

Delaware Institute for Excellence in Early Childhood

**Shifting Perspectives:
Early Childhood Educators' Perceptions Before
and After Conscious Discipline Training**



Authors: Deborah Fuller, Jason Hustedt, Kristy Sheffler, Christina Joe, Jennifer Potts, Lauren Strickland, and Ekaterina Novikova

Background

Conscious Discipline (Bailey, 2011) is a classroom management system that focuses on educator self-regulation and safe learning environments to support optimal child learning across developmental domains. Research indicates that when Conscious Discipline is implemented with fidelity, it is associated with a higher-quality classroom environment, including positive teacher-student relationships and improved teacher responsiveness to disruptive student behaviors (Wilburn et al., 2023). Conscious Discipline helps teachers support student emotional expression, problem-solving (Wilburn et al., 2023), emotional regulation, and conflict resolution (Ayers, 2020). In addition to being linked with gains in classroom quality and child social skills, Conscious Discipline is positively associated with executive function (Anderson et al., 2020), and executive function mediates the relationship between Conscious Discipline and kindergarten readiness skills (Anderson et al., 2022).

During the 2026 fiscal year, the Delaware Department of Education's (DDOE) Office of Early Learning (OEL) launched a group of three Conscious Discipline initiatives. All three initiatives were open to all early childhood professionals across the state of Delaware. The initiatives were:

1. The *Creating Safety Through Composure and Assertiveness* training – This is a 6-hour professional learning session facilitated by a certified Conscious Discipline Instructor (Conscious Discipline, 2026a). Participants were introduced to the Conscious Discipline Brain State Model and the foundational concepts of composure and assertiveness. Through a parallel process, educators first explored strategies to support their own self-regulation and learned how to apply those same strategies with children to foster emotionally and physically safe learning environments. The training emphasized that adults' ability to remain calm, connected, and intentional provides the foundation for supporting children's self-regulation and social-emotional development.
2. The *Handling Upset: The Adult-First Mindset* training – This is a 4-month professional learning series consisting of nine 1-hour asynchronous modules and four monthly 1-hour facilitated group sessions led by a certified Conscious Discipline Instructor (Conscious Discipline, 2026b). The course introduced the principle that adults' ability to regulate their own emotions is essential for effectively supporting children's emotional development. Participants examined how Conscious Discipline conceptualizes upset behavior as dysregulation and explored strategies for responding with composure, connection, and intention. The series also introduced classroom practices designed to help children strengthen self-regulation, build social-emotional skills, and respond more effectively to challenging situations.

3. The *Conscious Discipline: Building Resilient Classrooms* (Bailey, 2014) book study – Some program leaders who participated in the 6-hour *Creating Safety Through Composure and Assertiveness* training subsequently participated in a 9-month book study of *Conscious Discipline: Building Resilient Classrooms* (Bailey, 2014). The book study included monthly 1-hour Zoom-based cohort meetings focused on each chapter, along with individual consultation sessions to support application within the program leaders' programs. The book is organized around Conscious Discipline's Brain State Model. The book study explored the developmental needs of safety, connection, and problem-solving through the Seven Powers of Conscious Discipline. Participants learned about brain-based approaches, strategies for building a connected school family, and practical classroom activities to support children's self-regulation through both proactive and responsive approaches. The experience emphasized the parallel process of supporting adults' self-regulation while helping children develop emotional regulation skills.

Similar participant surveys were used to assess each initiative. Surveys for Initiatives 1 and 2 were administered by DDOE. The survey for Initiative 3 was administered by DIEEC. Survey questions were derived from the *Conscious Discipline Mindset Pre/Post Self-Reflections Training Tool* (Conscious Discipline, 2018a). DIEEC researchers analyzed the results from each survey, and we have shared them in this report.

Methods

Across all three initiatives, participants were asked to rate their attitudes toward managing children's behaviors. The *Creating Safety Through Composure and Assertiveness* training and the *Handling Upset* training assessed attitudes pre-and post-training. However, due to differences in data collection, there are differences in the types of pre-post comparisons that are possible for each type of training. We compared pre- and post-survey responses for the *Creating Safety Through Composure and Assertiveness* training using independent-sample t-tests. Availability of data to link participants in the pre- and post-training surveys and differences in sample sizes (pre-training $n = 881$, post-training $n = 606$) informed our plan for analysis.

The post-training survey had additional questions addressing perceptions of the usefulness of training sessions and changes in beliefs related to difficult child behaviors. We analyzed and reported descriptive statistics for these responses. As for the *Handling Upset* cohort, we used paired-sample t-tests, when data were available, to link pre- and post-cohort surveys and create matched pairs for comparison ($n = 35$).

The *Conscious Discipline Building Resilient Classrooms* book study participants were surveyed at a single time point at the end of the cohort. There were 15 book study participants, and 53% responded to the survey ($n = 8$). The small size of the cohort meant that there were fewer possible responses than with the *Creating Safety Through Composure and Assertiveness* and the *Handling Upset* surveys.

Summary of Results

Our analyses show that participation in Conscious Discipline training was linked with numerous positive changes in the attitudes and beliefs of participants. Those results are summarized in this section.

Participating in the *Creating Safety Through Composure and Assertiveness* training was associated with statistically significant **increases** in participants' agreement with the following statements:

- *Conflict is a call for help, not disrespect*
- *How I'm feeling affects how I act*
- *Children who act out are feeling threatened or unsafe*
- *I will be more successful in my work with children if I am more responsive and less reactive*
- *Discipline is a disruption to my day*

Participating in the *Creating Safety Through Composure and Assertiveness* training was associated with statistically significant **decreases** in participants' agreement with the following statements:

- *Rules are key to helping children behave*
- *I have fun helping children learn social skills*

Full results for the *Creating Safety Through Composure and Assertiveness* training are in Table 1.

