

# Cut it Out!

## Insights from Dr. Allison Rees

This *Cut it Out!* book is a compilation of short articles written to support parents in their quest for conscious parenting.

Her insights come from years of teaching the LIFE material and working with families in private practice.



A trusted voice of parent education in the Victoria community where over 30,000 parents have taken the LIFE (Living In Families Effectively) courses.

Her greatest teaching comes from living the material while raising her two, now adult, children. Still teaching, learning and sharing insights.



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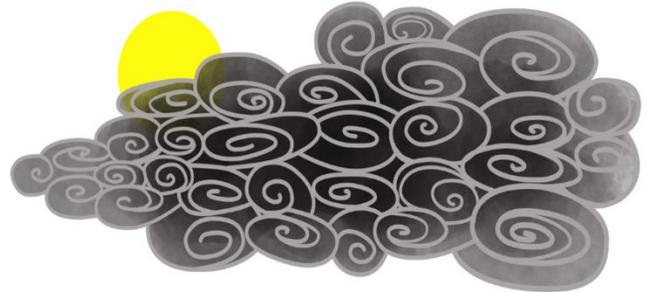
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# Clouds

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Clouds come and go, this is out of your control. What would happen if you got upset every time it got cloudy or it rained? The clouds would be in charge! Life has clouds and sometimes it rains, really hard. Spending time reacting to the rain is only useful for a moment or two and then you grab your raincoat or umbrella and get on with your day, your life, your plans, even if the plans had to change.



As parents, we have the wisdom and experience to recognize the importance of accepting what we can't change and to control what we can...but our kids don't.

**We keep our kids stuck under the clouds when we:**

- Feel sorry for them.
- Dismiss their feelings.
- Allow a "feel bad" story to continue beyond that useful moment.
- Take over their problems.
- Over-protect them.



**We need to be an umbrella for our kids by:**

- Giving empathy (not sympathy).
- Helping them identify their needs; acceptance, autonomy, understanding, comfort and so on...and brainstorm about how to meet those needs despite the clouds.
- Inviting them to answer questions that change perspectives: What's good about this? What has worked for you before? What now? And so on.....
- Showing faith that they can handle the growing pains of life.
- Being present, loving and calm.
- Providing protection without overdoing it.



Feelings are to be accepted but thoughts can be tweaked. Unhealthy entitlement says things *should* go a certain way or this *shouldn't* happen to me. This doesn't lead to peace or thoughtful action, only to thinking like a victim. Emotional freedom comes from knowing what we can and can't control.

## Be a Gem

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Be a GEM, a good enough mother. Parenting is no place for perfectionism. The longer you hang onto high standards, appearances and raising perfect little angels, the more you will suffer.

Parenting children is an experience that changes you from the inside out. Nothing in life compares to the love, fatigue, frustration or guilt you feel when you are a parent. To add to the intensity of emotions is the fact that your basic needs don't get met. Your sleep is interrupted. You can't relax and eat a meal without little ones getting up and down.

Who would have thought that going to the smallest room of your house where you used to sit in solitude is now a public space? Multi-tasking at a whole new level! You might find yourself saying or doing things that you don't feel great about. This happens. Let yourself feel healthy guilt which motivates change but don't go to shame. Guilt says, "What I did was unacceptable." Shame says, "I'm unacceptable." Watch that thought, it just isn't true.

While your circumstances won't be changing anytime soon, your way of thinking can.

- Your children will give you their most demanding behavior because they have their strongest bond with you, not because you are a *bad* mom.
- You will have times when you don't feel loving simply because your self-care is absent.
- It might look like other parents have it all together, they don't.
- You will have times when you just don't know how to handle your kids, that is normal.
- It's not selfish to take time to yourself when possible, even if you do nothing.
- A messy house is a sign that somebody lives there.
- Saying "good enough" is not lazy, it saves energy for things that really matter.
- When your kids are acting like kids, you probably aren't being judged and if you are, tell yourself, "It is none of my business what you think of me or my kids."

While pain is a part of life, suffering doesn't have to be. We suffer when mistaken thinking creeps into our life circumstances. If you hold the bar too high, it could be that your inner critic is taking over. Fire her! Okay, so she will never totally disappear, just don't give her permission to run the show. Tell her, you are a good enough mom.



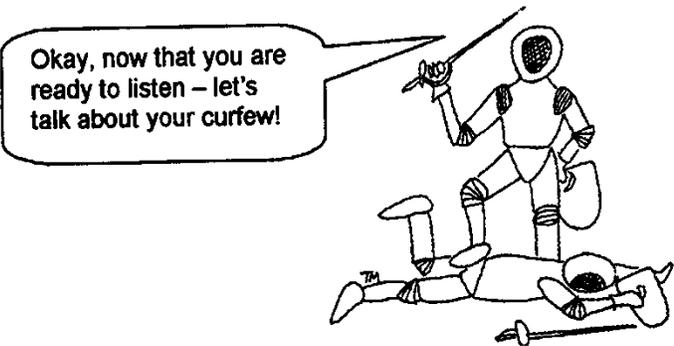
## Always Right?

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"I finally met Mr. Right. If only I knew his first name was always!" Some people base their self-esteem on being right. They never admit mistakes, don't apologize and assume only one person's point of view is correct. If this is you, you really need to take a look at this! Children know that parents make mistakes, even if you don't acknowledge it. Sometimes this happens when we lose our tempers and bark out a consequence. It's much better to admit to seeing things differently after you calm down. Your child will appreciate this and will learn from your role modeling.

When we insist on always being right, a child learns to accept his parent's assumptions and second guesses himself. This affects his self-esteem so he tries to boost it by being right as much as he can. Then.....he becomes like his parent.

Many of us have lived with a parent who insisted that he or she was always right, even in situations in which they were clearly wrong. Why does a parent do this? Because he or she has grown up in a family atmosphere where it was made clear that when people saw a situation differently, one and only one person was always right. Only that person deserved respect and insisted on being listened to. Everyone else was wrong, and therefore shamed. The child learns that in addition to having to be right, that the way to establish that you are right is through power and force – through being the big person, who by virtue of your size or your ability with words can establish your rightness.



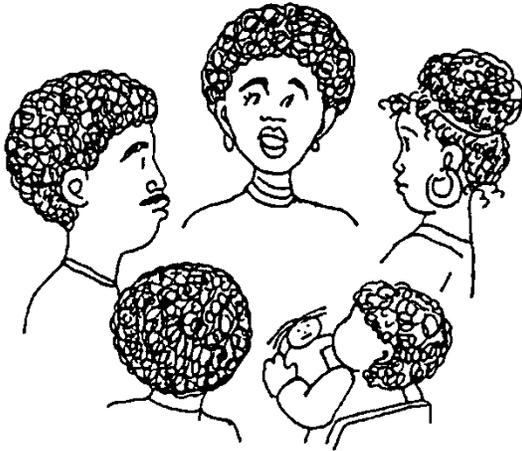
Okay, now that you are ready to listen – let's talk about your curfew!

The reality is that we live in a world where "right" is a difficult thing to establish. We can't be "right" about "the facts", because if any two people are asked to remember the same situation, they will almost always remember it somewhat differently! We can't be "right" about decisions, because when we make decisions, we don't know all the facts. We can't be right about the meanings of words, because words have different meanings. Mature moral behavior is based not on rigid rules of "rightness" but on recognizing that other people are selves just like we are and have a right to different opinions.

## Family Decision Making

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Effective communication skills need to be taught and practiced on a regular basis. These include learning how to take turns and listen to the speaker until there is an understanding of how that person feels and why they feel that way. We also need to listen to what really matters to that person once they have expressed those feelings.



We can learn to talk about an issue without blaming the other person, making assumptions or putting the other person down. These basic skills are a necessary component to conflict resolution and family decision making. When we do this, we decrease sibling rivalry, power struggles and actually win cooperation amongst family members.

When people feel heard and have a sense that their ideas are significant, it brings about a sense of belonging. The steps to making decisions or resolving conflict are as follows:

1. Identify the issue and stick to that point without bringing in other issues. Bringing up the past or other subjects will turn it into an argument that can't be resolved.
2. Hear the feelings and needs of each person. You don't have to agree, it is okay to see things differently. Just listen to understand by putting yourself in the other person's shoes.
3. Once step two is complete then invite people to throw out ideas. This is called brainstorming and the most important part of this is not to judge the ideas as they come up. Just make a note of them and keep asking, "What else could work?" Gather as many ideas as possible and have some fun by saying something crazy.
4. This is where the adults need to keep the playing field level by not taking over. Involve the kids when deciding what *won't* work. Once you get rid of what *won't* work, you have some good ideas.
5. Take those ideas and make a plan. You can write it up or draw a picture and stick it where everyone can see it. Let that visual structure be the boss!

You can set up a gripe board and agree to review it on a weekly basis. Co-operation is the end result of practicing these skills and while things may not work out perfectly, the bigger picture is that kids are learning a lifelong skill.

## Act Your Age!

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Do you often tell your children that their behavior is “inappropriate”? That is not an accurate thing to say. This means that you don’t understand how normal children behave and you are holding up a standard that your child can’t reach. Understand how normal children act and accept that the behavior is actually appropriate for a child that age! You don’t have to approve of the behavior, but you do need to accept it. Embracing childhood and all that goes with it grows loving, nurturing and self-assured adults!

### Normal children:

- have behavior that embarrasses parents
- explore the world and take risks
- have problems with their feelings so they scream, bite, hit, pinch and use strong statement like “I hate you.”
- say things that aren’t true
- ask lots of questions
- forget instructions and get distracted
- don’t focus on what we think is important
- don’t understand time
- don’t edit their thoughts and say them out loud



If you accept your child’s immaturity and notice positive behavior when it occurs, you will promote positive growth in your child. Relax, enjoy this time, even though it has it’s challenges....you don’t need to make it more challenging by thinking there is something wrong with your child!

Before you were a parent, you probably thought your children would never act like those snotty nosed brats in the supermarket. Hello!!!!

*See what happens if you find humor this week and let go of correcting your child.*

## Moral Values

To develop higher levels of moral development we need to feel healthy guilt. Healthy guilt isn't shame. Shame says, "I'm no good." Healthy guilt says, "What I did wasn't good." If we rely on punishment to teach a child it might do the opposite. A punishment can clear the ledger of "wrong doing". "I've been punished so now we are even." The child just focuses on the punishment rather than what they actually did and the effect it may have had on others. Punishment doesn't teach higher levels of moral development.

If we only believe something is wrong if we get punished for it, our conscience will trouble us only when we are caught doing something what some authority thinks is wrong. If our moral values are based on keeping rules and laws, our conscience will trouble us when we break a rule set down by some authority. If our moral values are



based on the higher moral principle of the Golden Rule, our conscience will trouble us when we harm another person or ourselves.

To develop mature moral values, a child needs to:

- 1) Know the realities of life, the meaning of truth and falsehood, and the results of deception.
- 2) Be able to think maturely and flexibly, consider the long-term results of their actions, and look at all aspects of a situation.
- 3) Have a sense of themselves as an independent human being rather than someone who blindly obeys rules or disobeys them.
- 4) Have the ability to recognize their own feelings, express them appropriately, hold back hurtful actions which might result from those feelings, and meet their needs in ways which do not harm either themselves or others in the long run.
- 5) Have a thorough understanding that other persons, of all kinds, are selves like too and that his or her actions can have helpful or harmful consequences for them.

You may wonder if you are on track with your parenting at times when your child appears thoughtless or mean. It takes most of childhood and then some to reach a point where we realize that other people have feelings just like we do. The most effective style of parenting is called induction. This is when we show children the effects of our behavior on others in a way that is free of shame inducing or harsh punishments. If rules are explained in the context of the Golden Rule, slowly, children will begin to understand the deeper meaning of how to treat people with respect.

## ***Say Yes to the Givens of LIFE***

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When we press our heels in and fight against *The Givens of Life*, we become indignant and self-righteous, like helpless victims. Why me? We complain, protest and stomp our feet insisting that life behave itself. But it won't. Life happens and we have to say a wholehearted YES to it. When we do, we decrease our stress levels, find courage and resilience.

Along with various other givens of life, there are five that are unavoidable:

- 1. Everything changes and ends.**
- 2. Things do not always go according to plan.**
- 3. Life is not always fair.**
- 4. Pain is part of life.**
- 5. People are not loyal and loving all the time.**

Perhaps we were told these things when we complained as children. I'm not sure that approach really helped although a shrug of the shoulder often allowed us to *get over it*. Holding up *The Givens of Life* shouldn't replace reflective listening. Quoting any of these Givens to our children when they complain would be dismissive and cold.

Teaching our children to accept Life's Givens isn't done through lectures or reprimands. It doesn't sound like "suck it up". Instead, we allow the pain, the disappointment and the hurt to be present. When we acknowledge that others experience the Givens too, we develop compassion.

While life takes its twists, we can adapt to the unexpected happening. We are highly capable of being creative and resourceful in a pinch. If we feed our children's mistaken ideas that everything should be fair, we are working against reality. Sometimes you get a little more, and sometimes you get a little less. In all healthy relationships there is a give and take.

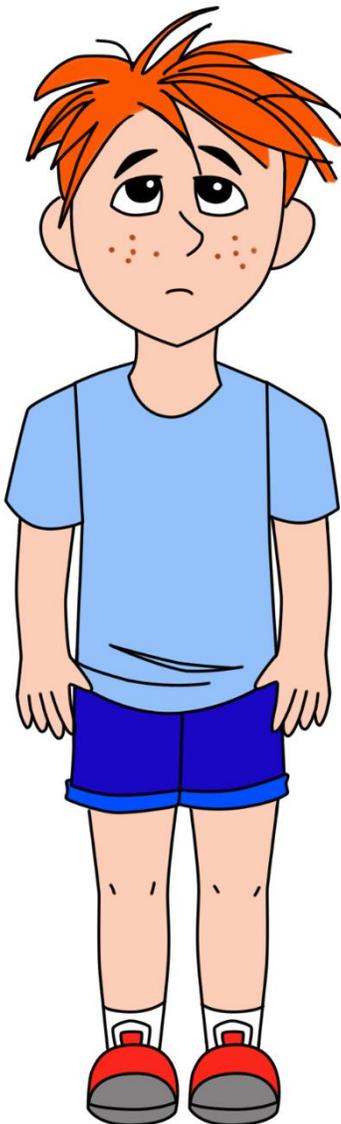


It's true, people won't be loving and loyal all the time. That hurts and can be disappointing but it is part of the human condition. Fighting against life's reality creates suffering. Teach children to be highly efficient at what they can control and find peace with what they can't.

