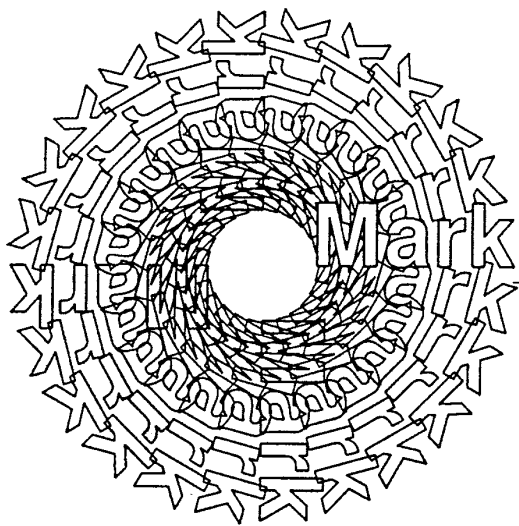


Practical Parenting Skills

by
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Dattoli

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Dedication

To my foster sons and the other
young folks who have shared my home:

Alan

Alex

Bobby

Brian

Curtis

Freddy

Jay

Jeff

Jimmy

John (1)

John (2)

Kevin & Julie, Katy and Becky

Lavar

Michael (1)

Michael (2)

Paul

Shawn

Tom (1)

Tom (2)

William

And to my friends and mentors
Fran Nytko and Paula Michonski.

And, of course, to my mom and dad.

PRACTICAL PARENTING SKILLS

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Part 1: The Basics

Responsibility of Parenthood

Being a parent is an awesome responsibility. One author cautioned:

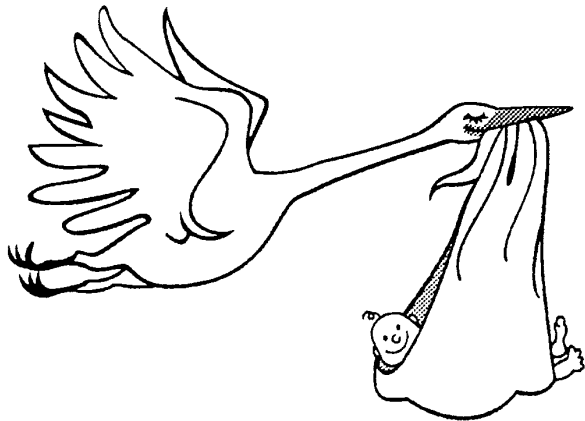
- Deciding to be a parent is like joining the army; if you can't deal with the sound of reveille at 5 am, you had better not do it.

- Ken Barun

There is a rapidly growing movement in the US that has recognized the long-term, damaging effects of dysfunctional homes on people. Most well known, perhaps, are the **Adult Children of Alcoholics (ACOA)** and similar groups, but many others have recognized how they have been crippled in life because of the way they were raised.

There are books like **Toxic Parents**, or **Toxic Faith**, and groups like **Fundamentalists Anonymous** that are addressing this growing recognition that how kids are raised can negatively affect them for their whole lives unless they get help. The sad fact is that, even if we are well-meaning parents, we can hurt our kids just as an alcoholic or abusive parents can. We must take our job seriously.

Many of us married young, and were unready for the responsibilities of parenthood. Far too many have simply walked away from it. Today, when it's so difficult to grow up, kids need both parents more than ever. Yet, the percentage of kids with two parents (let alone both biological parents) appears to be dwindling. We parents must stick to what we have committed to.



PRACTICAL PARENTING SKILLS

Good and Bad Parents

Although most of us try to be good parents, we know that there are bad parents out there who abuse and neglect their own children. When we have tough times with our kids, sometimes we may wonder if we have been bad parents. Though we may not always be as effective as we could be, there is a wide disparity between good and bad parents.

Bad Parents	Good Parents
Abuse kids	Provide and care for kids
Neglect kids	Love kids
Are too busy and ignore kids	Are involved with
Refuse to set limits	Set rules and clarify expectations
Don't discipline or punish to get even	Give consequences
Give up	Hang in there
Show indifference	Show affection
Violate boundaries	Respect opinions of their kids

Given the above categorizations, it should be clear that most of us are good parents. We have no need to feel guilty about the job we have done.

How might we want to treat these two types of parents when dealing with them? Shown below are totally different approaches you might take:

Bad Parents	Good Parents
Judge their behaviors as <i>wrong</i>	Evaluate how <i>effective</i> their actions are
<i>Criticize</i> them	<i>Empathize</i> with them
<i>Confront</i> them strongly	<i>Challenge</i> them gently
<i>Order</i> them to do what they <i>should do</i>	<i>Suggest</i> things they <i>could do</i>
Make them feel <i>guilty</i>	Help them feel <i>confident</i>
Force them to <i>stop and change</i>	Encourage them to <i>carry on & improve</i>

PRACTICAL PARENTING SKILLS

Do Good Parents Raise Good Kids?

Some of the realities we face as parents include these:

- Kids are human beings.
- Kids are not fully mature persons.
- Kids are not and never will be perfect.
- Kids have a free will.
- Human beings cannot be controlled by anyone but themselves.
- Kids live in an imperfect world.
- There are numerous tempting and unhealthy options for our kids.
- Kids make their own choices.