Participating in the *Handling Upset* training was associated with statistically significant **increases** in participants' agreement with the following statements:

- *Conflict is a call for help, not disrespect*
- *Feelings are the root of behavior*
- *Children's mistakes are part of everyday life and learning*

Participating in the *Handling Upset* training was associated with statistically significant **decreases** in participants' agreement with the following statements:

- *Rules are key to helping children behave*
- *Children need to be controlled by some outside threat or consequence*

Full results for the *Handling Upset* training are in Table 3.

The post-training survey for *Creating Safety Through Composure and Assertiveness* asked additional questions about the perceived helpfulness of different sessions covering the Conscious Discipline rubric. A large majority of participants responded that each session was “very helpful.” Additionally, participants were asked about the degree to which they changed their minds about challenging child behaviors. Results are discussed in the section *Creating Safety Through Composure and Assertiveness Training* and depicted in Figures 2–6 below.

Using a similar survey, at the end of the *Conscious Discipline: Building Resilient Classrooms* book study, participants were asked to rate their attitudes related to a set of items focused on managing children’s behaviors. The items with the highest and lowest levels of agreement are shown here:

The highest agreement was found with these statements:

- *All behavior is some form of communication*
- *My connection with a child supports positive behavior*
- *I will be more successful in my work with children if I am more responsive and less reactive*
- *Children’s mistakes are part of everyday life and learning*
- *I have fun helping children learn social skills and positive behaviors*

The lowest agreement was found with these statements:

- *Children need to be controlled by some outside threat or consequence*
- *Discipline is a disruption to my day*
- *How I’m feeling affects how I act*
- *Supportive discipline is less effective than punishment.*

Further, similar to the *Creating Safety Through Composure and Assertiveness* and the *Handling Upset* survey results, we also asked *Conscious Discipline: Building Resilient Classrooms* book study respondents about the degree to which they changed their minds about challenging child behaviors. The results are depicted in Figures 8–18.

Creating Safety Through Composure and Assertiveness Training

We compared pre- and post-participant survey results using independent-samples t-tests on all 15 attitudes towards managing child behavior that appeared in both surveys. Independent-samples t-tests were selected because we were unable to match respondents across the two surveys, and the sample sizes differ (pre-training $n = 881$; post-training $n = 606$). Attitudes were assessed on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Not at all like me, 2 = A little like me, 3 = Somewhat like me, 4 = A lot like me, and 5 = Completely like me). Results are depicted in Table 1. Results of the “Two-sided p” column at a level of ≤ 0.05 show statistically significant differences.

Table 1. Changes in participant attitudes/perceptions (pre-training $n = 881$, post-training $n = 606$)

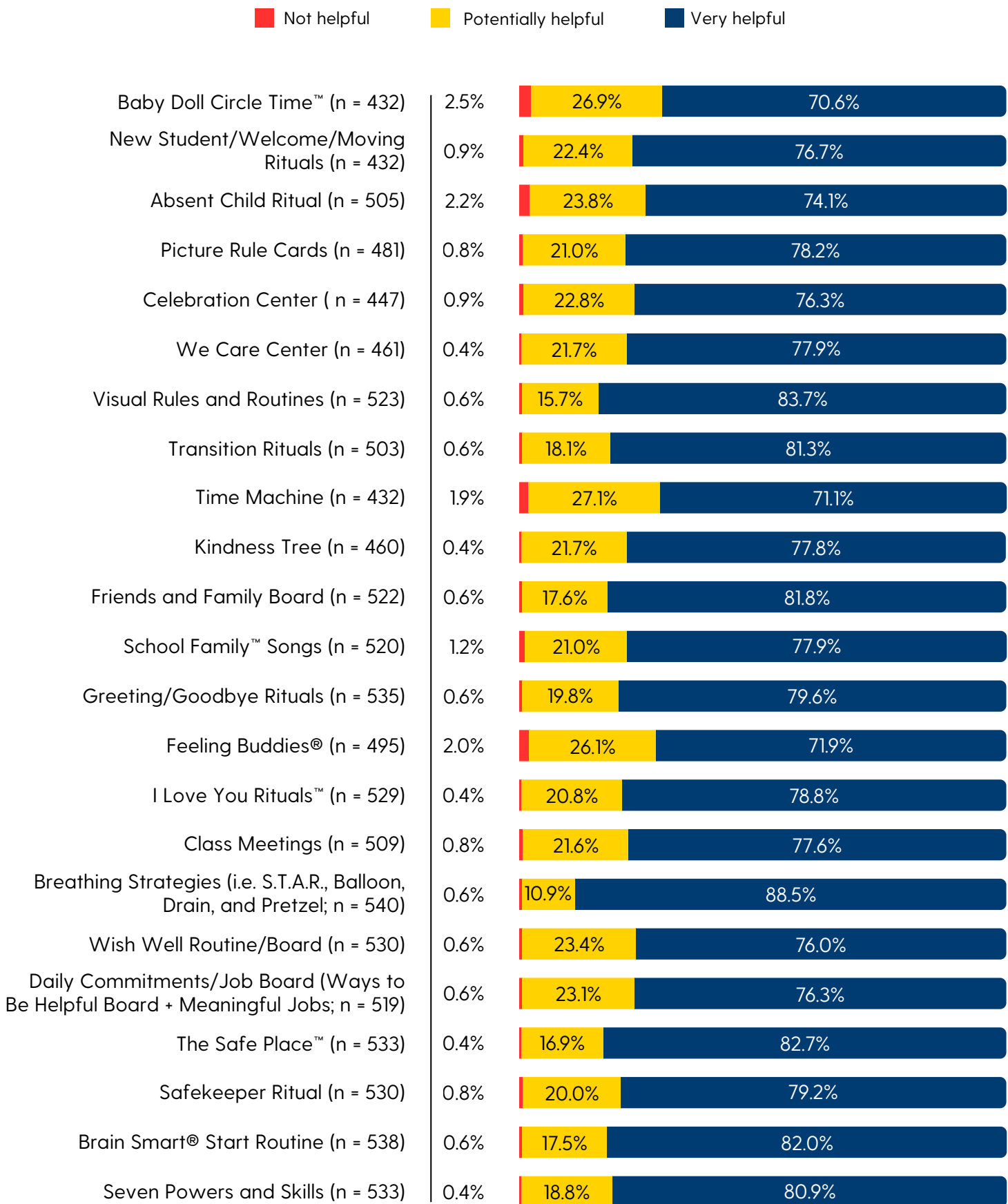
Participant Attitude/Perception	Pre-Training	Post-Training	$t(df)$	Two-sided p
	$M (SD)$	$M (SD)$		
<i>Conflict is a call for help, not disrespect</i>	3.16 (1.25)	3.60 (1.25)	6.56 (1485)	0.00
<i>Children need to be controlled by some outside threat or consequence</i>	1.45 (0.92)	1.62 (0.99)	0.89 (1485)	0.37
<i>My connection with a child supports positive behavior</i>	4.37 (0.83)	4.29 (1.00)	-1.68 (1130.90)	0.09
<i>How I'm feeling affects how I act</i>	2.76 (1.26)	3.22 (1.35)	6.62 (1242.34)	0.00
<i>Rules are key to helping children behave</i>	3.44 (1.05)	3.28 (1.16)	-2.58 (1207.97)	0.01
<i>Children who act out are feeling threatened or unsafe</i>	2.94 (1.87)	3.38 (1.23)	6.94 (1272.70)	0.00
<i>I will be more successful in my work with children if I am more responsive and less reactive</i>	3.74 (1.17)	3.93 (1.17)	3.03 (1485)	0.00
<i>Supportive discipline is less effective than punishment</i>	2.38 (1.43)	2.47 (1.51)	1.09 (1254.13)	0.27
<i>When I pay attention to certain behaviors, children are likely to do them more</i>	3.21 (1.20)	3.26 (1.24)	0.77 (1485)	0.44
<i>All behavior is some form of communication</i>	4.17 (0.99)	4.20 (1.05)	0.57 (1485)	0.57
<i>Discipline is a disruption to my day</i>	1.89 (1.02)	2.01 (1.09)	2.17 (1485)	0.03
<i>Feelings are the root of behavior</i>	3.69 (1.04)	3.75 (1.13)	0.94 (1230.75)	0.35
<i>My mistakes are part of everyday life and learning</i>	3.99 (1.05)	3.98 (1.14)	-0.20 (1231.99)	0.84
<i>Children's mistakes are part of everyday life and learning</i>	4.19 (0.97)	4.10 (1.09)	-1.67 (1193.83)	0.10
<i>I have fun helping children learn social skills and positive behavior</i>	4.45 (0.79)	4.26 (0.99)	-3.99 (1106.55)	0.00