## Determined to Win

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Who are you parenting? Has your child ever been described as stubborn, strong willed or determined? While persistence is a wonderful trait it can also play into a negative pattern of behavior. You say “no” and your child pushes harder. You might find yourself giving in, “Fine then, get the tattoo you little six year old!” Or, you might get locked into power struggles that escalate. The good news is that you can turn this around.



First of all, if you are going to give in, give in right away! Don't engage in a debate, this only trains your child to argue every time there is a limit. If you aren't sure, rather than blurting out a “no”, ask for a moment to think about it. Use this time to do a control check. Am I sweating the small stuff? Is he needing more freedom or independence? Am I being stubborn? Is this a limit that matters?

If there is a negative pattern or an ongoing issue, work it out with your child at a neutral time, not in the heat of the moment. Persistent kids are great at going along with a plan if they are a part of it. Explain your desire to be fair and considerate and why having time to think about your answer is important. What could this look like? You can also explain that you are likely to say “no” if there is a demand. This isn't being over-controlling, it is teaching a boundary that applies to all relationships. It is respectful to give people time to think about things and hear a “no”. When there is a reasonable “no”, state the reason for the limit *and* give your child empathy. Persistent kids grieve the loss of their ideas. They feel the disappointment strongly. Let them know you understand they are disappointed and why they feel that way. This can help your child change gears.

You also need to know when to end the conversation. Continuing with explanations too long or getting wrapped up in the negative emotions doesn't give your child the chance to move on. At this point you may lovingly disengage, perhaps a good time to use the washroom? Now your persistent child might try to follow you so explain your need for privacy as

you lock yourself in the bathroom. Once you are in there, turn on the taps, breathe and congratulate yourself as you look in the mirror. “That was a reasonable “no”, good job!”

## Dear Couple with Young Kids

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Dear Couple with Young Kids. You are in one of the most difficult times of marriage. Sure, you have those moments when your kids are so adorable that you could both burst with joy but typically, those are moments amidst the daily grind of life. You might notice that you parent very differently from each other. Often one parent believes that the other is too lenient and should just lay down the law! Or, you may see your partner as too strict and insensitive.



There will be times when you may even wonder if you like each other, this is normal. Feelings can change moment by moment but the need for love is shared by both of you all the time.

When you don't have time to be creative, rest or be alone it is natural to feel resentful. You might look at your partner and think they have it easier than you as they walk out the door to work with adults in an organized environment. Or maybe you wish you could have time at home to hang out with the kids all day. The truth is, you are both working hard, and it just looks different. Try to avoid feeling competitive about time, soon enough you will have time, this is just a phase. How many people tell you to enjoy it while you can because kids grow up so fast! Doesn't your sleep deprived body just want to kick them? But...it's true. Acceptance of where you are at with the wisdom to know it will change soon enough can bring about a sense of peace.

You might find that you don't talk to each other much anymore. When this happens the glue of the relationship can dry up. You need that glue to stick! Your children will benefit if you take some of the focus off of them and direct it back to each other. How do you stay connected? If it's too complicated, it won't happen. Keep it simple but do it! If you feel so resentful that you aren't sure that you want to connect remember that distancing never helps it just creates more misunderstandings. If there are important issues to deal with, deal with them! Get help if you need to.

There are three legs to the milking stool: Self Care, Couple Care and Child Care. How are you finding balance?

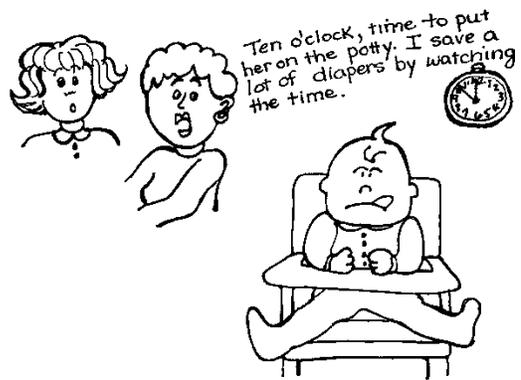
## All Pooped Out?

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Anytime between 18 months and four years of age is normal for kids to start using the potty. Many kids take even longer, especially if the demands of a preschool or a parent's own anxiety is creating tension. This can push the potty issue into a power struggle. If that is happening, you have to back out!

In order for your child to let go, you have to let go. No rewards or reprimands will work when a child feels pressured. Your first step is to let potty training be a non-issue for a few weeks. That means saying nothing when there are accidents or even backing off all together if things have become tense.

When your child shows interest or has a success be careful with your praise! Your child needs to feel in charge of the process and doesn't need the added pressure of pleasing you. Praise is often the hidden culprit to a lack of success.



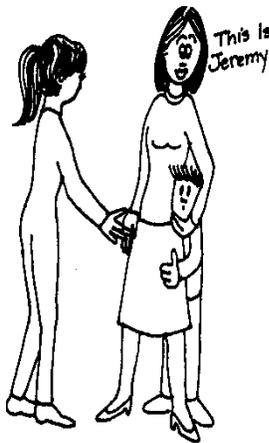
Once the issue has simmered down, go back to basics:

- Get familiar with your child's body rhythms and routines and set up potty breaks.
- Keep the potty in site and situated in just the right place.
- Kids want to please their parents but power struggles create resistance, so keep it light and don't get emotional.
- The focus is on what you want your child to do...stay dry and use the potty rather than what you don't want them to do.
- Praise can be specific, not gushy..."You stayed dry for \_\_\_ hours!"
- Be calm with any feedback otherwise, your anxiety will kybosh things.
- Let your child have some naked time.
- Model potty use.

Remember, just because your child has shown that they can use the toilet, doesn't mean all systems are go. It is normal for kids to resist and regress. Be supportive and patient and all will work itself out. 😊

*If your child is older and struggling, look into such issues as encopresis with your family doctor.*

## Not So Shy!



Do you have a child who gets excited about going places only to become withdrawn when he or she gets there? Do you or other people label your child *shy*? If you do, CUT IT OUT! While there isn't much we can do about other people's reaction to our child, we can speak up for our child and rephrase that label with something more accurate, "Jeremy likes to take some time before jumping in." People can quickly misinterpret this behavior as being rude, especially when it comes to manners.

Any label or negative attitude from an adult to a child regarding this trait can be harmful and keep him stuck. It is better that a child understands that it is okay to feel cautious and to be reassured that time and experience will bring about a more comfortable feeling.

This kind of cautious approach can be seen when your child encounters new people and/or new places and/or even new things. While young kids will use their parents body as a magnet, older kids will often become irritable or experience stomach or headaches when encountering something new. Even a new toy or pair of running shoes can bring out a negative reaction, just because it is new! No, it doesn't mean they are spoiled; they just have to get over that initial negative reaction.

- Avoid putting him in the spotlight right away, he needs time to sit back and observe.
- Let the child know that it is okay to need time to get used to a new person, place or thing and that the uncomfortable feeling will change.
- Keep your anxiety in check and reassure your child that you have confidence in her ability to work through her discomfort.
- Cautious people are often intuitive, methodical and thoughtful.
- Avoid getting into the avoidance trap! Go to the lesson and stay, even if your child sits on the sidelines...not as a punishment but as a supportive method of giving time a chance. If your child wanted the lesson and fear is interfering, staying there and letting him or her observe is actually the start of participating. No shame!
- Remember, anxiety is looking ahead but once the event happens, we are usually okay....so watch that you don't stay at drop off too long. Leave. Come back sooner instead until the child feels more secure.



*Imagine being the child. You need to take everything in to feel comfortable. It isn't a problem, it's a way of approaching the world out there. Not such a bad thing.*

## Taking it Personally?

When kids are struggling for independence they will often get frustrated with your control. They will argue and resist requests, react negatively about anything that comes out of your mouth and even call you a “Butt Head” or scream, “I don’t have to and you can’t make me!” It is hard not to take this personally, it hurts... but when healthy kids are in touch with their need for independence and autonomy this means you have done something right! Their behavior is teaching you to treat them differently. Young children will want to do things for themselves and get angry when you take over. Older children will criticize how you breathe and would rather die than be seen with you in public. How could somebody you have loved and cared for so deeply treat you this way? Would you notice their need for independence if they didn’t?



### What to do:

- Remind yourself that this is a stage and it will pass.
- Stay calm and try to have a sense of humour. This can be very helpful with all kind of human behavior, especially our own!
- Limit the rules and stick to the ones that really matter, you will have more authority by doing this.
- Ignore, ignore, ignore.....the attitude, mouthiness, and eye rolling.
- Talk about issues at a neutral time rather than during a power struggle, walk away and preserve your dignity.

Find your inner peace and don't react to the prickliness of your child. Try giving more choices this week and controlling fewer things your child is doing. Do this for several days and you might find the behavior shifts a little.

*Kids act out their feelings rather than articulate them. Imagine if they could say....Mom, Dad...just give me a little more freedom and try to nag me a little less, I'm just going through a strong transition stage right now and my autonomy is very important. My allergic reaction to your parenting is because I need more responsibility.*

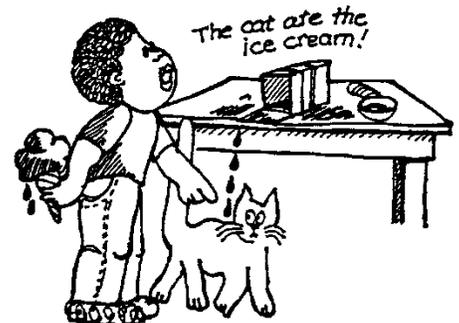
## ***Over-Reacting to Untruths***

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When children turn about four years old, they often become incredible story tellers. When asked a question that could possibly get them in trouble are clever enough to give you the answer that you might want to hear. If you react to this “untruth” with a lecture, yelling or a consequence, you could be setting the stage for more “untruths”. Don’t turn story telling or lying into some huge moral dilemma, a child’s perspective is egocentric: they can only see things from their own viewpoint, and from this viewpoint it just makes sense to lie, as they get attention and stay out of trouble. The story of the “Boy Who Cried Wolf” teaches the child about the long-term consequences of telling untruths. Young children who lie are not “selfish or “bad”; they are just normal children who are not yet mature enough to recognize the effects of lying. (Apparently, some adults don’t get it either!)

Children over about seven are old enough to know what a lie is, and why it is wrong. If they lie it is usually for other reasons, such as to protect their privacy or to avoid punishment. This kind of lying needs to be handled differently, by removing the circumstances that make it necessary for the child to lie.

Sometimes children lie about a certain ability that they have in an attempt to raise their self-esteem. Ensuring that children get significant positive attention and sincere feedback for positive behaviors can make a difference but they also need to know you they are loved when they make mistakes.



### **What to do:**

- Don’t overreact – stay calm, you aren’t raising a criminal!
- Don’t ask a question that invites a lie...“Did you eat the ice cream?” ...Is replaced with... “I see you ate the ice cream.”
- If you have a young child who gets lost in fantasy, you can gently say, “It sounds like you are telling me a story right now.”
- Don’t label your child a *liar* or attack your child’s character. This isn’t a moral issue!
- Avoid using harsh punishment...honestly, why not lie if that is going to happen?
- Make it easy for your children to express their needs and be assertive.
- Set an example of honesty.

***Accept that moral development needs maturity...most of childhood and then some.  
Children learn moral values by watching you. Model kindness.***

## The Art of Boredom

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Where did boredom go? It used to hang around for hours on end forcing us to do something creative like make a car out of an empty toilet paper roll. Boredom pushed us around until we read that book (again) or climbed a tree. It wasn't so bad.

While engaging with our children and having time together is very important...we are not meant to be a one person entertainment center. It's okay for our kids to experience a little time on their hands when they don't know what to do. Of course age is an important consideration but an indulgent parent may try to provide everything for their child -- the best toys, clothes, you name it -- along with all the time the child wants. These parents often become a one-person entertainment center, not taking any private time for themselves. They make a full-time career out of attending to the child's every need and whim. This eagerness to please their child can quickly turn into resentment resulting in a short fuse.



By the time children turn approximately four, you can ask them to play independently for short periods of time. For some kids that's easy, but for others, they have a harder time with this.

Figure out with your child what they can do. You can set a timer so they know when the buzzer goes, you can be available to them again at that time. Give sincere praise by acknowledging their ability to do this. Increase time as they get older.

Older kids will have a tendency to turn toward screens. Having

screen free times can provide them the much needed free time. The point to this article is that parents who overindulge or protect, interfere with their kid's ability to develop a relationship with themselves! So mix things up a little. Have quality time to connect with your kids so they can feel secure enough to disconnect at times. That is what healthy attachment is about.

*Remember, boredom is the waiting room to creativity and resiliency.*

## Make Them Care?

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How many therapists does it take to change a lightbulb? None, the lightbulb has to want to change. If a therapist argues for change, it will create resistance. Now the relationship between the client and therapist becomes something the client wants to avoid. The agenda of the therapist gets in the way of the clients growth. Parents do this. They expect kids to care about things that they haven't fully experienced yet. Taking over kid's responsibilities such as homework, getting along with friends, cleaning their rooms, remembering their lunches, eating enough or anything that directly involves the child and doesn't really harm the child or another, is a kid issue. As the saying goes, "This might hurt you but it won't harm you." Taking over a child's responsibility removes healthy hurt and that can harm a child. Feeling enough healthy anxiety motivates us to change. So avoid the constant lessons.

It is a form of intrusiveness to continuously teach kids a lesson and it stops them from experiencing genuine learning for themselves. The teaching simply gets in the way and takes over the chance for a child to become contemplative. Being contemplative means looking at the pros and cons. When the cons outweigh the pros, the desire for change happens. With healthy self-esteem, we are motivated by the hope of success rather than the fear of failure. We understand how we feel and what matters to us. With healthy self-esteem, small failures aren't a crushing blow, they are simply enough *hurt* to push us along the continuum of growth.

Conditional approval also interferes with a child's self-esteem. If all a child is concerned about is gaining approval from the adult or avoiding punishment, it robs a child of developing internally. This is something that takes time and ownership.

Practice the language of acceptance, it sounds like this:



Child: I think I failed my math test today.

Parent: Oh? You sound concerned.

(empathy)

Child: Yeah, kind of, I don't want to fail the course.

Parent: You would hate to fail and have to do it over again. (reflection only)

Child: That would suck. (the child's feelings)

Parent: Yeah. Sounds like a dilemma. (not taking over)

Child: I can't fail! I have to do something! (expressing a need to change)

Parent: What could this look like?

(consultant, not general manager)

Let your child sit with their life experiences.