And, finally:

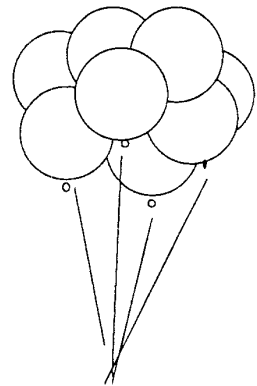
- Even good parents differ in their degree of effectiveness.

It's only this last point that we can do much about. With some effort, we can learn to develop more effective practices. As good parents, even caring about and providing for our kids, we all do some things that are not as effective as they could be. How our kids are affected by these we may never know.

○ An analogy

Take 1000 identical, helium-filled balloons.
Release them simultaneously into the sky.
Some will soar; others will fizzle.
The same makeup; the same environment.
Yet vastly different results.
You can't predict, and you can't control.

– James Dobson



PRACTICAL PARENTING SKILLS

Being a More Effective Parent

Given that even good parents vary in their effectiveness, how can we learn to improve our skills? Structured around the things shown earlier that good parents do, here are ways of doing those things effectively, and not so effectively. Also shown are reactions kids may have when we are ineffective.

Effective Practices	Less Effective Practices	Why: How our kid may think
1. Provide for his needs; let him obtain luxuries.	Spoil him.	"Why are they doing all this?" "What do they want from me?" "The world owes me a living."
2. Love him unconditionally even when he misbehaves.	Over-react to his mistakes, immaturities, and misbehavior.	"If my parents can't love me, no one ever will. I must be unlovable."
3a. Be involved, yet recognize his separate identity. 3b. Be available to support him with his problems.	Be over-invested; live only for him. <i>Own</i> all his problems and be responsible to <i>fix</i> them.	"I'm trapped; under a microscope. Get your own life. Will I ever be on my own?" "If you're gonna solve it, I won't do anything at all."
4. Have rules, but turn areas over as he matures.	Keep house rules fixed until he leaves home.	"When I get out of here, I can't wait to break the rules."
5a. Give fair consequences. 5b. Stick to the consequence 5c. Give consequences in a calm, matter-of-fact way. 5d. Wait for teachable time. 5e. Act confidently.	Be unfair/inappropriate. Back off. Give in anger, emotionally. React immediately. Be hesitant, unsure.	"It's unfair. I'll get even." "You are unsure, weak parents" "I'm being punished just cause my folks are mad." "Can't you control yourself?" "How can I trust you?"
6a. Be patient, understanding his immaturities. 6b. Use community supports	Endure, but let impatience show through. Be a <i>Lone Ranger</i> parent.	"If you hate me so much, why not just leave me alone?" "My folks are so out of it. Only <i>my</i> parents act this way."
7. Show affection physically in appropriate ways.	Invade his space or ignore his mood.	"Why don't they ever think about what <i>I</i> want?"
8. Respect opinions; listen; Be able to agree to disagree.	Hear him, but deny, belittle, negate or trivialize his feelings or thinking.	"I'm always wrong; maybe I am stupid. What do I know anyway?"

Ineffective practices can limit our influence on our kids; can breed animosity and bitterness; and can eventually alienate our kids from us.

PRACTICAL PARENTING SKILLS

Guiding Principles for Parents

Many of us don't question what our overall guiding principle is. Many of us may follow one of these principles:

- "I want my children to have what I didn't have as a kid."
- "I just want my kids to be happy."
- "I want to protect my kids from disappointment."
- "I want my kids to believe in themselves and have high esteem."
- "As long as my kid does his best at everything."
- "My kid must excel at sports or education or a career."
- "My kid must date or marry someone whom I like and approve of."
- "I want to be my kid's best friend."

The **most** effective question, however, that we could be asking ourselves is this:

- **"What does my child need to learn at this time, in this situation?"**

Our task as parents is to help our children become independent, that is, to help them learn how to learn, and how to fend for themselves. Meeting this goal will keep us from the swelling ranks of well-intentioned parents whose kids are unmotivated, can't hold a job, keep returning home, or are dependent on friends or drugs — in short, kids who feel the world owes them their entitlement, without their working for it.

The common principles listed above all fall short in one respect: they may cause our kids to miss learning some important life lesson. For example:

- "Spoiled" kids may not learn to appreciate the value of money, of hard work, of expressing thanks, or of helping less fortunate people.
- "Pampered" kids may not learn how to save for an investment, or how to grieve a loss.

PRACTICAL PARENTING SKILLS

Guiding Principles for Parents (continued)

- “Happy” kids may not learn how to deal with disappointment, or to deal with anger, whether their own, or that of someone else.
- Kids with high self esteem are often those that lead others into bad behaviors. They may not have learned to be aware of their limitations, the need for self-discipline, or the importance of giving to and caring about others.
- Parents with unrealistic expectations or who feel they must mold their kid into a certain image run the risk that their kids may not learn what it is to be loved unconditionally. They also may not learn how to express or accept love.
- Kids whose parents are their friends may not learn to separate, to stand on their own, to respect authority, or to learn that actions have consequences. This is so unhealthy that the kids may never learn how to be effective parents themselves.

Whatever your own guiding principle has been, ask yourself what lessons your kids might have been missing as a result. Take some time to observe if there's any evidence of it already.

A Letter to his Son, by Ricardo Montalban

Dear Son: As long as you live in this house, you will follow the rules. When you have your own house, you can make your own rules. In this house we do not have a democracy. I did not campaign to be your father. You did not vote for me. We are father and son by the grace of God, and I accept that privilege and awesome responsibility.