Note: In the Pre-Training and Post-Training Columns, M = mean and SD = standard deviation. In the $t(df)$ column, t = t -value and df = degrees of freedom.

The post-training survey contained additional questions and responses related to participant ratings. Out of the 606 total participants, there were 66 who provided more than one answer within a single question. For clarity in interpreting the results, we removed them from the analysis of the Conscious Discipline sessions based on the *Conscious Discipline Rubric Progress Assessments* items (Loving Guidance Inc., 2018b), for a total of 540 participants in our analytic sample. Ratings were on a 3-point Likert scale (1 = Not helpful, 2 = Potentially helpful, and 3 = Very helpful). Average ratings by session are depicted in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Participant Ratings of Conscious Discipline Rubric-Based Sessions (n = 540)

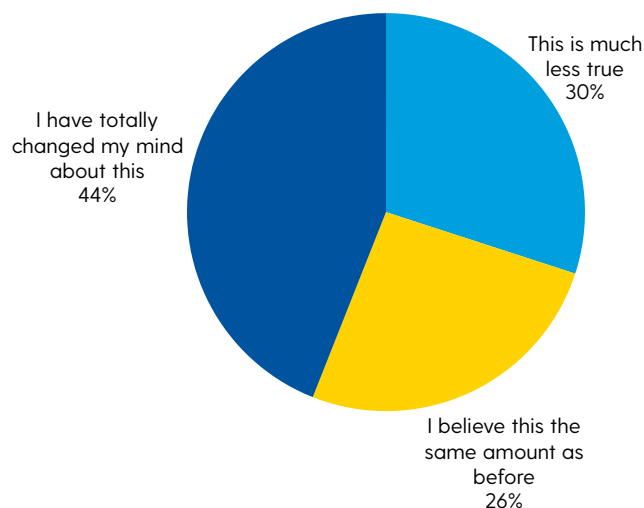


For each session, a large majority of participants rated each Conscious Discipline rubric item as “very helpful,” with percentages ranging from 70.6% to 88.5%. The top three sessions identified as “very helpful” were: Breathing Strategies (88.5%), Visual Rules and Routines (83.7%), and The Safe Place (82.7%).

For participants who began the training with perspectives that were inconsistent with Conscious Discipline priorities, there was an opportunity to examine changes in perspective following completion of this training. We examined the extent to which this group of participants reported they changed their minds about each of five challenging child behaviors, with results shown in Figures 2–6.

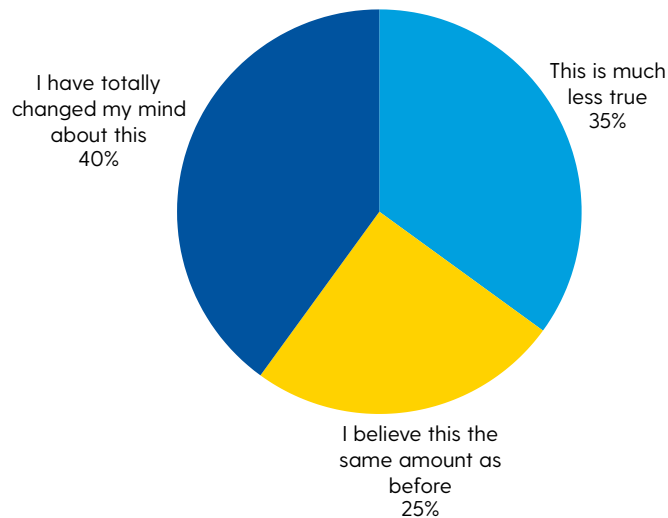
For the statement “Children’s refusal to listen to directions is willful misbehavior,” 33% of participants reported not believing this statement before the training. We would not expect to see a change in perspective by these participants, given that they reported perspectives already consistent with Conscious Discipline priorities. Of the remaining participants, 74% reported changing their minds about this, responding with “This is much less true” (30%) or “I have totally changed my mind about this” (44%). Figure 2 depicts these responses.