## Mealtime Blues

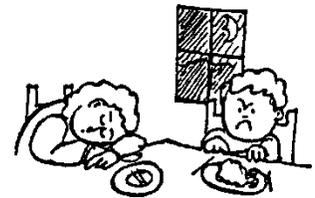
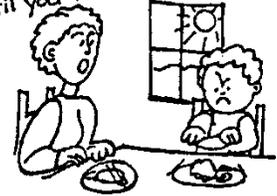
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Do you have battles with your children over how much they eat? Do you bribe them with dessert to have one more bite? Do you praise them for finishing their food?

Plenty of research shows that when parents take control of how much food their kids eat, many of those kids end up with food issues. They lose their inner guidance! Countless adults are trying to learn to eat when they are hungry and stop eating when they are full. The unconscious stuffing of food into their bodies is the result of a disconnect that started in childhood. It is intrusive to get overinvolved with your child's consumption.

Get creative with your approach and yes, with young children they can be picky eaters or have food fads but this passes. The point is, don't make it an issue or a power struggle, it is none of your business how much they eat. Your job is to provide healthy food and a pleasant atmosphere which supports your children to feel relaxed enough to enjoy their food.

You can't leave the table until you finish dinner.



### If you are stuck in a power struggle try this:

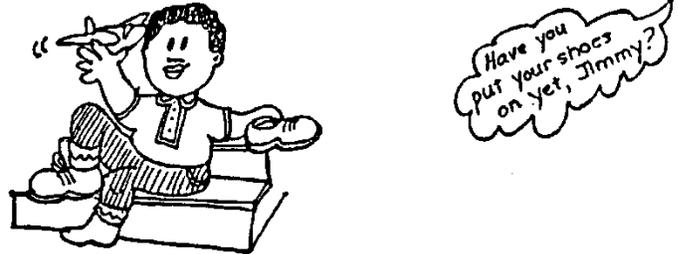
- Let children choose how much food they want and if they are old enough, they can serve themselves.
- Do not praise children for eating or criticize them for not eating, keep your eyes to yourself!
- If you serve dessert make it a separate issue rather than being a reward for eating.
- Make last call to the kitchen the beginning of the bedtime routine so that hunger can't be an excuse to get out of bed and so they can eat if they really are hungry.
- Make it easy for children to help themselves by having healthy food easily accessible.
- Create a pleasant atmosphere by engaging children in discussions at the table.
- Have an expectation that your child sit at the table for a reasonable time, timers can help.

***Think about what you are afraid of when it comes to your child's food intake? What relationship to food do you have? What were the messages when you were a child? Being in charge of your own body is part of establishing healthy boundaries that relate to issues beyond food. Children will have much more resistance to peer pressure if given permission to be their own boss in this department. They won't try things that they don't want to. Think about it. Children aren't a fools, they can tell if they are hungry or not. See what happens if you take your eyes off your child's plate for an entire week.***

## Morning Madness

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Many families struggle to get out of the house in the morning. It isn't a great way for anybody to start the day. Young kids struggle to understand the concept of time. If morning is repeatedly chaotic and stressful devote yourself to turning things around and focus for at least a two to three week period until healthier patterns of behavior can take over.



- Start the morning off by connecting (before directing) for at least five minutes with the kids. Hugs, eye contact, smiles and pleasant conversation can turn the tone into something positive.
- Have some food available to your child before they set their feet on the ground. Perhaps coconut milk or something healthy. This takes care of the morning grumpies.
- Have a family meeting and brainstorm on ideas regarding the morning rush.
- Get organized the night before; lunches, what you need for work, kid's knapsacks (packed by them to promote independence) and clothing.
- Get your children into self-help routines if they are over 3 so that they can dress themselves before breakfast. They may need assistance for each step, charts can help.
- Keep the television set off if you have young kids unless you can use it as a bonus for getting ready early with time to spare. "When you get ready, have your breakfast and get all your things at the front door, then you can watch your show." When/then is an excellent strategy for getting kids to take responsibility. Screens can backfire though...
- Dress your kids the night before, what's a few wrinkles? (just kidding, sort of)
- This you won't like, get up fifteen minutes earlier.
- Get out of the nagging trap which is doing your child's thinking for them, instead use a one or two word reminder; "lunch" "homework" "clothes" but give them a chance to think for themselves first.
- Let natural consequences go to work if the child is old enough and the consequences aren't devastating – it isn't that fun having to get dressed in the van or walk into school late or forget something like your lunch. Let them start to take on responsibility for themselves!
- Stick to your jobs and provide structure through routine but let the kids stick to theirs.

***For one week, focus on being calm, pleasant and using humor in the morning. See what happens. How does your child respond? If nothing changes at least you might feel better!***

## ***Don't Rush Me!***

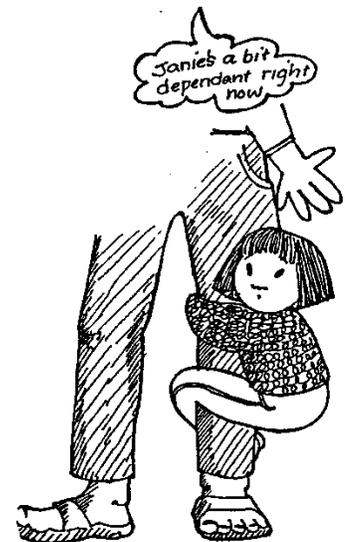
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Growing up is scary business and many of us would like to go back to a time when we could be cared for and have no responsibility. Taking a step back with our independence is part of the process of maturing. Kids take two forward by trying to have more independence but they also take one step back. They whine and cry and say they can't do something they've been able to do for a while. They act babyish or become self-critical.

The relationship with our kids takes place in the daily routines of getting ready as we slowly teach them how to care for themselves. While it is frustrating to see your child take this step back, understanding it will help you respond rather than react with anger. If you relax and let them fall back a little, they will quickly move forward again. How far back you ask? Enough to help them feel calm and not so much that you distort your life. You will see this behavior throughout childhood into the teen years. Teens might go back to reading old books from their past, hang around you acting annoying or even sitting on your knee as they tower above you!

The **following symptoms** indicate that although your child is growing into new independence, she is also afraid of the responsibilities that go with it:

- needing parents at night
- crying when parents leave
- whining "you do it for me"
- self-criticism
- touchiness
- babyish behavior
- going back to old activities
- negative attention getting



***Seek out connection with your child several times a day and focus on being fully present. Even just a few minutes. Watch what happens.***

## Let Them Ask

Learning to ask for what you want is a life skill. The first step is to notice that you actually need something and then to figure out what that might be. Many adults expect their partners to read their minds, "He should just know what I need, I shouldn't have to ask for it." Really? If you don't know what you want, why should he? People must take responsibility for their own feelings and needs and ask for help when they want it. When we over-indulge kids we teach them that other people should do their thinking for them and take on the responsibility of making them happy. If you have confused parenting with being a mind reader, you are working too hard.



Letting a child work things through without interfering is giving your child the space needed to learn, develop confidence and become resilient. If they ask for help they learn that they are part of a supportive environment and develop trust in your relationship. Sometimes through fearful stages, kids will ask for help that they really don't need just so they can take a step back to the comfort of your support.



***So take a nice long breath before jumping in to help and pat yourself on the back if you recognize that this deliberate and supportive pulling back is love in action.***

## Acceptance is not Approval

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When you accept children's behavior it doesn't mean you approve of it. Of course we don't want our toddlers to hit or our children to be messy and we'd love it if our teens could be a little more polite .... but these behaviors are normal and if you can't find peace with this, then perhaps you were raised with expectations to be obedient yourself? That makes it much harder to relax and let go.

There are no healthy parenting strategies that should make your kids act like adults. This doesn't mean that we approve of all of these behaviors. We set limits, state our

feelings and take some action to minimize the behaviors but at the end of the day we just need to acknowledge that normal children:

- Make messes, spill things, drop things and don't clean up after themselves.
- Forget instructions. Lose track of time and dawdle.
- Seldom do as they are asked right away.
- Misbehave when parents are having bad days.
- Get into danger, climb on counters and table tops, even when we tell them not to.
- Waste things like toothpaste, shampoo and food.....
- Often use curse words or don't use any words when we ask them a question and they scream and yell at siblings.
- Make too much noise when we are on the phone or trying to work and their favorite time to talk is when we are busy.

## Valuing Emotion

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Just as the intellect is part of the basic equipment with which a baby starts life, so are the emotions. But children must learn how to use their emotions effectively, just as they must learn to use their intellect. Emotions are signals or messages to tell us about the state of our needs, just as physical pains are signals about the state of our body. Learning to use our emotional feelings to help us get through life more effectively is a major challenge of human development. Surprisingly, many adults have never completed this learning process and still handle their feelings like children.

Our responsiveness to feelings is very much affected by what we learn in childhood. Feelings are very complicated to most people, especially to young children. Children don't have the vocabulary or the mental ability to express themselves *when* they are upset, and many feelings are difficult to identify.

A parent's task with regard to their child's feelings is a crucial one. The parent must assist the child to identify feelings correctly, and to express a full range of feelings appropriately, rather than forbidding feelings. Children can learn to control their behavior, while using their emotions to identify their needs and problem areas. Parents can then assist children to take action to deal with the problems causing their feelings. This must be done in a way that meets a child's maturity level.



Babies cry, toddlers scream and throw tantrums and young children express feelings physically and lash out with biting, hitting, kicking.....and then they finally use their words. This doesn't sound like, "I'm overwhelmed because I did too much today." Or "I feel frustrated and annoyed because I was really hoping to go to the park." Four or five year olds say, "I hate you butt head!" Older children say things like, "I hate my life, I wish I was dead." Or "I want to kill you!" All of this will send parents running to their neighbourhood psychologist! What parents often overlook is that their children are simply expressing strong feelings in the only way they know

how. Taking this personally, catastrophizing the behavior or punishing a child for acting this way is harmful.

A commitment to understand, value and respect our feelings as messages provides growth for our children and perhaps even more growth for us as parents.

## No Bad Choices!

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Offering children choices goes deeper than eliminating power struggles. It allows children to develop a sense of who they are. We are defined by the choices that we make. "I like this, I don't like that." "I want to do this, I don't want to do that." This is autonomy and the process of discovering and fulfilling our true nature. Judging children's choices as "bad" is just as faulty as judging a child as "bad". Worse than that, over-controlling a child so there are no choices keeps a child immature. This control increases levels of anxiety in children and as they mature and are required to make choices they feel anxious and experience self-doubt. What if I make the wrong choice? The *What If's* are endless when anxiety runs the show.

It's not easy to let go and watch our kids struggle when we know ourselves what they *should* do. It can be especially hard if we are wrapped up in our child's success. Parents who struggle with low self-esteem often fear what others think of their parenting. When this happens appearances outweigh the acceptance of the child. Conditions take over as our children are required to be the best, be good and basically act like adults.

As children develop, they will try many different activities, styles of dress, and peer groups. If they have a secure sense of self, they will be able to choose what fits with who they are, rather than being influenced to become like everyone they spend time with. We can help our children develop self-confidence in their ability to handle things in the world through allowing them to take responsibilities and to do things their way. When we respect their decisions we allow them to fulfill their ambitions not ours. Most importantly, they develop the resilience to trust their choices as a part of their own personal journey.



When kids do something that crosses the line we can make our observations. "It seemed that you were so upset that you lost it and ended up hitting." We can say, "I feel concerned because I want physical and emotional safety for everyone." Of course we don't approve but to confuse immature, lustful reactions with the idea that the child was making a conscious choice adds fuel to the fire of self-doubt. How often do we as adults do or say something that was from that lustful place. It's part of the human condition and much more so when you have the less developed brain of a child. Keep it real rather than teaching a lesson. When you avoid judging, teaching and blaming, you can take a position of support. We get out of the way so that the child feels a desire to change rather than being told to change. When you hear that desire in a child to change, then you coach, you don't take over. It sounds like:

- What matters to you?
- What has worked before?
- What could this look like?
- What will you do?
- What else?

If you find yourself offering feedback to a child regarding his or her choice try to avoid using evaluative terms like good or bad, right or wrong. Get curious about the need of the child and validate that need by putting it into words. "You wanted to be *included*." Coach the child's internal voice by getting curious. Help your child grow an internal self. That is resilience!

## Too Sorry!

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Sometimes you, as a parent, might say or do something to your children that just doesn't fit within your vision of how you want to be. Apologizing makes sense if you have acted out of your integrity. It is also great role modeling. If however, your apology is all about how badly you feel, it isn't an apology! It is your guilt!



Kids can handle hearing this kind of thing for about ONE minute! Any longer than that and it ends up feeling yucky to children. Children shouldn't be put in a position of forgiving you or understanding you to make you feel better! For the most part, kids are allergic to their parent's feelings and needs when it comes to parental guilt. Why? Because it is an adult issue.

To add to this, parents often go on and on about how they were raised and how badly they want to do things differently. Yes, it makes sense, but does your child need to listen to all of this? What about them?

The other reason kids resist these conversations is that it often turns back into a discussion about their behavior! Another lesson! If you apologize, do so with the intention of understanding how your behavior impacted your children. It might sound like, "I'm feeling upset with myself for losing my temper this morning. I imagine you feel upset too. Tell me how you feel." Then get curious about how this experience impacted them. Listen to your children talk about their feelings and remember you don't have to agree with how they see things in order to do this. They may not see their own behavior or accurately read the situation, but that's okay. The issue that led you to lose your temper is a separate one. If you need to talk about that, don't mix it up with the apology.

Sharing this kind of vulnerability shows your children how to experience healthy guilt instead of crippling shame. Healthy guilt says, what I did wasn't okay. Shame says, I'm not okay. Healthy guilt allows us to be vulnerable and look at our mistakes, shame stops us from being able to go there, so we just act defensive instead.

*Allowing kids to talk about how they feel regarding your behavior releases the pain that can create negativity in them. You don't have to agree with them nor do you need to argue. Watch what happens when you do this. You are teaching accountability which is being able to hear feedback. Awesome role modeling!*

## Reacting?

If you are matching your child's negative reactions with your own, you might want to take a look at this. Kids can be blurters because they haven't developed that internal editor that gives them a couple of seconds to reassess what pops out of their mouths. All



children have problems with their feelings simply because of immaturity. Many children get physical, tell their parents that they hate them, and say scary things like, I wish I was dead. Sometimes it can be helpful to give them a **second chance** to reword something especially if they have just called you a butt head (or worse). This is a compassionate approach and gives them an opportunity to practice being assertive. "Tell me how you feel, you can do that now or later." Children can learn to express themselves when they are calm with some help from you.

Likewise, if you have a frustration or concern, *I statements* allow you to express yourself in such a way that it doesn't attack your children and put them on the defence. If you can

"unhook" your children's behavior from their self-esteem, even only partially, it will make the behavior that much easier to change. If you do anything (such as labeling) to increase the connection and make children feel rotten about themselves instead of about their behavior, you will probably set up a mass of resistance that will make it impossible to change that particular behavior.