In accepting it I have an obligation to perform the role of father. I am not your pal. Our ages are too different. We can share many things, but we are not pals. I am your father. This is 100 times more than what a pal is.

I am also your friend, but we are on entirely different levels. You will do, in this house, as I say, and you cannot question me because whatever I ask you to do is motivated by love. This will be hard for you to understand until you have a son of your own.

Until then, trust me. Your Father.

“Perfect” Parents

None of us are perfect parents, and actually that's the good news. Our kids need imperfect parents.

Much of what kids learn is by observation and imitation. When we apologize to them, for example, they observe how apologies are extended and they learn what it feels like to be loved and to forgive. Our personal growth process, our times of grief, our bad days, even our bad-hair days — these are the times when our kids observe us most keenly and learn how to handle life.

A couple of good books elaborate on this principle: **A Good Enough Parent**, by Bruno Bettelheim and **When Parents Love Too Much**, by Ashner and Meyerson. Both books expose the myth of the *super-parent* and teach us to feel good about ourselves as we are.

The point, then, is that we don't need to strive to be perfect, we only need to be ourselves, and work at being as effective as we can be.



PRACTICAL PARENTING SKILLS

Confident Parents

In the late 20th century, most of our kids' biggest problems have their roots and supports in the culture. Our US culture is very ambivalent in its messages about drug and alcohol use, about sexual morals, about honesty, and actually about most absolute values. Today, some of the celebrities most respected by our kids practice and promote almost every form of perversion one can imagine. Even our presidents, legislators, ministers, and business leaders demonstrate dishonesty, immorality, and consuming greed.

To be an effective parent in these times, then, we must act confidently, yet not be over-confident. We must trust our kids only in areas where they have earned the trust. And we dare not be naive:

- Although 50% of kids use drugs, only 5% of parents know that it's their kid who is using. We **must** check up on our kids occasionally.
- We shouldn't provide unnecessary temptations for our kids to do wrong (by leaving money around, leaving teens home alone overnight, etc).
- We shouldn't expect a religious upbringing to prevent all problems.
For example, one study showed kids from conservative churches to be as sexually active as their unchurched peers.
- We can't expect kids to tell us about their drug use or moral behavior.
Even when caught doing something wrong, our kids likely will only admit to the "tip of the iceberg."

Parental guilt is normal, but unnecessary and unhelpful. Some kids will prey upon our guilt, intensify it and manipulate us. Worry is also normal, but unhelpful and sometimes crippling. Prayer helps many of us maintain our perspective and remember that we're not in it alone. Support groups or supportive peers can also help us gain confidence.

We parents have to be risk takers because we cannot guarantee how our kids will turn out. Trying to control any other human being leads to frustration, codependency, and ultimately failure. We cannot control our kids' behavior, but we can and must challenge it, confront it, and consequent it when necessary.

We want our kids to trust our judgment, experience, and to adopt our values. Yet when we appear uncertain in our role as parents, our kids may doubt whether we're really sure about anything we've tried to teach them.

Boundaries within Families

There must be appropriate boundaries between parents and children — there is family business and there is parents-only business.

- If we look to our kids for emotional support, we lose our objectivity. This sacrifices our effectiveness at discipline, and our kids may suffer by not learning what they need to know.

While we may enjoy and appreciate the expressions of love our kids show to us, we must always let them initiate those acts. We diminish our authority when we demand it of them. One of the hardest things for us is accepting, without complaint, our kids' coolness to us as they go through their adolescent years.

- If we abdicate our home responsibilities to the point where our kids must take over, they may not learn to play or relax; or may not learn to socialize appropriately; or may not learn to own, recognize, or control their emotions.
- If we share our own adult problems with our kids, they may learn to manipulate, that is, they may fail to learn appropriate skills of negotiation and cooperation.

Whenever our kid needs to play the parent, or the spouse, they may experience developmental delays. Whatever the kids would normally be learning in life is delayed to deal with the adult problems. For example, a young girl who must be too responsible for siblings during puberty may easily find herself in situations she hasn't even had time to understand yet.



Part 2: Communication

Communicating with Our Children

Communication with kids works best when it is direct and honest. Hints, subtlety, veiled threats, and sarcasm are not heard or understood by kids. We can't hide much from our kids. They are too adept at reading us. Non-verbal clues are picked up when they don't match our words. Our messages of morality, ethics, and religion are undermined when kids discover weaknesses that we think we've hidden from them.

Because kids and teens are action oriented, and not verbally oriented as adults are, they may not be convinced by words. They are, however, very likely to be influenced by our actions.

There are a lot of reasons why kids may misunderstand or not hear things that we tell them. We increase the chance of them hearing by being precise. "Please clean your room" is a lot different from "You may go outside when your bed is made, your clothes put away, and your room vacuumed."

Kids know when we are upset or frustrated even though we may think we are staying calm. It's much better to discipline kids after we really have calmed down inside, even if it takes a couple of hours (or days). It also helps us not impose consequences that are too severe, or that we have to take back.

Talking is for setting the rules, not for disciplining after a violation of the rules. Action is needed then — a consequence imposed with no emotion and as little talk as possible.

- After the consequence has been enforced and is over, there may come a **teachable moment** where we can explain our values or discuss how the kid might handle the situation better next time.
- After the consequence is also an appropriate time for us to re-express our love for or confidence in our kid. Because kids are action oriented, it's critical that our expressions of love include physical contact: a hug, pat on the back, a hand on the shoulder, etc. This helps the kid **feel** loved, even though it may be at a subconscious level.