Figure 2. Responses to the statement “Children’s refusal to listen to directions is willful misbehavior” after completing Conscious Discipline training, among those who believed this statement before training (n = 362)



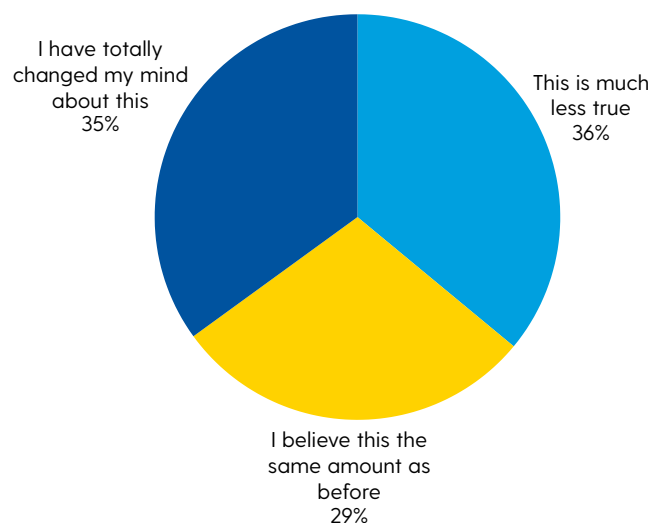
For the statement “When a child hurts another child, they need to be punished,” 39% of participants reported not believing this statement before the training. Of the remaining participants, 75% reported changing their minds about this, responding with “This is much less true” (35%) or “I have totally changed my mind about this” (40%). Figure 3 depicts these responses.

Figure 3. Responses to the statement “When a child hurts another child, they need to be punished” after completing Conscious Discipline training, among those who believed this statement before training (n = 331)



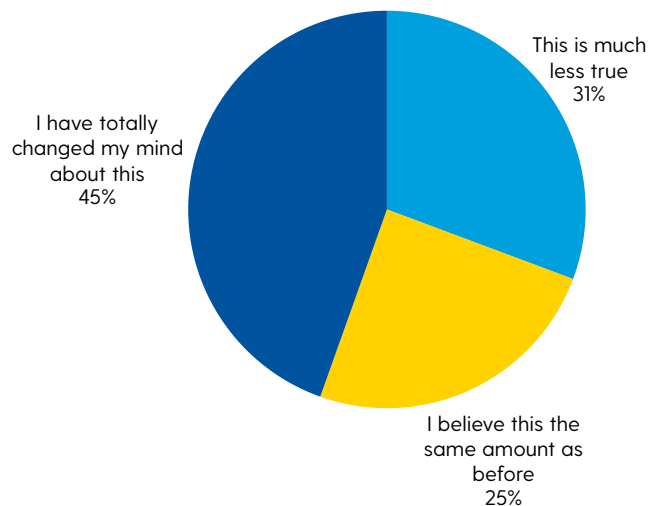
For the statement “Children who have had a few chances to correct their misbehavior should be punished if the problem continues,” 33% of participants reported not believing this statement before the training. Of the remaining participants, 71% reported changing their minds about this, responding with “This is much less true” (36%) or “I have totally changed my mind about this” (35%). Figure 4 depicts these responses.

Figure 4. Responses to the statement “Children who have had a few chances to correct their misbehavior should be punished if the problem continues” after completing Conscious Discipline training, among those who believed this statement before training (n = 361)



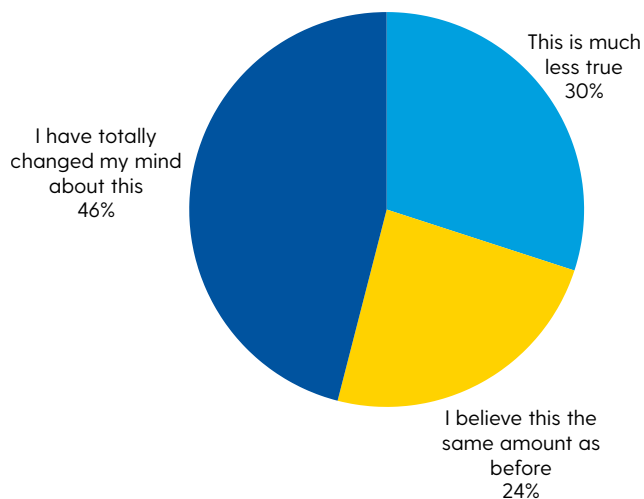
For the statement “Conflict among children is disruptive and an inconvenience to me,” 43% of participants reported not believing this statement before the training. Of the remaining participants, 76% reported changing their minds about this, responding with “This is much less true” (31%) or “I have totally changed my mind about this” (45%). Figure 5 depicts these

Figure 5. Responses to the statement “Conflict among children is disruptive and an inconvenience to me” after completing Conscious Discipline training, among those who believed this statement before training (n = 308)



For the statement “Children’s misbehavior is the cause of my upset,” 42% of participants reported not believing this statement before the training. Of the remaining participants, 76% reported changing their minds about this, responding with “This is much less true” (30%) or “I have totally changed my mind about this” (46%). Figure 6 depicts these responses.

Figure 6. Responses to the statement “Children’s misbehavior is the cause of my upset” after completing Conscious Discipline training, among those who believed this statement before training (n = 314)



Open-text responses were also included in both pre- and post-training surveys. Qualitative analysis of responses can be provided upon request.

