplineeveryday.com.