For kids, **being** loved is meaningless; **feeling** loved is what matters.

PRACTICAL PARENTING SKILLS

Choices for Children

Because it shows respect to them, it's an effective practice to give our kids choices where possible. For example, ask: "Would you rather make your bed first, or vacuum your room? I'll let you decide."

When we give choices, we must be careful that we don't give our kids the chance to get us upset with them. "Would you rather clean your room first or play outside?" Giving a choice when we really care which they choose sets us up for conflict. It's better to be clear about what we want: "You may play outside after you make your bed or you may stay in the house all day. You choose."

Choices give kids some control over their environment. It shows that we care, it gives them a chance to make decisions, it shows that we trust them to make a good decision, and it presents us as fair in deal making.



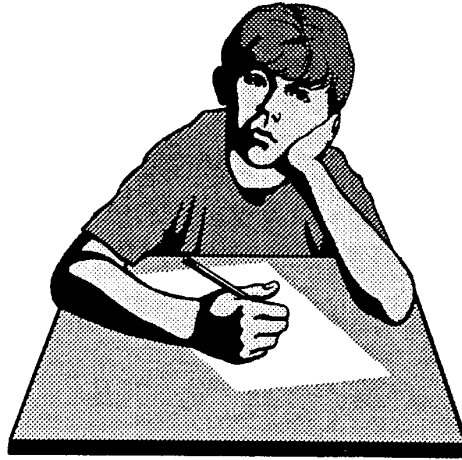
*If you love it, set it free.
If it returns, it's yours.
If it doesn't, it never was.*

PRACTICAL PARENTING SKILLS

Praise and Correction

We need to recognize progress with our kids, as that progress occurs. We can't wait till something is perfect before we recognize it. Kids will give up long before they are perfect at something.

To enhance our kids' reception of both praise and correction, it works best to separate the two: by giving positive feedback immediately after an event; and by giving negative feedback just before the next time the event will occur.



Suggesting ideas for improvement will be taken much better when given at a time when it will help the kid. It will be perceived as support rather than criticism. The common advice to "praise, then criticize" sets a kid up to stop hearing the praise, knowing the kicker is due.

An example:

- Suppose your kid enjoys making you a sandwich, but doesn't put enough salt on it for you. Rather than saying "Better but still not enough salt," start with "Thanks, that was so good. I could tell you put more salt on it for me." Then just prior to next time, say: "Last time it was great. Maybe it would be better yet with even more salt. Let's try it, okay?"

Verbal Abuse of Children

There is never any valid rationale for showing disrespect to kids, such as:

- labeling or name-calling
- sarcastic (or mixed) messages
- insults
- flippant and hurtful remarks

Discipline is most effective if given when we are calm, and able to speak in a controlled way. Yelling and threatening almost always fail in the long run, and builds alienation between us and our kids.

Kids usually react as most of us do when attacked: they get defensive. Outwardly, they may sulk, attack back, or feign attention, but inwardly they are defending themselves, and protecting their self-esteem. Consequently, they are not hearing the intended message. Kids who are labeled may spend their whole life believing their parents were right, or trying to prove their parents were wrong. They may never be free to just be themselves.

If we show any anger when giving a consequence to our kid, we run the risk of a missed message. Rather than learning that his behavior was unacceptable, the kid feels punished “just because mom was mad.” Further, when we exhibit out-of-control behavior ourselves, our kids may lose respect for us.

As damaging as physical abuse is to children, emotional abuse can be more so, because it hits ***in the gut***. It's usually an overreaction to the offense and the kids cannot understand it. Whether it's sarcasm, silence, ignoring, or withholding love, it often hurts kids more deeply. Emotional abandonment is devastating to kids. No behavior is so bad to deserve that.

Appropriate discipline may cause kids to feel appropriate guilt or remorse, and they need to recognize these feelings. Repeated verbal abuse can cause shame, an inappropriate feeling of worthlessness, a sense that “something is wrong with me.” When kids feel deficient or defective as persons, it sets up severe mental, emotional, and behavioral problems.

PRACTICAL PARENTING SKILLS

Word Choice and Phraseology

Studies have shown that the message people receive comes across by more than just the words that are spoken. In fact, one study shows this breakdown:

Percent of message heard	Is communicated by
55%	Body Language
38%	Tone of Voice
7%	Words

Despite the above, the words we do use are important also. Often, our kids will remember the exact words we used long after we can. Kids react more positively when they are not threatened or disrespected, and when they are given more of a choice.

When we speak to influence our kids' behavior, we can present ourselves in a number of ways. Shown below are some ways, each one showing an increasing amount of freedom for our kid to choose:

- Order
 - A demand to do something a specific way with no options
 - "2 eggs, fried."; "Cut the grass now and use the push mower."
- Demand
 - A directive to do something
 - "Cut the grass now, please."
- Advice/Opinion
 - The way I think you should do something
 - "It's my considered opinion that you should attend State U."
- Preference
 - What I would like you to do
 - "I would prefer that you play outside."
- Ideas
 - Possible ways you could do something
 - "I suppose you could call, write, or ask a friend to call. What else?"

PRACTICAL PARENTING SKILLS

Word Choice and Phraseology (continued)

When our kid is in a situation that he has to get himself out of, we could brainstorm with him and give some workable ideas, but we don't want to indicate what **we** would do. We will trust his judgment. In other situations, where we do care what he does, we will state our preference, but not as if it were advice. He must be free to make his own decisions and live with the consequences.