Handling Upset: The Adult First Mindset Training

We compared pre- and post-participant survey results using paired-samples t-tests with the 15 attitudes towards managing child behavior that appeared in both surveys. These items are the same as those used with the *Creating Safety Through Composure and Assertiveness* training above. We removed responses with no ID number, duplicates, and those that were unpaired in order to refine the sample for analysis ($n = 35$; See Table 3). Attitudes were assessed on a five-point Likert scale (1=Not at all like me, 2= A little like me, 3= Somewhat like me, 4=A lot like me, and 5=Completely like me). Results in the “Two-Sided p” column at a level of ≤ 0.05 show statistically significant differences.



Table 3. Changes in attitudes/perceptions at the participant level (n = 35)

Participant Attitude/Perception	Pre-Training	Post Training	<i>t</i> (df)	Two-sided <i>p</i>
	<i>M</i> (SD)	<i>M</i> (SD)		
<i>Conflict is a call for help, not disrespect</i>	3.51 (1.31)	4.03 (1.07)	2.36 (43)	0.02
<i>Children need to be controlled by some outside threat or consequence</i>	1.60 (1.01)	1.26 (0.74)	-2.42 (34)	0.01
<i>My connection with a child supports positive behavior</i>	4.71 (0.52)	4.66 (0.54)	-0.70 (34)	0.49
<i>How I'm feeling affects how I act</i>	2.86 (1.44)	3.34 (1.37)	1.97 (34)	0.06
<i>Rules are key to helping children behave</i>	3.49 (0.92)	3.17 (1.29)	-2.15 (34)	0.04
<i>Children who act out are feeling threatened or unsafe</i>	3.26 (1.09)	3.57 (1.27)	1.51 (34)	0.14
<i>I will be more successful in my work with children if I am more responsive and less reactive</i>	4.17 (0.82)	4.34 (0.94)	1.10 (34)	0.28
<i>Supportive discipline is less effective than punishment</i>	2.74 (1.58)	2.31 (1.51)	-1.39 (34)	0.17
<i>When I pay attention to certain behaviors, children are likely to do them more</i>	3.46 (1.27)	1.27 (3.77)	1.17 (34)	1.61
<i>All behavior is some form of communication</i>	4.49 (0.78)	4.69 (0.58)	1.65 (34)	0.12
<i>Discipline is a disruption to my day</i>	1.89 (1.08)	1.69 (1.08)	-0.89 (34)	0.38
<i>Feelings are the root of behavior</i>	3.89 (0.93)	4.29 (0.70)	2.79 (32)	0.01
<i>My mistakes are part of everyday life and learning</i>	4.11 (1.08)	4.46 (0.74)	1.75 (34)	0.09
<i>Children's mistakes are part of everyday life and learning</i>	4.14 (1.00)	4.51 (0.70)	2.13 (34)	0.04
<i>I have fun helping children learn social skills and positive behavior</i>	4.54 (0.70)	4.63 (0.55)	1.00 (34)	0.32

Note: In the Pre-Training and Post-Training Columns, *M* = mean and *SD* = standard deviation. In the *t*(*df*) column, *t* = *t*-value and *df* = degrees of freedom.

Other than open-text responses, the Handling Upset post-cohort survey did not include any other questions. Analysis of open-text responses can be provided upon request.

Conscious Discipline: Building Resilient Classrooms Book Study

The Conscious Discipline book study survey was at a single point in time at the end of the initiative. Among the 15 book study participants, 53% responded (n = 8). Similar to the prior surveys, this survey also assessed the 15 attitudes towards managing child behavior. These items are the same as those used with the *Creating Safety Through Composure and Assertiveness* training and the *Handling Upset: The Adult First Mindset Training*.

Attitudes were assessed on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Not at all like me, 2 = A little like me, 3 = Somewhat like me, 4 = A lot like me, and 5 = Completely like me). The results of the 15 attitudes and perceptions towards managing participants post-book study are depicted in Figure 7. Statements in the bar chart also include the mean response as well as the number of individuals who selected each response option.

Figure 7. Participant attitudes/perceptions (n = 8)

