

## **THIRD SIFTINGS: BEHAVIORAL: ADULT**

Roslyn Duffy

### **Behavioral: Adult**

We each have generalized attitudes about children that will lead to different expectations. This sifting, *Adult: Attitudinal* will examine those attitudes.

Depending upon our attitudes and expectations, different styles of discipline will appeal to us. Often, though, our discipline style is not so much a choice as it is a reflection of our own upbringing and experiences. Whatever the style, different skills and different levels of effectiveness will result.

Effectiveness and skills are determined by our actions or reactions. Consistency and follow-through characterize both of these. This sifting does an in-depth self-examination of our adult attitudes, expectations, actions, and reactions to and with children.

## TEMPLATE 1

### THIRD SIFTINGS: *BEHAVIORAL: ADULT*

Attitudinal: Attitudes and Generalized Expectations

#### Step One: Discover

1. What are the attitudes of the adult toward child/adult relationships?

Examples:

- *Children should be seen and not heard;*
- *Father (or the teacher) is in charge;*
- *Children are capable of participating in problem solving; and*
- *It is easier for me to do things than to wait for a child to do them.*

How do these attitudes affect adult expectations? (An adult with an, “*I’m Boss,*” attitude will find it difficult to engage in mutual problem-solving with a child.)

---

2. What child behaviors are disturbing to this adult?

- *Is this behavior only disturbing at certain times or in certain situations? (e.g., early or late in the day — does it relate to the teacher’s disposition at those times of day?)*
  - *If it is disturbing only on the playground, lunchroom, etc., what expectations are different at those times? (For example: An adult raised as an only child, may find squabbling children more alarming than does a coworker raised with four siblings.)*
-

3. What underlying attitudes or expectations might make the child's behavior seem disturbing?

---

### **Step Two: Decide**

1. When (if at all) is this behavior disturbing to other adults (or children)?

---

2. How might the adult's attitude change (if only one adult finds the behavior disturbing)?

---

3. How can expectations be altered (if the behavior is disturbing in only one setting or only at certain times)? *(For example, a child might be allowed to get up from the table and read books when finished eating, instead of having to wait until everyone at the table finishes.)*

---

### **Step Three: Do**

#### Possibilities:

1. Identify why the child's behavior bothers you. Look for ways to change your attitude or expectations.

---

2. Identify the settings (or timing) associated with the child's disturbing behavior and look for ways to change adult expectations in those settings or at those times.

- 
3. Provide training and practice for children to adjust to new or different adult expectations. *(For example, if children must line up before entering or leaving a room and have not had to do so previously, treat this as a skill to be practiced outside of times it will be expected.)*
- 

#### **Step Four: Refine**

1. Discover: What is happening now?
- 

2. Decide: How did the plan work?

If it worked, great!

If not, proceed to the next step.

3. Do: Refine

Try the same idea again, refining how and what you do.

OR

Repeat this sifting and come up with a different plan, then try it.

4. If the problem persists — proceed to the next sifting.

## TEMPLATE 2

### THIRD SIFTINGS: *BEHAVIORAL: ADULT*

#### **Attitudinal: Interpersonal**

The discipline tools we use and our skills or effectiveness vary greatly. Like an intricate dance, discipline styles and skills invite different responses, each representing a different step in the complex waltz between adult and child.

Typical discipline approaches include rigid, punitive, lenient, and collaborative with each producing a different outcome.

**Rigid:** Rules and consequences are inflexible. The positive here is that children know what to expect and boundaries are clear. The negative is that this style invites power struggles and can become punishment or retribution-focused.

The key question behind this style is: *How do I make this child mind?*

**Punitive:** As its name implies, this type of discipline focuses on punishment. It is not respectful and invites revenge and hurtful behavioral responses from children who feel hurt or treated unfairly.

The key question behind this style is: *How do I make this child understand “No”?* But the unspoken question (often) is: *How do I make this child ‘suffer’ enough* (adult code for: ‘get his attention,’ or ‘change his behavior’)?

**Lenient:** This style gives the perception of being less rule-bound and more relaxed, but it rarely is. Children are confused about boundaries (since rules and expectations shift like blowing sand dunes) and it does not feel as if anyone is in charge. It can produce anxiety and feelings of not being safe. This also tends to be a very frustrating style for

adults who are often tempted to swing between no rules and over-the-top rules, when things get out of hand.

The key question behind this style is: *How do I get this child to listen to me?*

**Collaborative:** This style is also known as cooperative, democratic, or solution- and skills-based. For more on this style, with skill training, consult the *Positive Discipline* series of books, especially: *Positive Discipline: The First Three Years* and *Positive Discipline for Preschoolers* (Nelsen, Erwin, & Duffy, 2007, Three Rivers Press).

The focus in collaborative discipline is on gaining cooperation and collaboratively seeking solutions to problems. The end results can be outstanding because children learn long-term life skills. The weakness of this approach is that it requires practice and skill development or it can become wishy-washy (explaining away misbehavior or not holding children accountable for their behavior). It can also be misused and turn punitive when consequences, instead of solutions, become the focus. More than all the other styles, this approach requires attention to a child's development and skills.