The principles involved here are:

- The more we press our desire, the more likely a kid may not do it (especially an adolescent learning to be independent).
- The more a kid feels we trust his judgment, the better he will feel about himself. Hence, the more likely he will lean toward our preference (or one of our ideas) if he is unsure what to decide.

The Word "Should"

The word "should" makes people defensive, and they often fail to hear the point we are trying to make. We can usually substitute the word "could" for "should," and come across as less threatening or critical.

When a kid hears what he "should do" or "should have done" he will very likely become defensive, if not oppositional. Rather than understand what we mean, he will start thinking of why he can't or couldn't do what we want.

To ask "**Could** you have called to say you would be late?," is a way of finding out facts, instead of criticizing first. Kids appreciate this fairness and may likely respond honestly: "Yeah, I could've, I suppose. I'm sorry." This wording and approach can often defuse tense situations.

Listening to Our Children

Any kid wants to be heard, understood, and accepted for who he is. How we listen to our kid is very important. Defensiveness or close-mindedness may cause him to shut down. Openness, courtesy, concern, a willingness to consider his opinion, and an aggressive attempt at understanding him, normally will keep him communicating with us. It also helps him feel loved and special.

A kid evaluates how well we've listened by what we say after he speaks. Our response and word choices reflect our real attitude toward the communication process. It helps to accept that we are not perfect parents, that our kid may have some legitimate complaints, or some valid ideas as to how to improve the family life. Wanting to appear perfect to our kids, and never feeling it appropriate to apologize to him can poison relationships.

Hopefully, our kid can perceive us to be "on his side," helping him learn the skills he needs to be successful in the real world. If we are always attacking him when he reveals things to us, he may perceive it as a competitive or antagonistic relationship. Here are some **ineffective** ways we can respond to our kid's complaints:

○ Defensive

- Denying our kid's reality
 - "That's not true. We love you."
 - "You shouldn't feel that way."
 - "Don't speak that way to me."
- Appealing to our kid's sense of fair play
 - "But we did the best we could."
 - "We did it for your own good."
 - "Why do you treat us this way?"
- Short-circuiting the discussion
 - "I've heard enough. So what's the solution?"
 - "Okay. I'll change. Are we done?"

○ Close-Minded

- "I don't want to hear any more about that subject."
- "That's your opinion. And you're just wrong about it."
- "We simply will not discuss changing the rules. Sorry."

Listening to Our Children (continued)

Defensive and close-minded approaches simply do not work. Usually they make it harder for our kid to continue trying to communicate. When we have a kid who won't speak to us at all, we have likely used some variant of one of the above approaches. If we can get him to air his grievances **one more time** and we take a new listening approach, maybe we'll achieve a breakthrough. Here are some of the more **effective** phrases to use when listening to our kid:

- Offensive (or aggressively seeking to understand)
 - Accepting our kid's reality
 - "Why do you feel that's true? What have we done, specifically, to make you feel that way?"
 - "How might we have handled that situation differently to have made you feel better?"
 - "I really want to hear your feelings on this, but I cannot deal with your shouting. Could you take a few minutes to collect yourself? I'll wait."
 - Recognizing our kid's need to be treated fairly
 - "I see now why you felt mistreated by us. In a future situation like this, how would you prefer we act, so that we can still give you the message that we feel you need to hear?"
 - Probing for full disclosure
 - "Okay, how do we summarize what we've just discussed? Is there anything else you're concerned with on that topic? What other topics should we discuss? What else is bothering you?"
 - "What else?" ... "What else?" ... "What else?"
Repeat this until the kid is done venting. This question can make the grievance process a series of meetings. But what an important family healing process.
- Open-Minded
 - "You seem to keep coming back to this incident that I thought we resolved. Is there still something about it that's bothering you. What didn't we hear?"
 - "We seem to have different opinions about this issue. And that's okay. Now how do you think we should handle it?"
 - "Until you can suggest a next step to resolving our difference of opinion, I must ask you to at least refrain from that practice while you're living in our home. Can you agree to that?"

This kind of listening doesn't mean that we always give in, but it ensures our kid that when he must "lose," at least we have given fair consideration to his side of the story. He'll feel that we love him enough to have been fair, and that we're not uncaring dictators.

Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution skills are very important for us to use with our kids, as well as to demonstrate for our kids. Two key principles in conflict resolution include:

- Knowing when to disagree
 - With adolescents, if we don't pick which battles to fight, we'll be fighting all the time.
Probably not what any of us wants!

Knowing what are major and minor issues is key. It helps if we have our morals and standards clearly defined. We have sorted out issues as to whether they are matters of substance or style. That is, is it a standard or preference at our home? Without being clear, unnecessary arguments surface, with kids often getting us to fight with our spouses.



There are a lot of gray areas; family members may legitimately differ on matters of dress, acceptable activities, etc. It seems that the more a family makes these gray areas into standards, as opposed to preferences, the more fighting that will occur in the home. Depending on our values and our kids, we may all set different standards. Every family must make (and clarify) their own rules.

- Identifying the type of disagreement

Disagreements usually occur over three causes:

- goals
- facts, or
- methods to achieve goals.

Knowing which one often helps.