Effective communication is a significant positive tool to create profound changes in our relationships. This in turn creates a spirit of cooperation. This kind of awareness allows us to come up with an intelligent approach or strategy to get our needs met rather than just reacting and creating more problems. When we improve our communication, we improve our relationship with our kids and everyone in our lives. This is a radical change in approach to the typical, habitual ways of approaching discipline. All of us are on a learning curve with our communication. We have been speaking a certain way all of our lives so be prepared to feel inadequate and phony. Just don't give up, it matters!

## ***Explaining Tragedy***

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There comes a point in a child's life when his fears of monsters and scary dreams turn into fears that reflect the reality of the world. It can come as a great shock to a child to realize that there is such a thing as death and that tragedies of all kinds are a part of our human experience.

While we can comfort a child and reassure him that there is no monster under his bed or that he was just having a bad dream, we can't do that with realistic fears.

Children already feel helpless because there is so much they don't know about the world. They form mistaken ideas about situations being dangerous when they aren't. Young children can watch a rerun on the news and think the event is happening again. They may hear of a tragedy in another country which is far away but may not understand the concept of distance so it feels far more threatening than it really is.

What do we, as adults, do with our own fears so that we aren't riddled with terrifying thoughts? We take the precautions that we need to keep ourselves safe. We have enough life experience to draw from and to form rational thoughts. When we do this, we can forget about the possibilities of danger and find some peace to live our lives.

How can we help our children? We can explain that tragedies and accidents rarely happen and how unlikely it is that these awful things would happen to him. This is important information for a child.

Never lie to a child. Children need to trust you, so sugar coating the truth doesn't help. If you deny that something has happened or isn't that bad and they discover otherwise, they won't trust you. Likewise, giving too much information can be devastating to a child. It is best to present the facts briefly and then let a child guide you. Answer their questions with tenderness and sensitivity.

Young children may seem unaffected by sad or upsetting news as they go off and play, that is how their immaturity protects them. Older children and teens often take more seriously than parents the threats to our lives and our world from pollution, destruction of the environment, and other humanly created evils. Because of this, they may feel overwhelmed with emotion.

Words that are designed to try to make a person feel better when they are experiencing strong emotions, rarely land well. It is often better to give your calm and loving presence with no words.

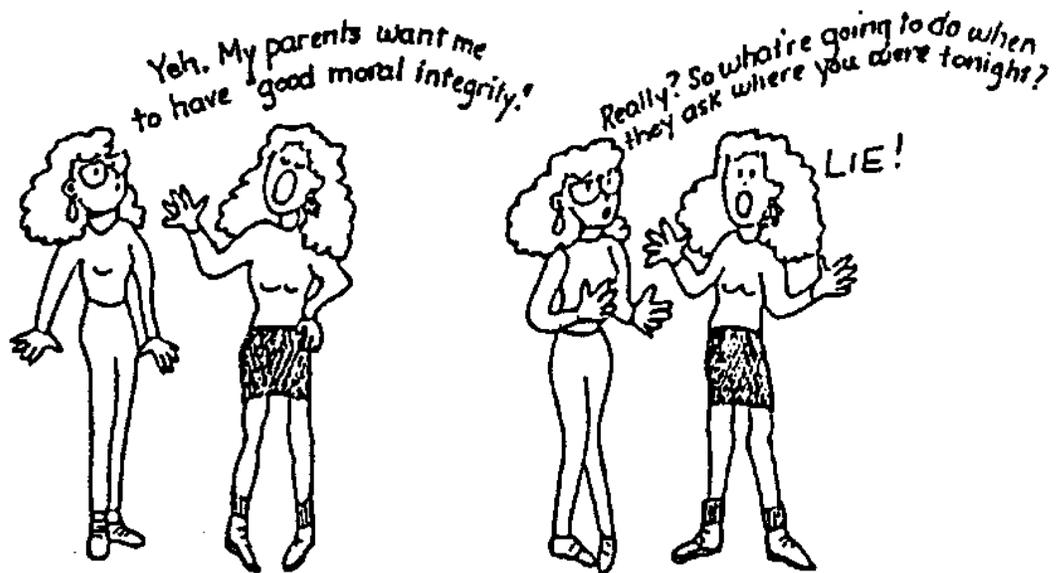


## Can't Trust Your Teens?

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There is one perfect solution to get your teens to stop lying to you. Stop asking so many questions! If you are sticking your nose in a little too far, that's what you get. Teens are trying to be big people and that means they have to have some privacy. Think about it, did you tell your parents everything you were doing when you were a teen? You tell them you want them to be responsible so step back a little. They need independence to get to that place otherwise, they are just resisting your control.

Regardless of how you behave as a parent, teens will go through times when they will be secretive, act prickly and appear to have a strong allergic reaction to you. Not taking this personally is your first step. That's a hard one.



Now you have to try to stop nagging, asking too many questions and treating them like they are little people. Yes, they make mistakes, don't clean up, and may seem to have a "bad" attitude but this really is a stage. It will pass and what you don't want to lose is the relationship you have with them. It might seem impossible to trust a lying teen. What *you do* have to focus on is making sure they can trust you. That means knowing you'll still be there for them when they need you, no questions asked. It means seeing the best in them and noticing the good choices that they *do* make. It means managing your emotions so you can go about the delicate dance of now having a big person to big person relationship.

***Try noticing how much you focus on your teen's behavior in your mind. What happens if you replace that thought with something interesting in your life?***

## *Growling and Snarling*

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It is difficult when we see children experiencing isolation from peers because they either can't stand up for themselves or because they lash out with too much aggression.

When children *are* acting aggressive they are often just protecting their personal boundaries. Animals set their interpersonal boundaries through growls and snarls. An animal is vicious if it actually bites, not if it just growls a warning. Yet we expect our children not to give these warnings. Shouldn't children feel free to growl and snarl a little? They need permission to be able to tell other kids to back off and leave them alone.



Real aggression often comes out when a child is angry and doesn't know how to express it and to set a boundary with another child. For example, one child may "bug" and provoke another until the other child lashes out. It's important to teach your child to use words to express what he feels or wants. We need to coach our children on how to express themselves verbally so that they don't need to resort to physical threats and violence. Keep it simple.

It isn't enough for a child who is being provoked to make wimpy statements like "Please don't do that," or "That hurts my feelings." These just invite further bugging or bullying. A child needs to be able to give the verbal equivalent of a growl or a snarl. This can be done without damaging anyone's self-esteem.

What's not okay? Physically assaulting another child when he hasn't attacked you physically. Remember that physical assaults like kicking, biting, pinching and hitting often happen when the child has overwhelming feelings and doesn't know what to say. Giving your child some strong words to use can make a physical attack quite unnecessary. Strong words aren't put downs of the other child but are focused on a clear message that represent your child's boundaries. They are spoken assertively, not with too much aggression or with an injured tone.

Do a little practice at home:

- Ask your child to show you confident body language,
- Come up with a few brief statements that your child can use.
- Learn snappy comebacks that have some humour.
- Take turns practicing different roles.

Role playing helps a child respond during stressful interactions. The rehearsing of strategies provides them with a structure to hang onto.

## ***Struggling for Independence***

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Children grow up by taking two steps forward and one step back. This is the path to individuating; becoming their own unique person apart from family. When their need is to experience more autonomy and independence, they become “allergic” to parents telling them what to do. They argue about things that parents are interested in like: brushing teeth, sitting at the table, practicing music lessons, homework, contributing to chores....Older kids become more private, shutting out their parents and perceiving questions as TOTALLY INTRUSIVE! While your childless friends or in-laws may tell you that you need to show the child who is boss, it actually means the opposite. Kids are designed by nature, if they are healthy, to strive to become a ME. Not allowing independence messes with a child’s growing sense of self.

### **What to do:**

- Avoid anticipating a child’s needs or jumping in to help when they are trying to do something on their own. Give them space to struggle. See it as a loving act to step back rather than being neglectful. If your child needs help, it is a life skill to ask for it.
- Minimize the rules. Sweating the small stuff only teaches your child to argue. Instead, think about the rules that really matter and be consistent with those. Those rules will apply to everyone: safety, respect for privacy, space, possessions and contributing to the neutral area of the home including cleaning up after yourself.
- Don’t take it personally. Older kids going through this can become critical of how you dress, what you say.... your breathing! Hang onto your self-esteem, this too shall pass. A sense of humour helps a lot too.
- Ignore the verbal flak and cheekiness. While this might seem permissive, it actually stops a pattern of giving negative attention to a behavior that is a misdirected attempt to engage with you.
- Spend 1:1 time together when you can. This doesn’t have to be long stretches of time. Even short periods of time can be meaningful when you are fully present. Clear your mind and give your child your undivided attention through periods of play, conversation or taking an interest in what they are up to. Have some time away from the rest of the family. Have you ever noticed how a child’s behavior changes when you do this?
- Look under your child’s prickly behavior. What is it communicating to you?

## ***Parents Interfering with Each Other***

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When parents who live together are in a battle for control, one parent interferes with the other when he or she is interacting with the children. Mary interrupts with “John, you’re being too hard on him,” as John imposes a consequence on her son. John interrupts with “Mary, he should be asleep by now,” as Mary reads his son a lengthy story. Each parent undermines the other parent’s authority, and then John and Mary wonder why their children don’t accept their discipline. If you are interfering with each other’s parenting, you really need to, Cut it Out! The children in this situation learn to play the parents off against each other. “But Mom said I could go over to Andrew’s house.” If one parent is more lenient than the other, the kids will ask for a privilege from that parent first. If one parent is acknowledged to have greater power than the other, the less powerful parent may be asked... “What would dad say?”

For two adults to work together effectively, they must have an agreement that each is to be respected in their interactions with the children as long as there is no abusive behavior. If mom disagrees with the way dad is disciplining their child, she should not interfere at the time. She may speak with dad afterwards about it, out of the child’s hearing. Similarly, if dad thinks mom is being too lenient, he is not to interfere in the child’s presence. This kind of interference undermines the authority of both parents in the child’s eyes.

Many parental disagreements stem from the fact that the parents had different upbringings and consequently different ideas about appropriate limits and how to enforce them. Often one parent sees the other as being either too harsh or too lenient. Perhaps one parent develops knowledge and skills (e.g. a new sense of good boundaries) and can no longer tolerate hearing the old methods coming from their partner’s mouth. It’s really important for marital partners to discuss these issues and, whenever possible, read the same parenting books or take the same courses so they can come to a consensus. But this should be done privately, not in the hearing of the children, and certainly not by interfering with one another’s parenting, unless genuine abuse is occurring. There should be a boundary around each parent’s relationship with the child, and a boundary around the parents’ relationship with one another as they try to work out their philosophy of parenting.



Often the limits can be easier to agree on but the tone of voice and use of language can be a source of concern and confusion. Learning effective communication skills not only guides effective discipline but will also be a great help for the couple to discuss parenting.

## Parenting Pitfalls with Chores

When it comes to getting kids to help around the house there are many useful strategies that parent education outlines. Certainly listing chores and giving them some choices works well. Also, kids tend to prefer to do chores with the parents so family clean up time helps get that buy in. "When/then" is useful, "When you empty the dishwasher, I'll drive you to your friend's house." What a lot of parent education doesn't consider is the attitude of the parent. We parents often sabotage our kid's willingness to contribute. If you are doing any of the following things, you need to Cut it Out!

- We nag. Nagging stops kids from taking action because they learn to tune us out until we get frustrated and angry. This creates a pattern of resistance and negativity in the child. Instead of nagging, change your approach to a positive direct approach. Using very few words, give your child a smile or a pat on the back and point toward the dishes in the dishwasher or the recycling. If you have preplanned with your child and you keep your emotions in check and even positive, you are much more likely to get co-operation.
- We bend over backwards and don't ask for help. Sometimes it just seems easier to do it ourselves but then we feel resentful and out comes the contempt. Once again, our child is reacting to our negativity. Most people, including adults would prefer to pull their own weight as opposed to being on the receiving end of a martyr's wrath.
- We micro manage responsibility that belongs to our kids. We don't give them room to experience not being responsible. We rescue and control when natural consequences could teach life lessons.
- Perfectionism is when we hold the bar too high. We put up standards that the child can't meet because of immaturity or abilities and then the child feels discouraged. If you are a perfectionist it is important to take a look at this and see how it discourages people around you. It is also hard on you!
- We judge our kids as being lazy and irresponsible instead of understanding that it isn't natural for kids to care about dust on the coffee table or a dirty sink. Did you have a messy bedroom when you were a kid? Maturity and brain development kicked in around your early 20's that helped you sort and organize. You weren't lazy after all, you were just a kid!



## What a Chore!

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Getting kids to participate and contribute to household tasks is a chore in itself. Most kids aren't that interested in getting the recycling to the curb on time. A child's thinking is centered, meaning he can only focus his attention on one part of a situation at a time. He will clean up part of a room but not notice other parts. This is simple immaturity and it exists in adolescence too even though it might be hard to see. An older child loses things frequently and also has difficulties managing time and planning ahead. This is all part of childhood and an immature brain. These skills don't fully develop until the early 20's so keep that in mind.

Basically, children only learn a cognitive skill when the tasks they are called on to do require it and when they are developmentally ready to learn it. That means that we must expect them to take on a task only when they are ready, and then we must be prepared for plenty of goofing up during a learning period. Do not label them lazy, irresponsible or selfish!

- Take the time to involve your kids with tasks and make it a shared experience. Cooking together or letting kids help when they show interest or what they show interest in, is quality time.
- Designate a family clean up time once a week for the bigger chores and once a day for the five minute tidy up.
- Determine your child's tasks based on their readiness and give them choices.
- Good roommates clean up their own mess in the neutral area of the home. Watch your boundaries; even if you are a stay at home parent. We clean up our own mess when we are old enough to do so. Young children (under six or seven) can still help you.
- Don't take over a child's task if you are trying to hand the responsibility over to him.
- Use a one word reminder (trash) without nagging and lecturing.
- Use when/then. When you clean up your dishes then we can (watch our show, I'll drive you to Kate's house, ?)... without turning it into a vicious struggle for power.
- Give them choices and mix up the tasks so they aren't stuck on the same thing every time.
- Gradually let go of their individual responsibilities like their rooms, their laundry, their homework, their lunches.... By teaching, supporting and then allowing natural consequences that aren't devastating. Continue to be supportive without taking over or scolding.
- If the natural consequence is devastating, like feeding the dog then don't make that the child's task – they can still help but you are in charge otherwise you'll be nagging all the time.
- Ignore the verbal flack, grumpiness and moaning. Why let that derail you?
- Don't reward or bribe with things or money – contributing to the household is part of being in a family and wonderful for a child's sense of belonging and competence.



