

Interview with Ms. Desere La Qua, Senior Conscious Discipline Coaching Coordinator at the Caribbean Center for Child Neurodevelopment



WHAT FIRST DREW YOU TO THIS WORK?

I was drawn to this work when I noticed how differently I saw situations in my classroom once I took the time to breathe. This breathing helped me calm down and see conflicts as opportunities to help the students in my care. This change in approach built willingness and cooperation with my students, which allowed me to try more of the skills and powers with them.

I was a preschool teacher, and the Conscious Discipline program was fun and exciting for both my students and me. Conscious Discipline was not an addition to the things I had to do; instead, it complemented my daily routine seamlessly. In fact, Conscious Discipline worked beautifully with HighScope, the curriculum I used while in the classroom.

WHAT DOES A TYPICAL DAY IN YOUR WORK USUALLY LOOK LIKE?

My day starts with self-regulation and positive self-talk. I visit schools where I coach and model Conscious Discipline skills in the moment, such as composure, assertiveness, encouragement, choices, empathy, positive intent, and consequences. What I do depends on what is happening in the classroom and what support the teacher needs at that time.

I remain close to the teacher and give her the words to use in the moment or model for her to try. I remind the teacher to focus on what she wants, give assertive commands, offer choices, and see the best in every child. Teachers and students engage in Greetings, Wish Well, Brain Smart Starts, and Brain Breaks. I provide structure to help support both the teacher and students.

One of the great things about Conscious Discipline is the abundance of supporting materials, such as books, the Feeling Buddies, songs, and classroom structures like the Safe Place, which help students self-regulate.

At the end of the school day, the teacher and I have a one-to-one meeting. In this meeting, the teacher is encouraged to celebrate herself, reflect on challenges, and consider how she will problem-solve. She is also encouraged to set a goal for the week to work on until my next visit.

WHAT'S ONE THING PEOPLE OFTEN MISUNDERSTAND ABOUT WHAT YOU DO?

One common misunderstanding is that adults think I am there to work with the children. It is actually the other way around. Conscious Discipline is an adult-first approach. If adults cannot self-regulate, it is not possible to co-regulate. Children need a regulated adult to help them regulate.

HAVE YOU SEEN A SMALL CHANGE THAT MADE A BIG DIFFERENCE FOR A CHILD OR ADULT?

I have seen dysregulated teachers become regulated by taking a pause and deep belly breathing, calming themselves first, and seeing behavior as a call for help instead of misbehavior. I have seen students feel safe and believe in themselves because their teachers saw the best in them. I have seen students and teachers build school families where they share, encourage, help, and support each other. Students who finish their work help their friends, and students without a snack are given one by their peers. I have seen the school family wish well those who were not at school, not feeling well, or having a challenging day. I have also seen teacher-parent relationships improve because teachers lead with empathy, love, and encouragement.

WHAT'S SOMETHING A CAREGIVER OR TEACHER SAID TO YOU THAT REALLY STUCK?

One teacher said to me, *"I am thankful for this program. Finally, there is a program for me. Normally, everything is for the students; however, Conscious Discipline is for me exactly what I need in my life right now. I am calmer and better able to problem-solve, and it is making my job in the classroom so much easier."*

What's a situation where you most often see adults feeling stuck? I often see adults stuck in power struggles. What I have found to work well is offering two positive Choices. For example, story time is over, and the students or your child does not want to put away the book. You can say to the child, *"I know it's hard, you were hoping to continue reading the book. You can put the book on the bookshelf or on my table. Which works best for you?"*

Two positive Choices are a skill we need to practice consistently, since the brain has a negative bias. If we are not aware, we may give one positive and one negative choice, so it is important to look out for that.

WHEN THINGS FEEL CHAOTIC IN A CLASSROOM, WHAT DO YOU USUALLY ENCOURAGE ADULTS TO FOCUS ON FIRST?

When things are chaotic in the classroom, I encourage the teacher to take a moment for self-breathing and self-regulation. The teacher's state will dictate the students' state, and we all know we can't pour from an empty cup. Once the teacher feels calm enough, she will be in her executive state, where she can make wise decisions to support the students.

IF YOU HAD TO CHOOSE JUST ONE CONSCIOUS DISCIPLINE SKILL FOR EVERYONE TO TRY, WHICH WOULD IT BE AND WHY?

Everyone should try Composure. Breathing in through our nostrils and slowly out through our mouths increases the oxygen level in our blood. This oxygen-rich blood signals the part of our brain that is aroused that we are safe and do not need to fight, flee, or freeze. This allows us to calm down and access our executive skills such as time management, organization, problem-solving, reasoning, and more. If a person would take just one minute in a challenging situation to breathe deeply, I am sure our prisons would have fewer people in them.

WHICH CONSCIOUS DISCIPLINE SKILL DO YOU FIND YOURSELF USING THE MOST, BOTH AT WORK AND IN EVERYDAY LIFE?

I use Composure and self-regulation to keep myself in, or bring myself back to, the higher centers of my brain. I also use the Power of Love, being able to see the best in everyone, which makes a huge difference.

WHAT HAS THIS WORK TAUGHT YOU ABOUT YOURSELF?

This work has taught me that I love to share, learn, and work with both adults and children. I enjoy sharing what I know with anyone who is open to learning. I get really excited about learning new things or relearning familiar ones. Seeing children in environments where they are understood and supported is my greatest joy, and seeing adults become more conscious of who they are is truly amazing. This is not just work; it is a passion. It comes from the heart and is built on relationships, love, and care for people, leaving the world better than we found it.

WHAT SURPRISED YOU WHEN YOU FIRST STARTED WORKING WITH CONSCIOUS DISCIPLINE?

With consistent practice over time, I saw the change in myself, and then I was able to see misbehavior as a missing skill and offer help. It was surprising to see the connections I was able to build with my students, which made a huge difference in their cooperation and willingness to get things done.

WHAT'S SOMETHING YOU FIND YOURSELF REMINDING CAREGIVERS AND TEACHERS OF AGAIN AND AGAIN?

It starts with you. Be the change you want to see. You can't change anyone else.

WHAT'S ONE THING YOU HOPE READERS TAKE AWAY FROM YOUR EXPERIENCE?

I hope readers take away the importance of deep breathing, that moment of pause that allows us to reset. Positive self-talk, seeing things differently, and responding differently to situations are powerful skills. Viewing all behavior as a call for help and a missing skill allows us to choose teaching over punishment. When a child has a problem to solve, our role is to teach the missing skill rather than punish the behavior. With consistent daily practice, we can believe that change is possible. I wish the readers well.



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