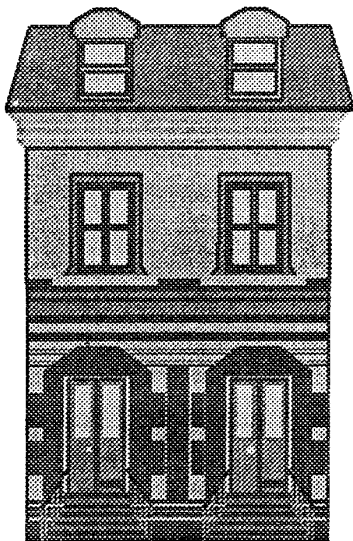
Conflict Resolution (continued)

It can be very helpful and relationship-building for us to spend time with each of our older kids and find out:

- What they see as their near term, longer term, and career goals
- Why those particular goals appeal to them, and
- What they think they will have to do to reach their goals.

These questions will help us see if we have a problem with their goals, the facts they have about their goals, or the methods by which they plan to achieve their goals.

One boy, for example, had a goal of a high school degree, with a planned method of quitting school and taking the GED. The parent supplied some missing facts in a seemingly supportive way by giving the kid a GED Study Book and making him work on it. Once the kid realized how tough the GED tests were, he changed his plans and stayed in school.



Conflict resolution and negotiating with others are critical skills for our kids to develop. It's likely they will learn this at home, subconsciously, and by observing our approach to it. If we demonstrate an effective, non-emotional approach, it can become second nature for our kids, helping them immeasurably later in life.

PRACTICAL PARENTING SKILLS

Discipline

Discipline is a many-faceted topic. A summary of the general principles we've seen in the preceding material would include:

- Don't threaten a kid with impossible consequences: the "I'll kill you" or "ground you for life" nonsense. We lose credibility with our kids.
- Don't impose a discipline that is unenforceable. "No TV all night" sets us up to be duped if we must go out sometime that night.
- Don't always ***go for the jugular*** when disciplining. Consider least means first: maybe a short time out, maybe no phone from 5-6 p.m., maybe withdrawal of a privilege, etc.
- Remember the difference between punishment and discipline: punishing a kid is a way to vent our anger; discipline is a method of training.
- Remember to recognize progress, not to wait for perfection. Be creative in recognition: compliments, notes, tokens, hugs, announcements, etc.
- Be creative in expressing love; show physical expressions of affection. If our kid is not in a receptive mood, we could touch him lightly on the shoulder when he's concentrating on something else, for example.
- After discipline, use the teachable moment to ensure that learning has taken place. Use the moment to reassure love, acceptance or confidence in their ability to do well. This may be done non-verbally.
- Make discipline here and now and over. Don't let it last forever.
- Discipline doesn't have to be a complete pain for the kid, maybe just an inconvenience. Rather than "you won't be allowed to go to the prom," perhaps "you won't be able to use the family car."
- Discipline is most effective when the consequences are natural or logical.
- Don't be too active in helping a teenager solve a problem that is strictly his, such as getting up in time for school. Whenever we help (or take over) with a problem, the kid may back off, let us be responsible, and not own up to his responsibility.

Part 3: Adolescent Problems

Manipulation

All teenagers manipulate their parents. Testing us and disagreeing with us is a part of growing up. Rather than resent it, we may as well look at the bright side of it. Sometimes there can be gamesmanship in it, and often humor. If we are able to laugh at something (the manipulative techniques), it shows that we are still in control (the opposite of rage).

Manipulation is purposeful behavior whose goal is to get the parent to give the kid what he wants. It usually takes one of these forms:

- **Badgering** Testing that involves repeated questioning, or an eternal series of gripes and complaints.
- **Intimidation** Testing whereby the child becomes very angry or has a temper tantrum.
- **Threats** Testing that suggests dire consequences.
- **Martyrdom** Testing that involves crying, pouting, looking sad or depressed, and not talking.
Designed to make us feel guilty.
- **Sweetness & Light** Testing that uses affection and sweetness and promises nice things.
- **Physical** The most drastic form of testing that includes physically attacking or running away.

Kids test to see if the limits are still there. Sometimes we mentally remove limits as we begin to trust our kid, but we don't tell him. By testing, he learns where the new limits are.

When we must tighten up the limits for out-of-control kids, we can count on them testing us to see if we're serious. When they **do** test us, the limits **better be there**.

PRACTICAL PARENTING SKILLS

Manipulation (continued)

○ Principles on Handling Manipulation

Some tips in understanding and dealing with manipulation include:

- Remember that kids want us to be in charge; it makes them feel safe.
A part of them will feel bad if their manipulation works.
- It helps not to take it personally.
- Each kid has his own preferred technique of manipulating.
If you see him change it, you're doing well.
- Life's big inequality: A kid's needs does not equal his wants.
- The golden rule: No talking and no emotion.
 - Talking gives the message: "You don't have to follow this rule if I cannot convince you that it makes sense."
- **Act** unconcerned. A effective parent is a good actor.
- Stay in the parental role.
- Pre-plan. What am I going to do when he uses the _____ technique?
- When we recognize a manipulative pattern, ask:
 - Can it be ignored?
 - Can I find humor in it?
 - Can I respond differently than I usually would?
 - Does it require a consequence?
- Possible responses to the types of manipulation:
 - Badgering/intimidation/threats: Stop listening, remove yourself, set a time when you will give an answer.
 - Martyrdom: Ignore it.
 - Sweetness & Light: Don't buy into the promises, be as sensitive to your **cold buttons** as well as your **hot buttons**.
 - Physical aggression: If others are endangered, separate them or call the police.