## Calming the Chaos

All kids benefit from predictability and routine. Some children are very sensitive to change, especially if they are the type of children who don't like surprises or tend to be cautious. If you are springing a lot of change or unpredictability on your child, it might create struggles. Chaos (because of a lack of routine) can be a major trigger for meltdowns. Planning your day and limiting unnecessary change can make a huge difference. Think about how you can simplify your daily experience. If you have a child who doesn't do well with change put the experience into words: "I think you feel uncomfortable and upset when you have to stop playing at pre-school and come to the van. What would make this easier for you?" Or, "I notice when you start a new semester at school, you seem to be stressed (or have more stomach aches). What helped you cope with this last time? Do you remember the feelings changing after a bit of time?" Articulate the trigger, accept your child's feelings while also acknowledging that they can cope.

As kids mature, they need to develop the ability to deal with uncertainty. While being supportive with routine and warnings is helpful, you want to watch that you don't overdo this. The anxiety that comes from the unexpected in your child should not completely take over the household.

While you want to be supportive, you also want to encourage your child to embrace the daily experiences that life throws at all of us. Their need for certainty won't always be met and accommodating it too much will set them up for helplessness.



The Arsenic Hour

When they're part of solving the problem, they develop more confidence. :

- Have a level of predictability in your home most of the time.
- Discussing transitions ahead of time or giving warnings for transition helps.
- Children five years and older can benefit from having their own calendars that have their schedules in black and white or blue or red..... seeing it helps.
- Giving kids the ability to solve their challenges dissolves unhealthy fear.
- Show a level of confidence rather than getting wrapped up in protecting your child from this Given of life. After all, things don't always go according to plan.

## Mean What You Say Without Being Mean

Are you full of idle threats? “If you don’t clean up I’m giving your toys to charity! Now this is your last second chance!” Do you make requests over and over again without actually meaning it? “Okay Jason, one more time around the campsite on your bike and that’s it. Okay Jason, one more time.....one more time.” If you wonder why your kids don’t listen to you, this could be why. The first ticket out of this wishy-washy behavior is to think about what you are asking of your child. Is the request important enough to make? Maybe you like it when Jason occupies himself riding his bike while you relax. Does it have to do with your child’s safety? Does it affect the well-being of others? Is it important enough for you to mean what you say? If not, don’t say it, you are teaching your children not to listen to you. The second consideration is that if you do take action and follow through, ask yourself, am I still respecting my child, being fair and being reasonable? If you can’t answer yes to this, don’t do it otherwise you are teaching your child not to listen to you.



### How to mean what you say without being mean:

- Present your concerns and involve the child in decision making. “I notice it’s getting late and I’d like you ready for bed at 9:00, I think two more times around the campsite. What do you think is fair?” But say it directly.
- When a limit or decision has been made, simply follow through without arguing or reasoning. “We decided on three more times, time is up.”
- Offer empathy without feeling sorry for your child or giving in. “I know you would love to keep riding and your upset that play time is over.”
- Get serious not angry and show your intent with your body language.
- Make your follow through related, reasonable and respectful. (The bike gets put away for the night, the tone is friendly or neutral and you don’t stack on a bunch of silly punishments.)

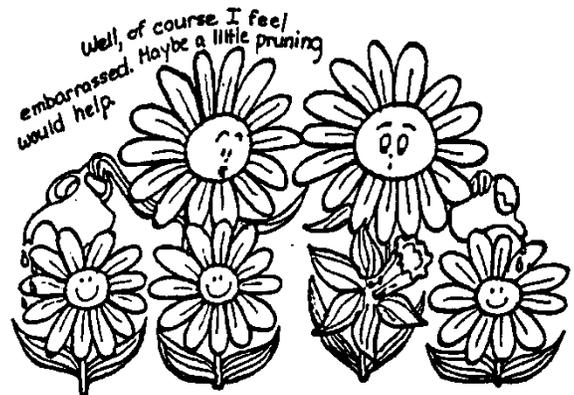
***Many parents plead with their children rather than being straightforward. This is a form of submissiveness and will create resentment in you because your kids won’t respect your requests. They don’t need that kind of power of you. If you recognize this in yourself, see how shifting to assertiveness lands.***

## Are We Perfect Yet?

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Are you a perfectionistic parent? Are you always urging your child to do better? Do you withhold full approval frequently urging your kids to try harder? A perfectionist drives himself too hard. A perfectionist frequently says, "If you can't do something right, you can't do it at all!" He can't just relax and enjoy life; there is always something to do. He is rarely satisfied with himself or other members of the family. When it comes to parenting, perfectionists have difficulty letting kids be kids. They imagine that people are scoring them based on the behavior of their children. This causes some short and long-term problems. Some kids will keep straining to gain the parental approval. They will miss out on feeling satisfied with themselves and miss out on the joy of childhood. Other kids will openly rebel saying, "What I do isn't good enough so why should I bother trying!" Their self-esteem will be fragile and they develop a severe inner critic that will accompany them through life. The cycle of perfectionism will continue through generations until somebody can finally say, "Enough!" or at least, "Good enough!"

- Recognize your tendency to set standards that are too high. It may be in one area of your life but not in others.
- Once you take some ownership of your own issues, it keeps other people safe. They can start to separate your issues from theirs. This can break the cycle that otherwise keeps going generation after generation.
- Learn to say "good enough" and allow yourself to rest and play.
- Share your struggle with perfectionism honestly with your family.
- Avoid correcting and criticizing family members when they have completed a task below your standards.
- Don't take over, completing jobs for your children.
- Realize that children don't always have to do their best. Nobody does. We save that for things that are really important or that we are really interested in.
- Encourage yourself and your children by appreciating effort.
- Permit yourself and your children time to "goof off".
- Accept each child's unique level of interest and ability.



## ***Nagging - Negative Attention Giving***

The average parent nags their child 55 times a day. If you have two children that is 110 and if you have a partner, double it! Nagging interferes with a person's ability to think for themselves. When you nag, you are taking over responsibility that belongs to the other person.

Nagging is doing your children's thinking for them. You aren't giving them a chance to take their own initiative. Furthermore, when something goes wrong, they'll blame you! How can you get out of the nagging trap? Parents who nag direct their kids all day long from the time they get up in the morning until they go to bed. The nagging parent's mantra is, "If I weren't here to remind you, you'd never get anything done." Nagging is a draining experience for both parent and child.

Nagging trains your child to stop listening to your pleasant tone of voice. They wait for the anger before paying attention....another reason why kids don't listen!

### **Tips to stop nagging:**

- Start to notice the number of times you direct or remind your child and see if you can cut it in half.
- Use one word reminders only after giving your kids enough time to think for themselves, "shoes" or "dishes".
- If the child is old enough to take the responsibility on, then let go, and allow natural consequences to take over; forgetting homework could be a life lesson that leads to responsibility.
- Give kids a chance to take their own initiative.
- Pick neutral times when you are relaxed and invite kids to problem solve around issues where you would normally nag.
- Learn to let go of control and see the value in parenting *less* in areas where your kids need to take responsibility.
- Approach your child directly, show a positive emotion, get eye contact and make a request..."Darling, it's 4:00, time to take out the garbage (like you agreed to )." Now stay there, smiling....staying.....staying....garbage out...Awesome!

***Now, take a step back, breathe and relax. One less nag in the bag. It feels so much better. See if you can pay attention to times that you nag... just stop yourself so you can start a change in this annoying behavior pattern. That is doing something!***

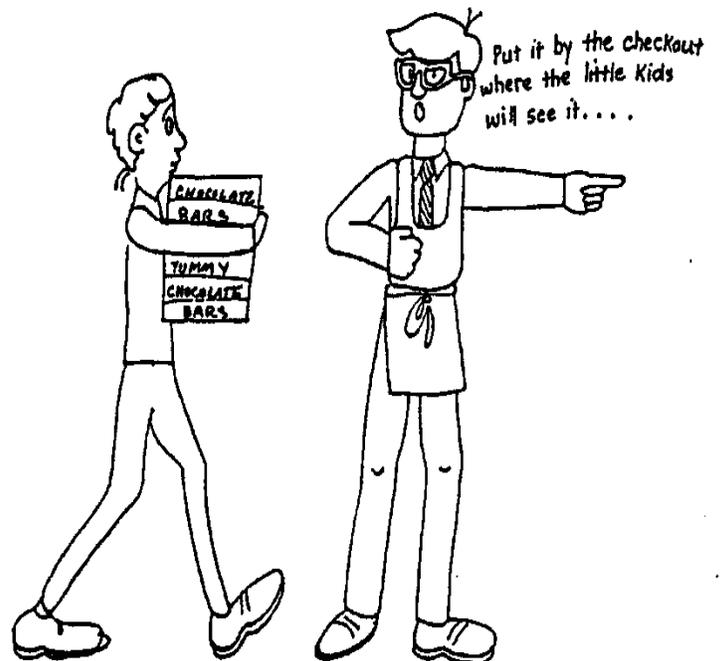


## Don't Buy It!

It is one thing for adults to avoid impulse buys at the checkout but our kids don't have the maturity it takes to push their desire aside. If you take your child shopping and buy something unplanned at the checkout, you are setting yourself up for years of arguments with your kids. How unfair to your kids if one day, in a good mood, you say "yes" and then the next time, you say "no". It is best to find ways to manage this common trigger than to deal with the temper tantrums that can go with it; yours and your child's!

### What to do:

- Discuss "shopping rules" with your child ahead of time and come up with a plan together.
- If you are going to buy your kids something, tell them before you go out and let them know what the limit is.
- Invite them to bring their allowance. Kids often think twice about spending their own money.
- Food shopping with a hungry kid? Really? Snack before you go.
- They can earn a *something or other* for sticking with the shopping rules...yes, it is a reward .... not a bribe though. A bribe offers something to stop a behavior, a reward offers something ahead of time for a desired behavior. Caution, make this temporary, not for every trip.
- If your shopping experience is repeatedly awful, figure out how to go alone for a while. Young kids don't understand why they can't touch, have, smell all the things they see at the store.
- Get kids involved to some extent. What could that look like?
- Educate older kids about marketing and the psychology behind it.



***Shopping trips can be fun if they are short and the child is involved but think about what it is like to see all those things and not really understand the concept of money. Even older kids have mistaken ideas about money.***

## Say it Sooner

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Many parents feel horrible about the number of times they lose their temper. One reason the blow ups happen is because parents deny their own frustrations and don't express themselves at times when feelings are manageable. You know, those moments when you are actually capable of expressing yourself like an adult! We owe this to our kids because they don't always pick up on our body language, facial expression and tone of voice. Our subtle feelings like frustration or annoyance fly under their radar. Teenagers will also misread emotions and see anger instead of feelings like worry, concern or overwhelmed. Body language can be misinterpreted by adults too as we tend to see or hear what we fear, especially during times of conflict. To make matters



just a little more confusing, we often don't even notice our own subtle feelings and that's when we find ourselves slamming cupboard doors or going on the attack. Then, we wonder why our kids don't listen to us! If you are stuck in this pattern, change it!

When we say people are acting childish, we usually mean that their feelings are driving their behavior. Think of the last time you "lost it" with your child. Maybe you were trying to get out of the house. Perhaps it was at arsenic hour, just as you were making dinner. What feelings came up before you lost it? Did you express yourself? How are other people,

especially kids, supposed to know how you feel? I-statements are not nicey-nicey ways of tiptoeing around issues.

Using them is a very mature thing to do. You will feel more like your child's parent than their sibling when you pull this off. It's okay, even beneficial, if you say things like, "I'm feeling grumpy, I need a moment to myself." Or "I feel so annoyed that you aren't ready to go. I want to be on time!" Your body language will be understood if *you use your words*. This isn't a tool to control others but it is an effective way to deal with the daily challenges of life. This can also eliminate needless punishments. After all, would you remove your partner's car keys if he or she came home late? No, you would express how worried you were and how upset you feel. You might be surprised at how much kids will "respect" you when you practice this.

## Got a Spirited Child?

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Some kids come into the world more spirited and with bigger behaviors. Parents can feel completely inadequate as one thing might work one day and not the next. If you are beating yourself up, Cut it Out! Just as parents whose children have easy temperaments can't take all the credit neither should parents of spirited children take all the blame.

### What to do:

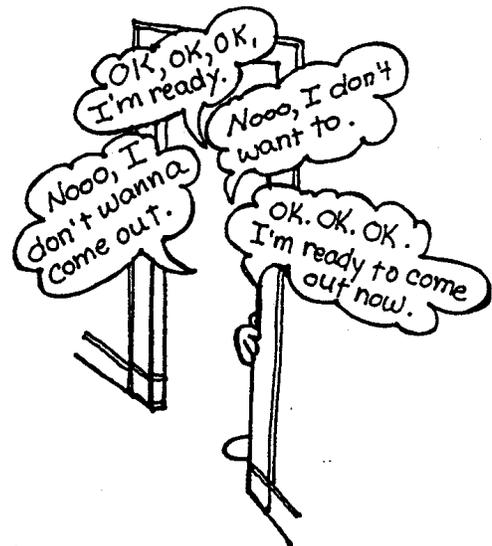
**Think about antecedents** which are triggers to your child's challenging behaviors. Things like hunger, fatigue, transition, change or just hearing the word "no" can be a trigger. Manage what you can and plan ahead.

**Identify your child's needs.** Every negative feeling points to a frustrated need. Some children need more certainty and rely on a steady routine. Some children are sensitive and pick up on the feelings around them so they need calm approaches. Some children need to have lots of autonomy and thrive on being given choices and a voice.

**Identify skills that need to be developed.** What skills does your child need to work on? Dealing with transition? Solving problems? Thinking about the outcome of their actions? Dealing with ways to deal with intense feelings or ways to express them? Do they misread social cues? Are they struggling with anxiety? Is focus or organization a challenge? Do they know how to calm down if they are given some space?

**Let things go.** Drop certain expectations, at least for now and focus only on limits that really matter. Safety issues and some basic house rules is a good place to start. Let go of expectations that are more complex.

**Be present.** All children need the loving presence of a parent or caregiver at random times throughout the day or going on dates doing something the child enjoys. Leave your smart phone at home and just be available. All children need to have a sense of belonging and importance and need your time and presence.