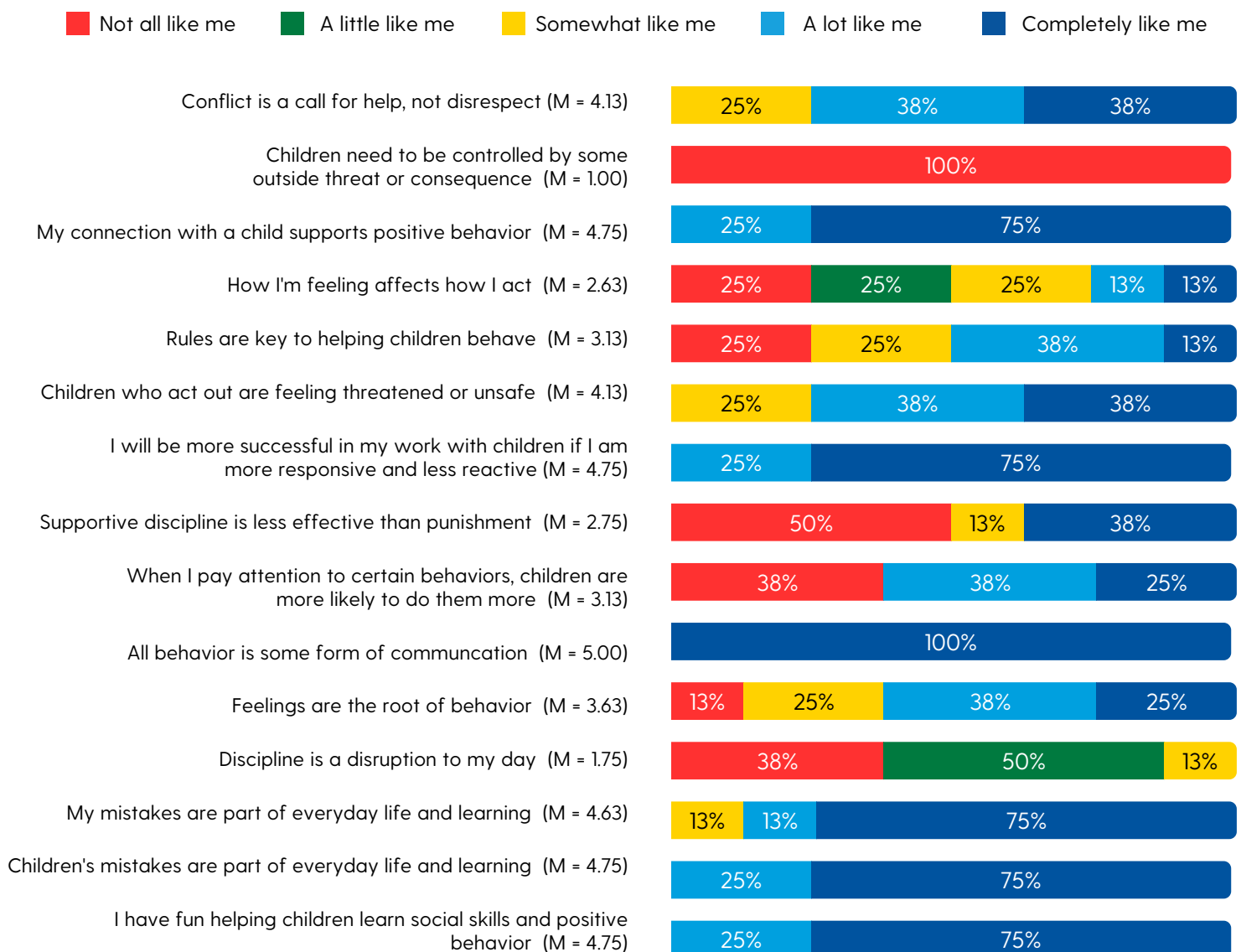
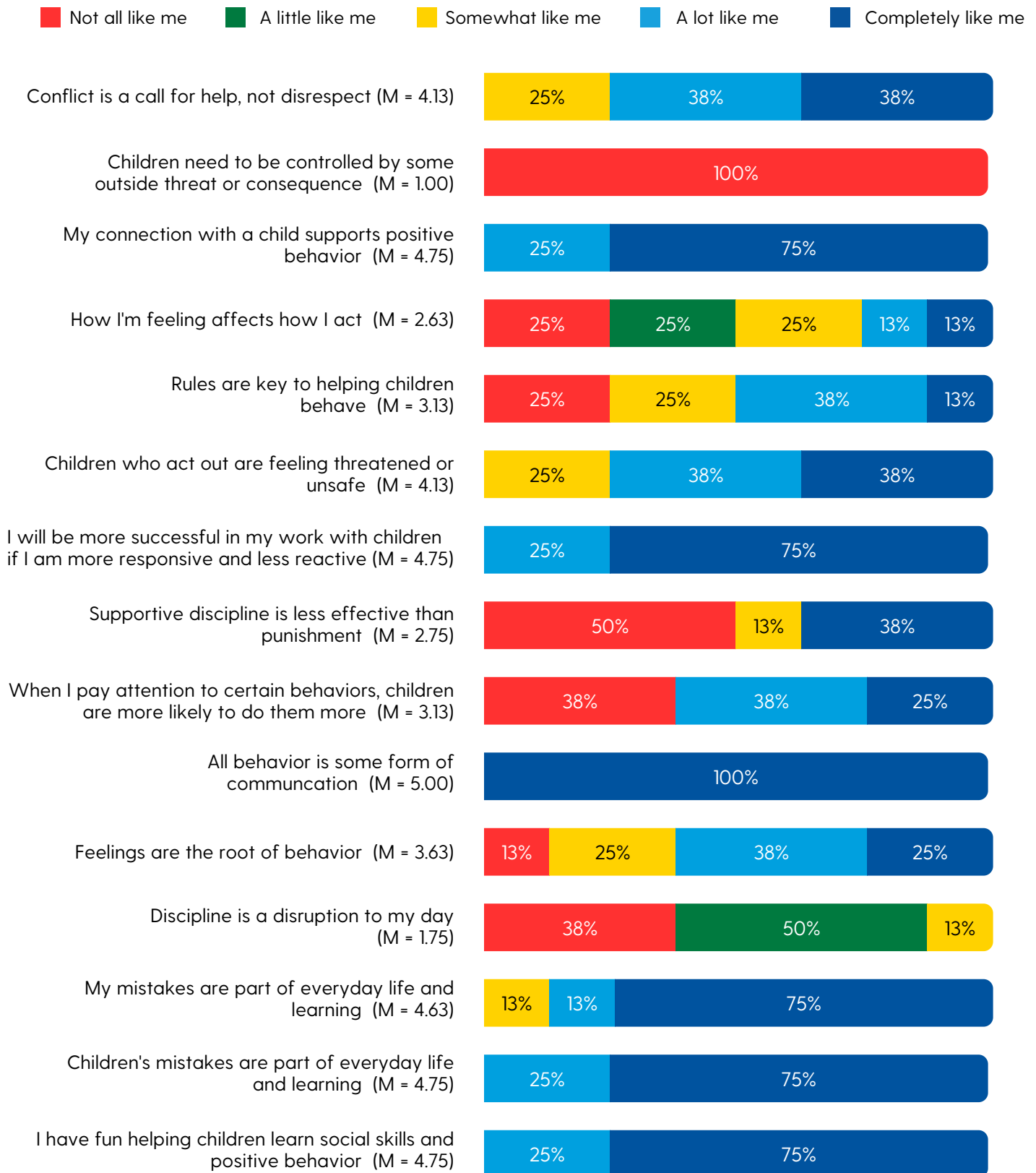