“
En-Oh”

What part of the word “No”
don't you understand?

Rebellious Adolescents

Some teenagers develop out-of-control behavior and our normal parenting techniques may cease being effective. For example, the following are normal parental practices, and often recommended by “experts.” Yet consider how a severely troubled teen may react:

- “Parents, be consistent”
 - But a manipulative teen can more easily prey upon a consistent parent, always knowing how they will react. Often, an effective approach is being as unpredictable as possible.
- “Parents, communicate with your kids”
 - But, again, some kids are so defiant, if we want something and they know it, they’ll do exactly the opposite. Sometimes reverse psychology works, sometimes evasiveness, sometimes misdirection. But, creativeness is called for instead of consistency and open communication.
- “Parents, be loving”
 - Some kids will take any act of love and use it against what was intended. Give this kind of kid lunch money and he’ll use it for drugs. Bail him out of jail and he’ll steal from us again. In situations like these, an optimistic, naive, and trusting love is the last thing our kid needs.

Out-of-control kids call for unorthodox responses, including family support groups, unusual discipline, and tough choices. Recognizing the need for and then changing our behavior can be very tough for us, let alone to do it by ourselves without support.



Rebellious Adolescents (continued)

○ Suspecting Alcohol and Drug Use

Many out-of-control kids, if not most, are using drugs (and/or drinking). Consequently, they do not act normal or rational. They cannot be believed or trusted because all drug using kids lie to their parents. We will not be able to reason with them or negotiate with them in good faith.

Too many families break up because a kid is using drugs. Multiple, intense pressures are caused because:

- spouses may disagree as to the extent or severity of the problem
- spouses may disagree as to what to do about it
- nothing you try seems to make any difference

The average length of time a kid uses drugs before the parents find out about it is often 1 to 2 years. The average age a kid begins using drugs is 11-12, and he can develop full-blown addiction within just a few months. This is much sooner than most parents will even suspect use. Often, by the time parents get involved, a kid may be poly-addicted to multiple substances, and has done irreparable damage to his body.

When a family's problem is basically one of communication, family therapy or counseling can often be helpful. These approaches, however, consistently fail (with a great waste of time and money) when the family's problem is an addicted child. These families must get help that goes far beyond counseling. Two groups that could be good places to look for help are ***Al-Anon*** and ***ToughLove***. Depending on the situation, they may advise hospitalization, ***Alcoholics Anonymous*** or ***Narcotics Anonymous*** for your kid, or some other unorthodox response.

AA and other 12-step self-help groups have good histories at helping people change addictive behaviors (counseling and psychiatry, on the other hand, have notoriously poor results when it comes to changing behavior). To change behavior, especially addictive behavior, it takes more than understanding and advice. It takes active support from people going through the same thing that you are.

Alcohol & Drug Abuse

At the risk of oversimplifying a complex topic, some general principles that apply relative to alcohol and drug use by kids include these:

- If our kid has sleazy friends and stays out all night, we can be sure he's into drugs. A kid may be using drugs and keep his grades and appearances up for a while. But when involved deeply enough, he may let down his guard and get caught. It's usually a very serious problem by then.
- Generally, we don't want to do anything for a teen that he can do for himself. Exceptions to this principle, however, are: Washing and putting away his clothes, and cleaning out the car. These are the main ways that parents find drugs or paraphernalia of their kids.
- Drug testing is the only way to ensure a kid has stayed clean.
- Never, ever believe a kid who says:
 - "The drugs aren't mind. I was holding them for a friend."
 - "Go ahead and test me. It won't show anything. You'll just waste your money."
- If the drug test says the kid is clean but you know in your heart he isn't, get another test. Find out the different types of tests, the traceability of different kinds of drugs. Be absolutely certain that a lab technician observes your kid giving the specimen.
- You would be safest to assume all kids use drugs and have yours tested to be sure. If a regular visit to your family physician can be used to do this testing, your kid may never even have to know what you're up to.
- Alcohol is a drug, in fact, the most commonly and deadly drug used by our kids. Kids today don't drink like adults or like kids did years ago. Kids drink to get drunk as quickly as possible; kids drink in combination with other drugs; and kids start drinking at earlier ages.
- Make it a practice to hug your kid when they come home. Observe signs and odors that are unusual: alcohol breath, breath mints, slurred speech, awkward or slowed movement, having the "munchies," etc.

Alcohol & Drug Abuse (continued)

- Be suspicious of **any** unusual objects around the kid's room: tin foil, baggies, razor blades, small mirrors, spoons, matches, etc.
- Be alert to unusual events: missing household items or cash; phone callers who hang up when you answer; night sounds/escapes; wearing of heavy clothes/long sleeves in warm weather; watered down liquor; etc. Investigate anything that makes you suspicious. Don't hesitate to invade your kid's privacy if his life is in danger; e.g., search his room or eavesdrop on phone calls if you suspect drug use.
- Require your kid wake you if he gets home after you're asleep. Observe as well as you can under the circumstances.
- If your kid comes home high or drunk, don't bother trying to talk to him. If you suspect possible alcohol poisoning (overdose), or poly-drug use, call an ambulance and have his stomach pumped. A common and potentially deadly combination is overdrinking while also smoking marijuana. Because marijuana inhibits vomiting, if your kid drinks to the point he would normally vomit, the dope allows him to continue drinking beyond that point, and possibly die from alcohol poisoning.
- Although debated among the professionals, the newest evidence suggests that drug problems occur in this order: kids take drugs; drugs cause physiological (physical) changes; these changes cause bad behavior and depression. Thus, the drug use is the primary problem (must be treated first), not the depression.