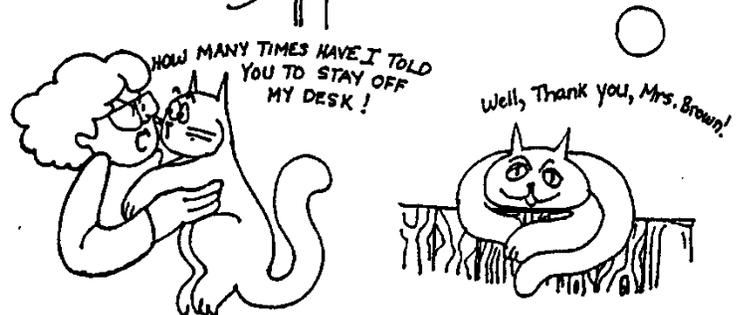
Little Johnny, timing himself out.

## Can't Say "NO"?

Do you ever notice how you feel the moment you say yes when it needs to be a no? You violate yourself when you give a "dirty yes" to others. There is a price you pay if you cross your own line. Actually, guess what, everyone pays the price, your kids, your partner, even Fluffy the cat! You will become resentful, burnt out, cranky and stressed. This can come out as a pervasive sour tone! Yuck.



You don't have to apologize if you say no as an act of self-care. Whether it is protecting your time or other personal resources, you need to be in charge of this.



Guilt about not being "nice" is a form of denial. You also deny your child's feelings when you protect them from disappointment or frustration. These feelings are a necessary part of growing and of learning about other people's boundaries.

**Allow yourself to feel the fear and blurt this out "It is important to me that \_\_\_\_\_ and so I must say no."....wait for it... relief... oh...surprise...you are still alive and nobody hates you although your kids might tell you they do....they don't, just disappointed...and that's okay.**

## To Praise or Not to Praise

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Praising children is encouraging, especially when you are being sincere. Giving positive feedback is an effective way of guiding children and keeping their self-esteem intact. But, when is it too much? Too much praise or gushing praise undermines praise itself. It can also give your child a false sense of grandiosity.....not good for the development of a healthy character.

USE AND MISUSE OF PRAISE	
Positive Use	Misuse
Specific (descriptive)	Unspecific (general)
Sincere (honest)	Insincere (false)
Non-Evaluative	Evaluative

**Specific:** "You emptied the dishwasher without being asked."

**Unspecific:** "You were good."

**Sincere:** "It's a relief to get the help without nagging for it."

**Insincere:** "You are just so amazing!"

**Non-Evaluative:** "The dishes are put away and the counter is cleaned. Thanks."

**Evaluative:** "Good job."

Insincere praise can feel manipulative. Also, when we are *amazing* for doing something, does that mean we are awful when we don't do it? Finally, what was so good about what I did? Being specific really locks in the positive.

**Ask children how they feel about their work or ask them to tell you about it.** "What made you think of cleaning the kitchen without being asked?" You might hear something insightful about knowing you would ask so they may as well do it! That is when your consistency pays off in combination with a little maturity on the child's part.

***Specific feedback gives people information about what they are doing that is working. We all benefit from a positive approach. What positive action have you noticed today? Have you said something?***

## Encouragement not Reward

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Far too often parents and teachers focus on using reward to encourage children. Even though reward and encouragement have a similar friendly tone, they have two different outcomes. A reward is given when the child succeeds, the child then basis his self-worth on being successful. The fear of not succeeding in the future becomes discouraging to the child. Self-esteem is having the ability to work through mistakes and recover from failure, clearly not the outcome of using reward. Sadly, reward is widely accepted and the negative effects too often go unnoticed. To make matters worse for a child, they often don't know what is expected for them to achieve success. We have to put ourselves in the child's shoes and talk to them at their level of understanding.

Helping children work through the process of learning is called encouragement.



### Encouragement:

- Assists a child in developing skills and supports the logical sequence of learning them, which leads to a child's success.
- Is present when a child fails. It involves the ability to see the child as worthwhile regardless of his limitations.
- Helps develop a child's capacity for learning and working toward his full potential.
- Focuses on a child's strengths and abilities in a specific and sincere way without gushing praise.
- Understands the child's frustrations without feeling sorry for him.
- Encouragement recognizes a job well done at the hands of a child who is learning.

## ***Jumping Out of the Irritation-Anger-Guilt Cycle***

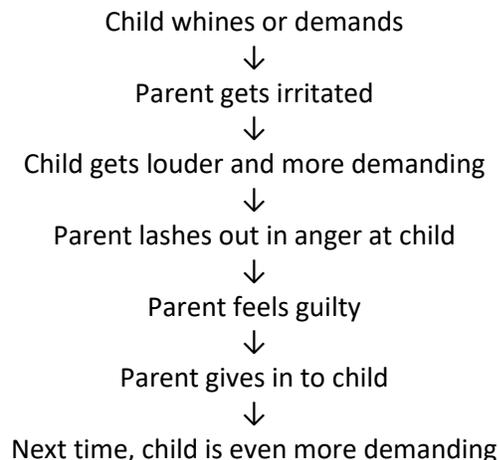
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Do you often feel guilty for having negative emotions about your child's demands? Feeling irritated can be a signal that you need to pay attention to your boundaries and need to set some clear, consistent limits. If you feel guilty about your irritation and dismiss your feelings, your child's behavior will escalate. Why wouldn't it if the guidelines aren't in place? While all parents experience times of being inconsistent and losing it, the Irritation-Anger-Guilt Cycle can create more serious problems.

This kind of cycle happens frequently when parents have difficulty setting firm boundaries. The child's demands cause irritation in the parent. The parent then feels guilty for being irritated and gives in to the child. The child is thereby rewarded for being so demanding, and continues to demand. The parent eventually blows up unreasonably over some point. She then feels very guilty for blowing up, and becomes even more submissive to the child.

Remember, the best exit from this cycle is to pay attention to your feelings of frustration or annoyance. They are there for a reason and point to a limit of some kind. Deal with things before you get angry from a clear assertive standpoint rather than when you "lose it". "It", stands for the authority you have over yourself. Slowly as your children mature it is healthy to consider your needs for sleep, privacy, time, consideration and so on. You having boundaries is what teaches children about other people's boundaries. They learn it from you that you have personal limits. When you can express yourself at the irritation level using effective language you will avoid the typical complaints that parents have about their kids not respecting them or listening to them.

### **THE IRRITATION-ANGER-GUILT CYCLE**



## The Guilt Trip

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Are you feeling guilty because your child's behavior is off? Are sure it's because of something you did? It's easy to feel guilty about things like going back to work, sending your child to daycare too early, kids having too much screen time.....the list goes on. So if you go there often, you better CUT IT OUT! It's not helpful. The stories we tell ourselves keep us stuck and usually don't point us in the right direction.

Guilt can be a chronic emotion that often starts in childhood when we were told our feelings of frustration, irritation and annoyances were wrong. Feeling guilty was much more acceptable. Those subtle feelings went underground and guilt took a front seat. Now we just feel guilty, about everything!



Yet, guilt is an important feeling. Feeling guilty can mean that we may have hurt somebody and if that is the case apologizing and making amends is the right thing to do. Healthy guilt usually points to a specific event where we can see that our behavior is out of line. The guilt gives us a signal to take a look and make a change that really needs to happen. If the guilt is just an automatic default, it most likely isn't helpful or even true.

Who do you become when you feel unhealthy guilt? Most likely a doormat! You lose sight of your boundaries when you don't allow yourself to feel irritated, annoyed or frustrated. Guilt can create overindulgence, overprotection and wishy-washy parenting. You might bend over backward and that never works out well because before you know it, you are in full blown resentment. Guilt stops you from meeting your needs, then.....you blow your stack. Oops. Now you really do have something to feel guilty about, however the way out of this cycle isn't more guilt. It is paying attention to the subtle feelings and addressing issues early before they pile up again.

No child needs to be on the receiving end of guilty parenting. It doesn't feel very reassuring and it doesn't usually point to useful solutions.

When you can get over your guilt you might actually see things more clearly. At least you'll feel better and you will be much more pleasant to be around.

## ***Second Chance***

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How often do you wish you could go back in time and do or say something differently with your kids or your partner? Now you can CUT IT OUT and give it a try. Second chance tickets are simple tools that allow you to go back and try again without needing a time machine. In the heat of the moment, it is difficult to see the bigger picture and think about other people's needs or your own behavior. Often when calmer feelings prevail the clarity comes out and expressing your thoughts and feelings is simply the right thing to do.

Copying a bunch of second chance tickets and keeping them available for everybody can bring a lighthearted twist to the value of a sincere apology. **"I feel sad about** yelling at you to hurry up. **I realize that** you had to find your library book. **If I had a second chance I would** be patient and try to help you find it **instead**.

Kids can use second chance tickets when they want to replay something they said to a friend or sibling. While you never want to force an apology you can support your child when they do feel sorry. Helping children reflect on how people feel in relation to their own behavior builds empathy and consideration.

Taking responsibility for our actions just feels good. Take a chance and pass it on.

### ***Second Chance Ticket***

**I feel** \_\_\_\_\_ about (what I said or did) \_\_\_\_\_

**I realize that** \_\_\_\_\_

**If I had a second chance I would** \_\_\_\_\_

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## ***Be NICE!***

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Being “nice” isn’t usually a great personal goal whether it is in our role as parent, partner, colleague or friend. It’s confusing because we were taught to be nice growing up. Yet nice is often about people pleasing, having poor boundaries and *acting* a certain way rather than *being* a certain way. Your kids need to see a level of confidence and clarity in you. Considering your child’s needs, your needs and the needs of others makes a good basis for healthy boundaries. This approach is kind and won’t have you falling into the pit of resentment and guilt.

So, let’s come up with a new definition for the word NICE:

**N = Negotiate** a limit so there won’t be confusion and talk about expectations ahead of time when possible. Bring everybody in on the discussion that is affected by the limit. Find some middle ground that you can all live with. For young kids simple choices can be a form of negotiating.

**I = Insist** that once a limit has been established that is reasonable, the boundary is respected. Sometimes when limits are new with our kids, we need to have a period of time of maintaining that boundary and being consistent, otherwise the limit disappears and confusion sets in. Consistency with important limits really matters.

**C – Consequences** enforce boundaries. Parents often use logical consequences with their children when it comes to issues of safety and respect for others. If a limit and consequence has been discussed ahead of time, simply follow through without anger or threats. “You agreed to wear a helmet but now I see you riding without one. It looks like your bike will be put away for a couple of days.” Allow your child to experience appropriate natural consequences; they are the rules of life. If they are old enough to take on a responsibility, don’t rescue, nag or get into power struggles. Over-parenting interferes with natural consequences so pull back!

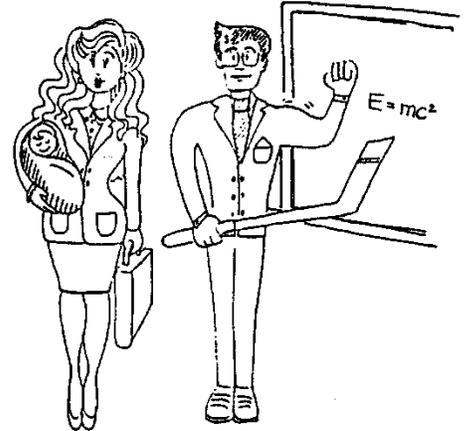
**E – Exit** the power struggle. Rambling on with lectures and moral values doesn’t teach kids. When you stay locked into arguments, you simply take back responsibility. Stop talking and let the actions teach your child. Empathy and support should be present at all times. “I know you are disappointed that you can’t ride your bike.” or “It sounds like you were embarrassed today when you forgot your homework.” These responses show your love without interfering.

## ***Super-Families and Healthy Families***

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Are you a super parent with super children? Do you base your self-esteem on being nice and being in control? If so, you might want to CUT IT OUT! Try being healthy instead.

1. **Super-children** have to excel. **Healthy children** enjoy being themselves, learning by exploring, and using their abilities.
2. **Super-parents** have to excel. **Healthy parents** enjoy being themselves, even if they aren't all-around perfect specimens.
3. **Super-children** don't interfere with their parents' perfect lives at inconvenient times. **Healthy parents** accept that kids are kids.
4. **Super-children** are "nice". **Healthy children** are egocentric and have feelings and needs.
5. **Super-parents** are "nice". **Healthy parents** pay attention to their own feelings and needs.
6. **Super-children** are obedient, and super-parents are in control. **Healthy parents** permit their children to become independent, and healthy children develop independence through resisting control.
7. **Super-parents** solve their children's problems and manage their behavior, so that super-children don't make mistakes. **Healthy parents** allow their children to solve problems and learn from their mistakes.
8. **Super-family** members never make mistakes. **Healthy family** members make mistakes and forgive themselves and one another.
9. **Super-families** are always together and close. **Healthy family** members have boundaries.



Ms. and Mr. North America.

## Bad Mood?

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It takes a lot of awareness to recognize that: 1) you are in a bad mood and 2) to figure out where it came from. Unfortunately our loved ones tend to suffer if we don't take



the time to reflect on our emotional states, especially our children who rely on us to take responsibility for our behavior. Often an adult will pass their bad mood on to a child, then the child will pass it on to a younger sibling and then the youngest will take it out on the family pet! Fluffy may wear the brunt of your bad mood.

Every bad mood begins somewhere. You can learn to notice a bad mood as soon as it begins, to detect the trigger that got it started, to identify the feelings produced by that trigger, and to problem-solve around the situation to prevent the same thing happening next time. While this isn't easy, it is possible and the process is something that our children need to learn

as well. Even if you can't figure it out, you can still "own" your feelings rather than blame those around you. "I'm in a bad mood and it's your fault!"

When we voice our negative emotions without taking it out on those around us, it creates a healthy boundary. We avoid getting intertwined in each other's emotional states.

### What to do:

- Make an *I Statement* – I'm feeling grumpy, tired, irritated....and I'm not sure why. This gives people a chance to relax rather than becoming anxious thinking that they have done something wrong.
- Take a moment and try to articulate the feeling, ask yourself when it started. If you can identify where it came from that awareness might be enough to help you move on.
- Talk about "bad moods" with your kids when you are feeling calm and when you have the ability to explain that it isn't their fault.
- Come up with a humorous signal that gives you and your kids an *out* when they need some space like - grumpy mom, dad or kid alert.
- Agree to give each other some space when the alert is on.

## ***Battling Over Homework?***

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Do you experience frequent battles with your child at the dinner table over homework? Do you nag, lecture, correct and blow your cool? Despite the growing research that shows there *is no* valid research proving homework to be helpful, homework should not be a source of negativity in your home! While how a child is doing in school is a school and family issue, children's homework is theirs. If they are struggling in school, it isn't because of homework, it is usually something like a learning challenge, social difficulties or stress. That being the case, battling over homework makes things worse for the child.