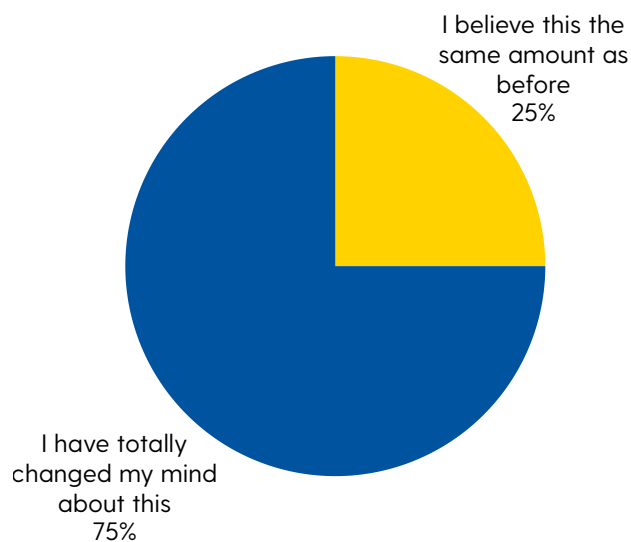
Figure 7. Participant attitudes/perceptions (n = 8)



We also examined the extent to which book study participants reported changing their minds about each of the five challenging child behaviors, with the results shown in Figures 8-12. These items are the same as those used in the *Creating Safety Through Composure and Assertiveness* post-training survey.

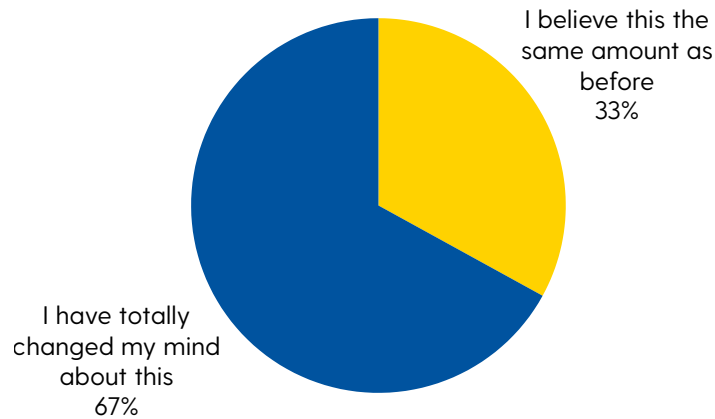
For the statement “Children’s refusal to listen to directions is willful misbehavior,” 50% of participants reported not believing this statement before the training. Of the remaining participants, 75% reported changing their minds about this, responding with “I have totally changed my mind about this.” Figure 8 depicts these responses.

Figure 8. Responses to the statement “Children’s refusal to listen to directions is willful misbehavior” after completing *Conscious Discipline* training, among those who believed this statement before training (n = 4)



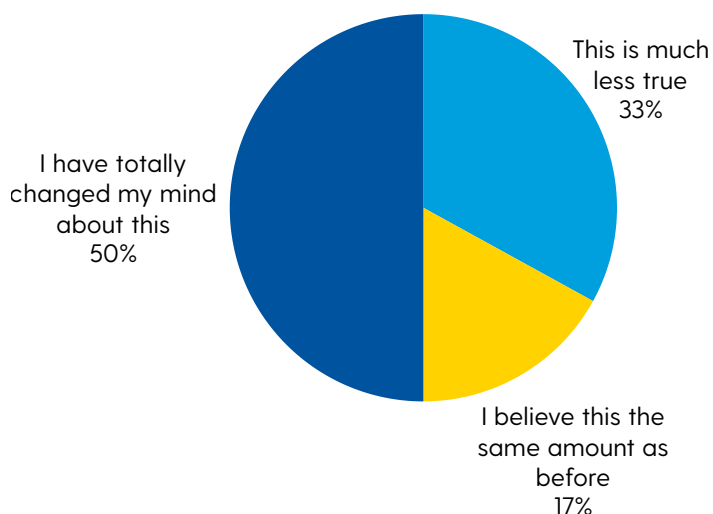
For the statement that “When a child hurts another child, they need to be punished,” 63% of respondents did not believe this before the training. Of the remaining participants, 67% reported changing their minds about this, responding with “I have totally changed my mind about this.” Figure 9 depicts these responses.

Figure 9. Responses to the statement “When a child hurts another child, they need to be punished” after completing Conscious Discipline training, among those who believed this statement before training (n = 3)



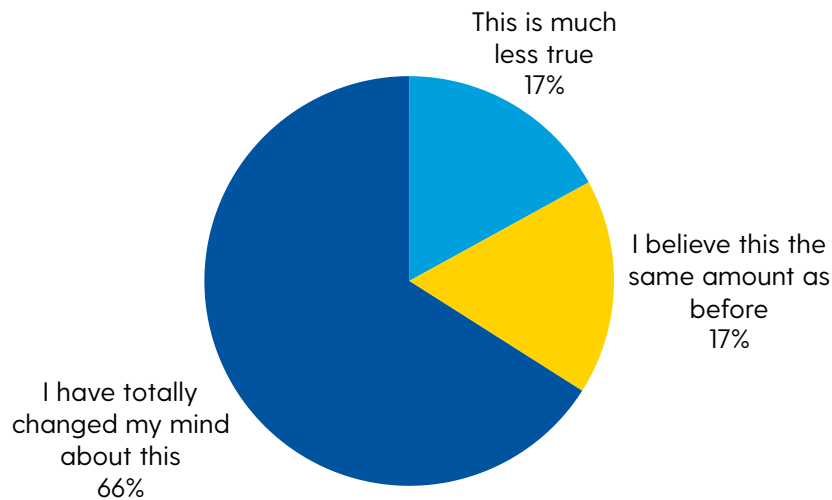
Of the seven respondents to the statement “Children who have had a few chances to correct their misbehavior should be punished if the problem continues,” 14% of respondents did not believe this before the training. Of the remaining participants, 83% reported changing their minds about this, responding with “This is much less true” (33%) or “I have totally changed my mind about this” (50%). Figure 10 depicts these responses.