The key questions behind this style are: *How can I help this child learn needed life skills, like cooperation and problem solving? How can I help this child feel capable and encouraged?*

No matter what the disciplinary style, adults will have different skills or effectiveness based on their own life experiences, temperament, and classroom practice. Fortunately, we are all able to improve our skills. This is really great because, as one person said:

*The more children with problems,  
the more likely the ADULT is part of the problem.*

### **Step One: Discover**

1. What is the adult's behavior? *(For example, sending several children to time-out during daily circle time.)*

---

2. What discipline approach does this behavior reflect? *(It could be rigid, punitive, or collaborative, depending on the adult's attitude.)*

---

3. What seems to be the goal of this discipline style? Will this goal result in improved life skills for the child(ren)? *(Is it to enforce a rule? Punish? Provide help with refocusing?)*

---

4. How can the discipline style be changed to achieve a positive (life skill-based) outcome for the child(ren)? *(Asking a different question — What skills might a misbehaving child lack? — changes the focus of discipline.)*

---

### **Step Two: Decide**

1. What adult attitudes or expectations might be inviting the child's disturbing behavior? *(For example, the adult may be focused on 'making a child mind,' leading to expectations that only prompt obedience is acceptable.)*

---

2. How much is the adult willing to change her attitudes or expectations? *(Is the adult willing to tune in to the needs, ideas, and activities of the child? For example, perhaps a child is focused on solving a puzzle and does not immediately get up to put it away when outside time is called. Is there a way he might finish the puzzle before going out — or keep it out to come back to after outside play is over?)*

---

3. What life skills could be supported in this situation? *(For example, if a child is often in time-out for hitting classmates, could better problem-solving skills be what he needs more than another time-out?)*

---

4. What specific adult behavior can change to support the development of a child's (or children's) life skills? *(For example, an adult could discuss a problem with a child to find out the child's thoughts and ideas.)*

---

### **Step Three: Do**

#### Possibilities:

To change his BEHAVIOR the adult could:

1. Seek new discipline techniques by doing (e.g., reading a book, taking a class, or working with a mentor).

---

2. Change his attitudes or expectations by doing (e.g., setting a different goal for his interactions with a child: Instead of seeking the child's obedience, perhaps looking for ways a child can express her feelings more effectively.)

- 
3. Practice new skills by doing.
- 

**Step Four: Refine**

1. Discover: What is happening now?
- 

2. Decide: How did the plan work?

If it worked, great!

If not, proceed to the next step.

3. Do: Refine

Try the same idea again, refining how and what you do.

OR

Repeat this sifting and come up with a different plan, then try it.

4. If the problem persists — proceed to the next sifting.

## TEMPLATE 3

### THIRD SIFTINGS: *BEHAVIORAL: ADULT*

#### Reactions: Consistency and Follow-Through

In this sifting we identify adult actions and reactions, and whether those reactions are consistent and if there is follow-through between what is said and what is done. We also look for consistency and follow-through from classroom to classroom as well as between school and home, or vice versa.

Some questions:

- Do rules change from person to person or from playground to art room to nap room?
- Does the same teacher have different rules for different children?
- Do adults do what they say they will do?
- How does what goes on at school compare to what goes on at home (and vice versa)?

#### Step One: Discover

1. What does the adult say and do? Do words match actions?

---

2. How often does the adult's behavior match up with stated rules or expectations?

---

3. How can the adult improve her consistency and/or follow-through?

---

## Step Two: Decide

1. What are the adult's expectations and have they been discussed with or communicated to the child(ren)?  

---
2. How can specific reactions demonstrate consistency within a classroom? (*For example, any child who plays with food at mealtime is asked to clear his plate and leave the table.*)  

---
3. What actions are needed to follow through on known rules and expectations? (*For example, once a child is asked to clear his plate, if he fails to do so within a minute or two, the teacher clears it for him.*)  

---

## Step Three: Do

### Possibilities:

To improve consistency and follow-through, the adult could:

1. Discuss expectations with other adults and be sure all are in agreement by doing.  
*(For example, be specific: "We agree that children will not be allowed to stand on tables.")*  

---
2. Discuss expectations with a child's family and be sure all are in agreement by doing.  
*(For example, be specific: "Both at school and at home, a child will be expected to put away toys after use.")*  

---

3. Discuss expectations with children and state what you (the adult) plan on doing. (*For example, "I will put the blocks away if you do not. They will not be available to play with the rest of that day."*)
- 

A good motto: *If you SAY IT — DO IT!*

#### **Step Four: Refine**

1. Discover: What is happening now?
- 

2. Decide: How did the plan work?

If it worked, great!

If not, proceed to the next step.

3. Do: Refine

Try the same idea again, refining how and what you do.

OR

Repeat this sifting and come up with a different plan, then try it.

4. If the problem persists — proceed to the next sifting.