Everyone feels the pressure of homework battles. The parents see it as their 'job' to manage homework and teachers are expected to produce it, even if it is meaningless and repetitive. What about the kids? Aren't they supposed to be kids somewhere in-between school and their karate or dance lessons? Some kids love doing homework so it's a non-issue as long as they are still playing. Lots of kids prefer activities or doing something creative and those kids need to have the time to do just that. See their lives outside of school as just as important.



So don't let homework become a battle ground in your home. Your relationship with your child is far more important than that. If it has become a problem, talk your child's teacher and look for a creative alternative. Supporting kids through their school experience should be positive.

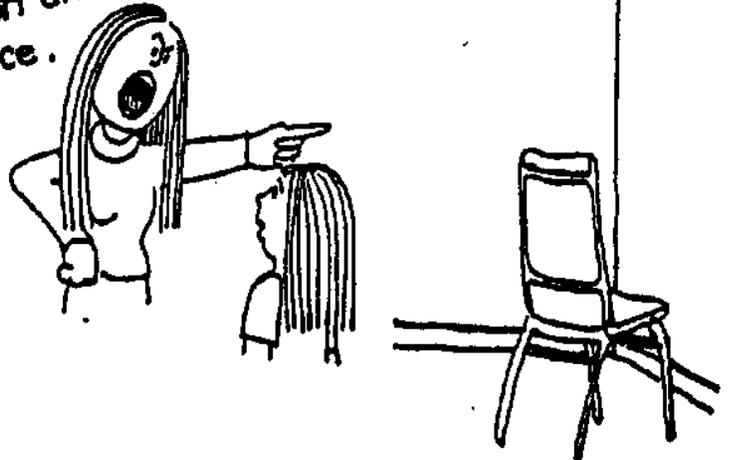
Setting up times of the day that are screen free invites kids to play, read or tackle school work. Provide the supplies, the place to do it and the structure without the negativity. Of course we are going to read with our child or help them if they are struggling. Wouldn't it be a shame if we didn't get to do our kids science projects for them anymore? "What mark did I get on your project son?"

## ***In the Heat of the Moment***

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When you are upset, mad, furious, anxious....your brain doesn't work properly. You say things you wouldn't normally say and think things that probably aren't true. "My child is doing this just to bug me!" or "She's so disrespectful." You hear yourself yelling and part of your mind is saying, "Stop this, you are hurting her feelings." The other part of your mind is saying, "Yes, but it feels so good right now." We all go there, but if you are blurting out punishments and following through when your brain isn't working, Cut it Out!

*If you don't stop that, Mary,  
I'm going over to that chair in the corner  
and sit down until I think of a suitable  
consequence.*

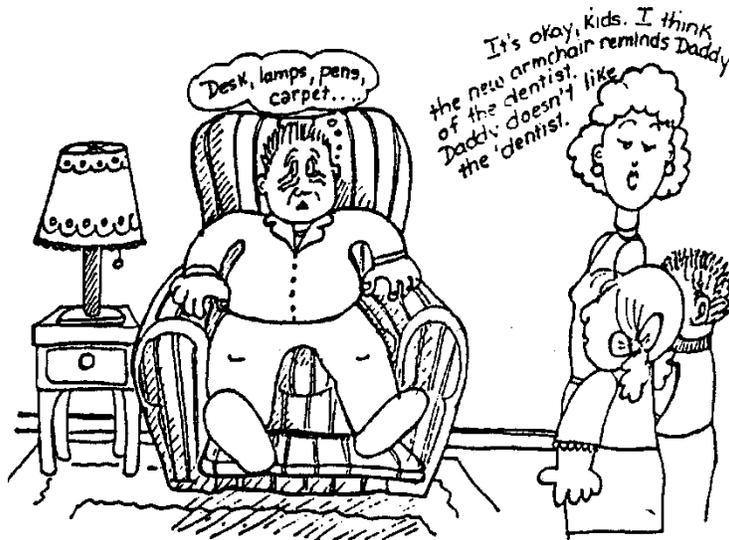


We create all kinds of power struggles when we deal with our kid's behavior in the heat of the moment. We blurt out a consequence and hopefully, realize later that it was unfair and then...we back down. That is better than thinking, "I said this so I better follow through." Your child will respect you much more if you apologize for being too harsh. The best way to deal with this is to say you are upset and give yourself time to think about what to do. When you take this time you often realize that merely expressing a frustration and why you feel that way is enough. You might also find out what is going on for your child and what needs are frustrated in her. Negotiating needs and using effective communication is healthy parenting. Managing your behavior when you are upset is great role modeling. This *is* discipline.

## Keep Your Fears to Yourself!

Kids will have enough opportunity to develop their own fears; the last thing they need to do is take on ours. If you openly express your fears of dogs, bugs, snakes, dirt, heights, spicy food..... the list goes on, you might want to stop. Kids are highly influenced by your reactions to things and this can easily create a crippling fear in them.

When my son was about two, I was lying beside him while he drifted off for an afternoon nap. Suddenly out of the side of my eye I saw a big, brown spider. I shrieked and grabbed my slipper to protect my baby from this terrifying monster. (yikes) My son quickly developed a strong fear of spiders!



When you feel terrified of things that don't really pose a serious danger it might be wise to borrow a calm behavior. You can take a breath and bite your tongue.

When it comes to more serious threats like strangers, earthquakes and illness, you can also

be mindful of the amount of fear you pass on to your children. It can be a shock to a child when they discover that such awful things happen and they look to the parent for reassurance. Things to think about:

- Spend time listening without interrupting or trying to fix your child's feelings.
- Give children facts and truth at an age appropriate level.
- Help them control what they can to prepare and then teach them to forget about it.
- Help them see the unlikelihood of these things happening.
- Stay calm yourself and model an optimistic outlook.
- Teach your child relaxation skills such as breathing, meditation, positive imagery, prayer or comforting daily rituals.

## The Ex Factor

So, it turns out that you married somebody for the short term not the long term and in the meantime, you had some kids. Somehow you have to be able to co-parent and put the resentment and history behind you. This is no easy task and surely calls on every piece of self-discipline you have. What's your other choice? You can't stay stuck in your story forever and if you are spending lots of time thinking stressful thoughts full of blame or retaliation, it will hurt you. These stressful thoughts cost you your health, your peace of mind and most likely affect your children. They just feel it.

Once upon a time there was a beautiful, innocent young princess. She met a frog who said he was really a handsome prince some witch had placed under a spell. She kissed him and he turned into a selfish been guzzling slob who treated her like dirt. So one day she got out her phone, a yellow directory and found a witch in the Yellow Pages who transformed her true love back into a frog. She then got out a book on how to prepare exotic French cuisine...



If you focus on your children's needs, putting your issues aside will feel easier. While every break up is different there are some basic rules you just need to agree on and if you are the only one willing to play the game, that will still make a big difference. Basically your relationship with your ex is a new one. You need more skills now than before. Here are a few:

- Never vent to your kids, question them about their visits or talk about your ex when your kids are around and if they are asleep remember, the walls have ears.
- If there is a lot of conflict, set a business tone to your discussions with your ex and focus on facts and important information. This eliminates the tone of contempt and disdain.
- Find a way to have consistent, brief discussions using a medium that works for both of you. Both parties must be comfortable with the amount of contact.
- Create a reasonable structure that both homes can adhere to regarding bedtime, screen time and support with school issues.
- Have a notebook to record important events that can travel with your children.
- Give kids a visual recording of their schedule and when you can, drop the child off at the other parent's home rather than picking them up. This decreases the likelihood of difficult departures.
- Remember transition time can be hard for kids and it doesn't necessarily indicate that there are problems at the other house. Be sensitive and give your kids time and space to adjust.
- Become a good listener so you can give support to your kids and stay connected to how they are doing without taking sides or prodding.
- Do not rush into introducing a new partner, give your kids a chance to grieve, adjust and get used to a life they didn't ask for.

## *Cutting Down the Ex*

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A child can become alienated from one separated parent for reasons of his own, for example, if that parent is overly critical or abusive towards the child. But a child can also become alienated from a parent if the other parent makes it a condition of her love for the child. If you are talking about the other parent or communicating disdain, even just with body language, you must stop it. It seriously hurts your child.

It takes a lot of self-discipline and awareness to stay on top of this. An angry frown or non-verbal sounds of disapproval can speak volumes. If mom is sobbing to her son about how mean his father was to her, the boy may well become scared of his dad, even though dad is no threat to him. If dad is telling his daughter about how mom spent all his money and lives a chaotic lifestyle, in order to keep dad's approval the girl will become indignant on dad's behalf and will view mom with dad's eyes.

It is important not to poison your children against the other parent, no matter how you personally feel about that person. Your child deserves to have the love of both his parents, and this may be possible even if the marriage didn't work. Your child deserves his own relationship with the other parent, and there should be boundaries of privacy around that relationship, as long as the child is not being abused. If your child talks about dad yelling at him, don't jump to conclusions; just listen and help him figure out how to deal with it assertively. Don't add your own anger to what the child feels or take over your child's experience. Often a child's perspective may miss important elements and perceive things in a certain way when there is more to it. This doesn't mean disagreeing, correcting or dismissing. It means that you let the child own the experience without you using it as fuel against the other parent.

On the other hand, it is also important for you not to deny your child's own perceptions of the other parent; even if you are trying to defend that parent against your child's criticism. Some parents feel it's always important to tell children that the other parent loves them even when it's becoming evident that there is inappropriate parenting. Don't make excuses for your ex. Sooner or later the child will have to face the reality of a poor relationship with that parent, if that's what it is, and come to her own conclusions. Don't distort the facts to protect the child; it will only backfire in the end. Respect your child's perception of reality and the boundaries of her relationship with the other parent.

If it is at all possible, if you hear feedback that disturbs you, check it without accusing. Start with something like, "I just want to check this out with you...." If the other parent is very defensive, this may not work but the tone you set at the start of the conversation may make or break the conversation.

## *Argue Well*

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Kids don't like to hear their parents argue. It feels like sitting through a minor earthquake, you know that feeling? Is it going to get worse? Will we survive? Will our structure collapse? If you and your partner fight in front of the kids, Cut it Out! Actually, if you fight within ear shot, cut that out too. Fighting consists of yelling, blaming, put downs, criticism, name calling and having to be right. Once it starts, every subject under the sun can be pulled into the massive ball of fire. "Remember Christmas of 1998 when you got so drunk you dropped the turkey on the floor?" "Yeah, well probably just as well seeing as you can't cook a turkey for the life of you!" We all know when we are in that defensive position. We can feel it in our bodies. We hear ourselves say things we wouldn't normally say and at the same time, part of our brain is trying to tell us to stop talking, shut-up! Yet once we are in that place it somehow feels good to keep going.

The problem is that the good feeling quickly disappears once the adrenaline settles down and then we are left with more damage. People get hurt, problems don't get resolved and new problems arise. You will also see the same behaviors in your children when they talk to you or argue with their siblings. Parental conflict can also account for many other behaviors in children from withdrawing to being explosive.

It takes time, willingness, self-awareness and some new skills to change old patterns but what could be more important to work on?

Role model a healthy argument:

- Listen to your partner's point of view and try to understand what they feel and need.
- Be comfortable with both of you seeing things differently.
- Talk about one thing rather than bringing in unrelated subjects or past events.
- Don't make it personal, stick to the issue.
- Accept that your perceptions and assumptions can be incorrect, only your partner knows what they intended, felt, thought, meant.....
- Stop a discussion if it heats up and agree to talk later.
- Ask yourself what your partner needs, what is the "please" behind the words.
- Get clear with what you really want and then ask for specific action.
- Express your feelings, acknowledge them, own them and let them guide you to your needs.

Model this and you are teaching important relationship skills. Remember that children learn by watching us. No pressure though!

## Raising a Parent

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While you are raising your children, your children are raising you too. Perhaps there has never been another time in your life when you felt such intense feelings. While many of them are overwhelmingly joyful others can be intensely negative. Feelings such as; anxiety, fear, anger, guilt, worry and sadness can surface frequently simply because you love and care for your child. Often these feelings can create reactive behavior, causing you to say or do something you regret. You could say that we go unconscious during these times. Yet, being a more conscious parent develops from being unconscious. That is kind of a relief, don't you think?

The foundation of effective parenting is to grow yourself. It isn't learning more ways to control your kids or have all the answers. It is the ability to be present for them and to be attuned to who they are, what they need, what they love. This means you need to be open to yourself first; your feelings, needs beliefs, and triggers. It means that if you are open to your over-reactions, you can dig deeper. The learning is in reflection of those times of when you "loose it" or "blow it".



When you feel open, try mining your unconscious reactions. Take ten minutes, relax and ask yourself these questions:

- What triggered me?
- What am I thinking about this? Is this true?
- Where did this belief come from? Is this what I believe or is this from my past or someone else?
- Who would I be as a parent without this belief?
- What would that look like?
- What am I afraid of?
- If I let go, what is the worst thing that could happen?
- Could I handle that?

## Resolving Anger

Anger is the emotion which causes the most difficulty, especially between family members. If we go to anger frequently, we really need to *Cut It Out!* The following anger chart, arranged around the letters of the word 'ANGER," summarizes effective ways of dealing with anger and the other emotions which underlie it.

	Steps to awareness:	How this can be effective:
<b>A</b>	Attend to your early signals of anger. What do you feel in your body? How do you behave?	You can catch anger before it escalates. When you increase your awareness of the early signals, you can choose how you will react.
<b>N</b>	Negotiate with those around you about your anger, not about specific issues. Choose distance and time.	Discuss this strong emotion with your family. Come up with a signal that means you need time out: <i>Give me five, Grumpy guy alert, Bag lady alert.</i> Calm down remove yourself from the situation and take some time to reflect. Even turning your back and breathing deeply can be effective.
<b>G</b>	Gear down from taking action and explore your feelings. Identify them if you can. Pay attention to your own triggering thoughts that may provoke anger.	G = Get alone E = Express your emotions A = Analyze your thoughts R = Recognize your needs. Catch negative trigger thoughts and replace them with healing ones. Use your feelings to explore what your needs are.
<b>E</b>	Express your feelings and needs assertively.	When you _____, I feel _____ because _____. I want/would like you to _____.
<b>R</b>	Resolve issues if possible. It may be as simple as making a positive request. It may mean engaging in conflict resolution. It may mean resolving the issue within yourself.	Resolving conflicts stops the vicious circle of old issues and patterns recurring. Resolution doesn't have to be complicated, but it can't happen without the preceding steps. Often we need to feel anger to know there is a boundary that needs to be addressed.

## Talking Too Much?

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Dad, I'm having a little trouble understanding the subclause B in paragraph 26 in your Behavior Expectation statement.



It's really hard to listen when somebody talks too much, especially when you are a kid with limited attention.