Figure 10. Responses to the statement “Children who have had a few chances to correct their misbehavior should be punished if the problem continues” after completing Conscious Discipline training, among those who believed this statement before training (n = 6)



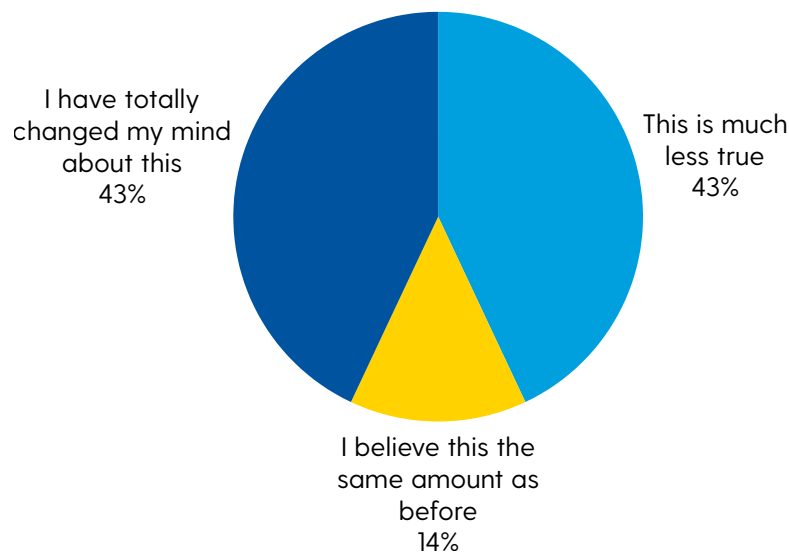
For the statement “Conflict among children is disruptive and an inconvenience to me,” 25% of respondents did not believe this before the training. Of the remaining participants, 83% reported changing their minds about this, responding with “This is much less true” (17%) or “I have totally changed my mind about this” (66%). Figure 11 depicts these responses.

Figure 11. Responses to the statement “Conflict among children is disruptive and an inconvenience to me” after completing Conscious Discipline training, among those who believed this statement before training (n= 6)



For the statement “Children’s misbehavior is the cause of my upset,” 13% of respondents did not believe this before the training. Of the remaining participants, 86% reported changing their minds about this, responding with “This is much less true” (43%) or “I have totally changed my mind about this” (43%). Figure 12 depicts these responses.

Figure 12. Responses to the statement “Children’s misbehavior is the cause of my upset” after completing Conscious Discipline training, among those who believed this statement before training (n= 7)



Limitations and Future Directions

Results across three different Conscious Discipline initiatives in Delaware offer a nuanced view of how members of the state's early childhood workforce shifted their perspectives to view and respond to child behaviors in a more positive light. However, there are some limitations that may affect the interpretation of these results. The sample size with available data from the *Creating Safety Through Composure and Assertiveness* training, while large, was not the same from pre- to post-training. This may reflect attrition bias in which participants less satisfied with the training or who did not require a certificate of completion did not respond to the post-training survey, potentially skewing results. Similarly, it was only possible to match a small group of the *Handling Upset: The Adult-First Mindset* participants from pre- to post-training. The *Conscious Discipline: Building Resilient Classrooms* book study sample was very small and only offers post-experience results. Finally, all three initiatives rely on self-report measures administered soon after the end of each initiative. This approach can be informative in capturing attitudes immediately after the training, but it cannot capture long-term change in attitudes or practices.

Future research could focus on improving completion rates and the ability to match participants from pre- to post-training. Doing so would strengthen the quality of the survey data, reduce the potential for attrition bias, and provide a clearer picture of participants' experiences over time. In addition, incorporating objective measures, such as classroom observations, alongside self-report surveys could provide stronger evidence of whether changes in attitudes are reflected in practice and ultimately influence classroom environments and children's experiences. Conducting follow-up surveys and observations several months after the completion of an initiative would further help determine whether changes in attitudes and practices are sustained over time. Finally, future research could examine how the different Conscious Discipline initiatives complement one another or are potentially suited to different segments of the early childhood workforce. This would provide insight into how professional learning experiences may be targeted to maximize impact.

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About the Authors

Deborah Fuller, PhD: Deborah is the assistant director of research and evaluation at DIEEC. She has been with the Institute since 2019, previously as a research assistant and a limited-term researcher. Deborah previously worked in several roles in Early Head Start and as state lead for the Idaho Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program.

Jason Hustedt, PhD: Jason is the chair of the Department of Human Development and Family Sciences at the University of Delaware and the DIEEC research director. His research focuses on early childhood policies and practice, including the impact of state-funded pre-K programs on child outcomes, Head Start/Early Head Start, and child care subsidies.

Kristy Sheffler, PhD: Kristy is the deputy director of DIEEC. She has been with the Institute since 2014, and her areas of interest include early childhood, workforce development, and promoting young children's mental health.

Jennifer Potts, EdD: Jennifer is DIEEC's associate director for the leadership and administration team. She has been with the Institute since 2012, having served in various technical assistance roles before stepping into leadership in 2019. Her work focuses on quality improvement, curriculum and assessment, and professional development.

Christina Joe, EdD: Christina is currently a research associate at DIEEC. She has been with the Institute since 2013. Before joining DIEEC, she held a variety of roles in early childhood and school-age education, including teacher, coordinator, director, trainer, and consultant.

Lauren M. Strickland, MS: Lauren is a graduate research assistant at DIEEC and a PhD candidate in Human Development and Family Sciences at the University of Delaware. Her dissertation focuses on family-school-community collaboration supporting children and youth with disabilities experiencing homelessness.

Ekaterina Novikova, MA: Ekaterina is a fifth-year PhD candidate in Human Development and Family Sciences. She has successfully defended her doctoral dissertation and will graduate in August with her PhD. Ekaterina is currently working as a graduate research assistant at DIEEC.



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