In an effective conversation, people talk for short spurts and give each other time to respond. This kind of exchange respects the need for both people to listen and speak. When it comes to children, they often lose us after the first five words. We can talk over their heads as well by using terms they don't understand or discussing concepts they are too young and inexperienced to grasp.

Parents must remember to keep instructions clear and brief. Say what you want to say with as few words as possible. If you think you have a tendency to talk too much, you are probably right.

What to try:

- Use one word reminders "garbage" instead of nagging.
- Ask for what you want specifically, "Please tell me what you hear me saying."
- Say nothing when you notice a time that you might usually natter needlessly.
- Keep your message brief and to the point.
- Stick with one issue at a time.
- Give your child time to respond.
- Be a good listener yourself.
- Notice if you repeat yourself or give too much detail.

Children are often scolded for not listening or being disrespectful when in fact, the parent needs to pay attention to how they are speaking!

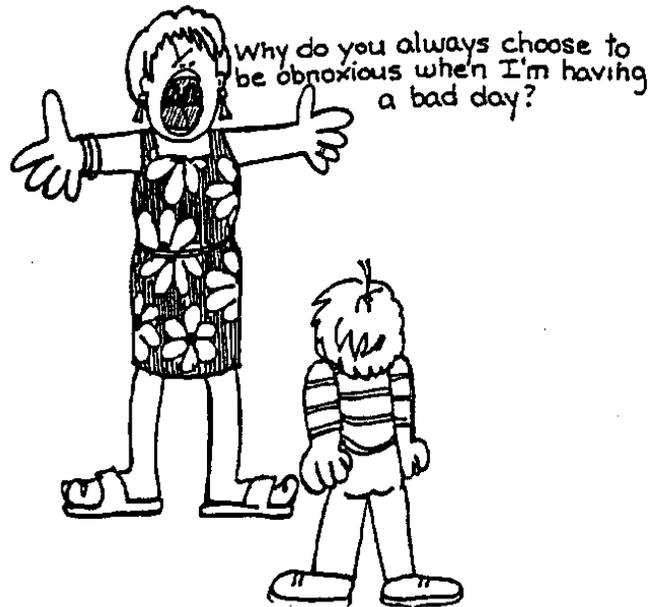
## The Blame Game

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“I feel awful and I’m pretty sure it’s your fault.” When we experience negative emotions it’s easy to blame those around us. There is no doubt that other people’s behavior can be challenging but if you are blaming them for your feelings you aren’t being responsible for yourself. The blame game is the cause for the breakdown of many relationships.

“You make me so mad!”

If you really believe that somebody has that much control over your emotions, you must spend a lot of time trying to change the other person. “I can’t be okay until you think, feel or act differently.” Now I’m not saying that we can’t make requests like, “I’m feeling tired and my head hurts, please you keep your noise down.” That is different than, “You’re giving me a huge headache!”



When the people around you are driving you crazy that is a pretty good indicator that your needs aren’t being met. Yes, I know that when you are a parent, you can’t eat, sleep or have much privacy but blaming others rather than taking responsibility for yourself is not the answer. When the voice of criticism starts to yammer in your head stop and ask yourself, “Am I feeling anxious or stressed right now? Do I think my child is purposefully being obnoxious just so he can drive me crazy?” Own up, your feelings belong to you.

## What We Do

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If your answer to your kids question: “Why should I?” is... “Because I said so!”... you might want to reword this.

We teach our children values through our style of parenting. Considering our child’s feelings, sharing our own feelings and reflecting on the feelings of others raises our children to a higher level of moral development. It teaches them why the rules are there – to spell out what it means in practice to “treat other people the way you would like them to treat you” (the Golden Rule).

A valuable exercise is to trace your limits back to the Golden Rule. This is a good reality check to make sure you are being reasonable; if you can’t relate the limit to the Golden Rule, rethink its importance. It may be a silly rule that really doesn’t matter.

**What We Do** is a way to explain: **what** behavior is required, why **we**, our family, does this, and that we all need to **do** unto others as we would have them do unto us. It describes the limit in terms of the needs of others and supports one of the most important lessons of childhood: *respect for others*. **Try your own example below:**

	Parent Dialogue	Child’s Response
<b>What</b> (request)	Please take out the garbage.	Why?
<b>We</b> (family value)	Because we have agreed that everyone in the family will help with chores and that everyone will get a different chore each week to keep it fair.	Why?
<b>Do</b> (relate limit to the Golden Rule)	Because everyone in this family matters equally, and we must all learn to help each other. It wouldn’t be fair if some people did all the work and others did none. So we help each other out.  <b>That is just <i>what we do</i>.</b>	That stinks!

## Stranger Danger

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Of course we need to educate children about strangers and the various dangers of the world. We know that pedophiles exist, that dangerous drugs are offered to kids and that internet allows kids to communicate with people who may not be who they say they are. This is reality. At the same time we must live our lives without distorting these facts into making us think like victims.

When we were kids we got to walk to school and play outside all day. We built tree forts, caught tadpoles and climbed trees. We developed a relationship with nature and expanded our physical energy and imaginations.



We have to find some balance so that our kids can experience life without fear, yet know how to protect themselves. Of course these are some basic rules:

- Stay in a group when you're off the beaten track
- Don't go anywhere with strangers, even if they say they need help. This includes women and children.
- Make a noise and fight back or run if someone makes a suspicious approach, and always tell about it afterwards.
- Know your karate skills and your super hero cape won't help protect you from a dangerous adult.
- Teach children about physical boundaries, language for body parts and inappropriate adult behavior.

It isn't usually a stranger to fear, it can be relatives, daycare providers, scout leaders, clergypersons, babysitters and so on, so screen them very carefully. In the meantime, find space for children to play, go outside, experience freedom and do age appropriate things. This will nourish their self-esteem, develop their spidy senses and give them a sense of confidence that could very well protect them!

## ***Behavior Is Communication***

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Behavior is communication. If you expect children to act like adults, you really need to CUT IT OUT! Emotional maturity needs to be nurtured in our children so that they can develop healthy ways of expressing themselves and take thoughtful action to get their needs met. Children are immature and they will scream, bite, hit and have temper tantrums when their needs aren't met. To develop mature moral values, a child needs to: Have the ability to recognize his own feelings, express them appropriately, hold back hurtful actions which might result from those feelings, and meet his needs in ways which do not harm either him or others in the long run. Most adults are still working on this.

### **When your child misbehaves ask yourself. How was he feeling?**

afraid, aggravated, agitated, alarmed, angry, annoyed anxious, apprehensive, bewildered, bored, concerned, confused, dejected, depressed, detached, disappointed, discouraged, distressed, embarrassed, exasperated, exhausted, fearful, frightened, frustrated, furious, guilty, helpless, hesitant, horrified, horrible, hurt, impatient, indifferent, intense, irate, irritated, jealous, lonely, mad, mean miserable, nervous, overwhelmed, panicky, passive, pessimistic, reluctant, resentful, restless, sad, scared, sensitive, shocked, sleepy, sorry, startled, surprised, suspicious, troubled, uncomfortable, unhappy, unsteady, upset, uptight, weary, withdrawn, worried

### **Every feeling points to a need. Can you match the feelings to a need?**

#### **Needs to be met in relationships:**

acceptance, affection, appreciation, clarity, closeness, community, company, consideration, distance, empathy, equality, fairness, honesty, inclusion, love, protection, reassurance, respect, support, trust, understanding, warmth

#### **Personal needs:**

achievement, accomplishment, autonomy, choices, comfort, contribution, creativity, dreams, emotional safety, freedom, goals, to grieve, integrity, justice, meaning, order, peace and quiet, physical safety, play, self-worth, sense of self, time alone.

Develop a language of needs and help kids come up with effective strategies to get their needs met.



## Mind Rape!

Often I hear people start a sentence with “I feel like,” and it usually ends with some sort of interpretation of the other person’s motives, feelings or intentions. “I feel like you don’t care at all and you think I should do all the work.” When we tell people what they their intentions are or how they feel, we are projecting our own story onto them. It usually isn’t true and it immediately puts the person in a defensive position.

This kind of imputing motives has been called “mind rape.” That’s a strong term, but that’s what it feels like to someone who goes through it. It is an insensitive invasion into the privacy of a person’s innermost thoughts, feelings, and motives, not recognizing the integrity of the person, their true nature, and their right to privacy.

This is especially harmful when we do it to our children. They don’t have the ability to defend themselves against such a thing and it can quickly create anger and hurt. You can bring up an issue, make your observations without imputing motives!



## The Parental Child

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Children have to be children. What does that really mean? They have to be free of taking on too much responsibility, especially responsibility that belongs to an adult. While it can look like a good thing when

a boy is called, "the man of the house", it isn't. When kids provide any adult like support to a parent it interferes with their true needs. They become the parental child. This should never happen. They need to be free, to play, to be a child and to be cared for. If you are giving your children too much responsibility, it will cause anxiety and worry for them.

Don't share your adult concerns with your kids, especially the feelings you have about the other parent. This burden of too much worry means they sacrifice their own childhood, and can never have it back. Children may rebel against this, or may become seriously depressed as a result of having to act as an adult when they still need to be a child. Even when if kids are helping you with their younger siblings, they need to know that you are still in charge. If they are old enough to baby-sit, they should be remunerated for their efforts in some way.

If you notice them getting caught up in adult issues like worrying about money or getting caught in the middle of adult conflict, talk to them. Let them know that you are able to handle the situation.

***Childhood is a protected time not just physically but emotionally.***

## Critical Grandparents

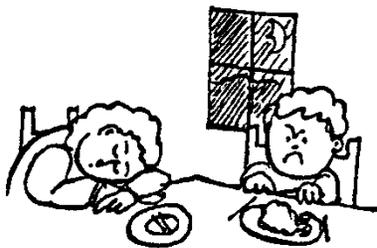
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Parenting might look different today and your grandkids may appear to be getting away with murder but perhaps what they are getting away with is being a kid. A generation ago, we had to obey our elders and while some of us appear to have turned out okay, many adults suffer from low self-esteem as a result. Today's parents are realizing that example works better than orders and punishments. This is true for having good manners as well, especially if it means parents have to be rude to enforce them.

You may see a little less obedience but this does not mean that your grandchildren won't grow up to be caring, responsible people. Research shows that reasoning with kids when you set limits, rather than just giving orders, raises children to be kinder, have more empathy and develop higher moral values.



Today's parents are allowing children to express their feelings and learn to understand and accept them. It's best to guide children to manage behavior as their maturity allows and not before. Parents are also learning to respect their children's bodies by not forcing food on them that they don't like or want or forcing them to hug someone if they aren't comfortable doing so. This will strengthen a healthy relationship with eating, help them respect their bodies and provide better personal boundaries.



Today's parents are getting in touch with what matters which is putting relationship at the forefront. They encourage their kids to speak up and help with making decisions that involve them. It turns out getting kids involved like this wins cooperation, a much healthier goal than obedience.

You might also notice that language has changed. Telling children they are *bad* is no longer acceptable. Instead, parents are detaching labels from children's character and describing specific behavior instead. This also protects children's self-esteem. Get curious and learn more about this, your adult kids will appreciate this.

Avoid saying this like, "You never acted like this when you were a kid." Or, "You just have to show her who is boss." Remember, your kids probably already feel a bit insecure about their parenting. Just be supportive, help how you can and if you can't say anything nice.....don't say anything at all!

## ***To Discipline or Disciple?***

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What is discipline? One definition is to obtain conformity by using punishment and reward? If you think that word still fits, you might want to reconsider this. It might be time for a new word or at least a new twist to that word. Another view of discipline is to teach in such a way that encourages self-discipline. In that case the word needs to change to *disciple*. To disciple somebody means that we mentor them by modeling respect, self-discipline and maturity: they become our disciple when they want to emulate us. This requires awareness of our emotional states and the impact they have on our children. Healthy mentorship also means we have clarity around our own personal boundaries and the boundaries of others. To disciple also means recognizing that along with how we behave we must be accountable for how we communicate.

Words are powerful and we can easily harm our kid's self-esteem by labeling them, making assumptions or putting them down. Or even when we praise them for doing something we want rather than encouraging them to develop internal values and goals. When this happens, our kids lose touch with the ability to learn what we might actually be trying to teach them and more importantly, are derailed from the natural course of development of conscience and responsibility. Likewise, when we don't actively listen to our children we are role modeling what not to do! If your kids don't listen to you start by showing them what listening actually looks like.

Effective communication is not about a set of skills and something that you "do". It is a way of "being" and having an awareness of boundaries. What issue belongs to who? Do I really have to fix this person's feelings? Are they responsible for how I feel and do I blame them? Do I allow myself to project my own fearful thoughts onto them? When we can get clear with the deeper part of communication then the skills come to us easily. Recognizing the do's and don'ts of communication makes much more sense when we get the deeper piece. Allow yourself to have well intentioned, messy communication. If the skill takes over, we lose our connection because we are in our head.

So keep learning and growing yourself. Somebody needs to disciple our children!

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## Being the Best

Some people learned that they were acceptable in childhood only if they were “better” than others in school grades, beauty, social graces or some other kind of behavior. They are constantly trying to impress others. They tend to turn relationships into contests in which they try to outdo the other person in the areas where they think they can succeed. They cannot rejoice in others’ successes, because they see themselves as in constant competition with others, with only the one who is “the best” being acceptable.

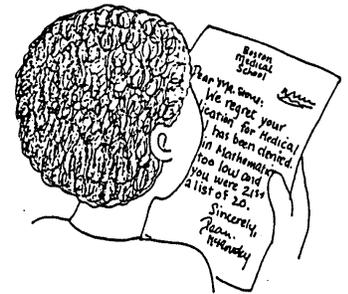
When children get lost in trying to be the best, they may experience a great deal of anxiety trying to keep up to the ever increasing standards of what it takes to win. When they are no longer number one, their sense of failure is devastating. Their self-worth walks the tightrope of performance. One wrong move and they tumble down. If you compare your child to others or save praise for perfection, you might be setting them up for fragile self-esteem. Kids don’t have to do their best all the time! Do you? It should be saved for times when we really need to do our best otherwise, it can contribute to anxiety.

### Self-Esteem Tool Kit

- Recognize your child’s interests and notice things that *they* really enjoy.
- Celebrate mistakes and share your own with a sense of humour.
- Show children that they are loved at all times rather than just when they perform and succeed.
- Be careful with the line “I’m so proud of you.” Don’t make it about you. Try, “You look proud.” Or “How do you feel about your work?”
- Celebrate your child’s successes but find the balance.
- Emphasize the importance of rest, play and recreation.
- If your child has self-esteem, he will do his best when he needs to, without basing his self-worth on the outcome.



"Richard at 10"



"Richard at 20"