Unfortunately, many hospitals still treat the depression, the psychology of the problem, rather than the root cause. They believe a kid who solves his depression won't choose drugs. This approach is counterproductive. The addiction must be treated first; then the depression will go away.

The net result for parents is this: before choosing a specific hospital for your kid, make absolutely certain that the facility's approach treats the addiction, not the depression, emotions, or psychosis, as the primary problem.

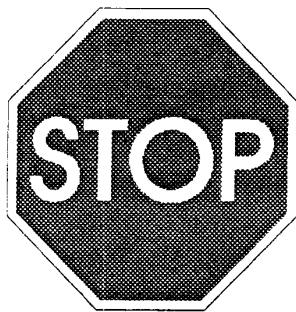
PRACTICAL PARENTING SKILLS

Rules for Teenagers

Sometimes adolescent behavior becomes so unpleasant that we just have to set down some rules. When we do set rules for a teenager, it's most effective to state them as *our* rules, or the rules of *our house*, rather than to use an outside source of authority such as the Bible, the Church, or God. Calling something a sin, immoral, or against God's will, is simply ineffective, and is just not heard by rebellious teens. These ideas belong to someone else at a time when a teen is learning to trust himself.

Adolescence is a time to (temporarily) reject parental values and try out new values. Much goes on in a teen's mind that they don't tell us about. This is normal, healthy development. As a result, we don't know when our kid will dismiss our religion or God as an influence in his life.

A teen may reject all our values, but he still has *us* that he must contend with. As *our* rules, like them or not, he's obligated by them. Often in discussion with their kids, parents bring in the kid's religious experience, training, or previous decisions or commitments. This is a waste of our time and effort when the kid is demonstrating by his behavior that that isn't important to him at the moment. We must step up and own our values, even if we can only enforce them when the kid is at home.



PRACTICAL PARENTING SKILLS

Parental Support

In the middle of a family crisis it's hard for us to be objective, to be rational, and to take appropriate, effective actions. Luckily, there are other parents who have been where we are at, and who are ready, willing and able to help.

None of us can see ourselves as accurately as others can. Hence, when our kids tell us we are crazy, we may doubt ourselves. Or when spouses disagree, our kids may divide and conquer us. Yet our kids need us to be in agreement, to be confident of ourselves, and to stick to our decisions despite their protests. Without that, they feel unsafe.

In most communities there are self-help groups for parents in all types of situations. If not, a concerned parent can start one. Self-help groups have a history of success in helping people change behaviors and improve their lives — even more so than counseling. While counseling may help you understand yourself or help your family communicate better, when family members have developed patterned (or addictive) behaviors, more effective tools and support are needed.



In a parent group, we may see that we are not alone, that our situation may not be so unusual or hopeless, that helping others may get our minds off our own problems for a while, and that there are other good folks who care and can help.



PRACTICAL PARENTING SKILLS

Appendices

Letting Go _____	A-1
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PRACTICAL PARENTING SKILLS

Letting Go

- To **let go** does not mean to stop caring,
it means I can't do it for someone else.
- To **let go** is not to cut myself off,
it's the realization that I can't control another.
- To **let go** is not to enable,
but to allow learning from natural consequences.
- To **let go** is admit powerlessness,
which means the outcome is not in my hands.
- To **let go** is not to try to change or blame another,
it's to make the most of myself.
- To **let go** is not to care for,
but to care about.
- To **let go** is not to fix,
but to be supportive.
- To **let go** is not to judge,
but to allow another to be a human being.
- To **let go** is not to be in the middle arranging all the outcomes,
but to allow others to affect their destinies.
- To **let go** is not to be protective,
it's to permit another to face reality.
- To **let go** is not to deny, but to accept.
- To **let go** is not to nag, scold, or argue,
but instead to search out my shortcomings and correct them.
- To **let go** is not to adjust everything to my desires,
but to take each day as it comes, and cherish myself in it.
- To **let go** is not to criticize and regulate anybody,
but to try to become what I dream I can be.
- To **let go** is not to regret the past,
but to grow and live for the future.
- To **let go** is to fear less, and love more.

— Source unknown

PRACTICAL PARENTING SKILLS

Steps to Maturity

- Maturity is the ability to handle frustration, control anger, and settle differences without violence or destruction.
- Maturity is patience. It is the willingness to postpone gratification, to pass up the immediate profit or pleasure in favor of the long term gain.
- Maturity is perseverance, sweating out a project or a situation in spite of opposition and discouraging setbacks.
- Maturity is the capacity to face unpleasantness and disappointment without becoming bitter.
- Maturity is the gift of remaining calm in the face of chaos. This means peace, not only for ourselves, but for those with whom we live and for those whose lives touch ours.
- Maturity is the ability to disagree without being disagreeable.
- Maturity is humility. A mature person is able to say, "I was wrong." He is also able to say, "I am sorry," and when he is proven right, he does not have to say, "I told you so."
- Maturity is the ability to make a decision, to act on that decision, and to accept full responsibility for the outcome.
- Maturity means dependability, integrity, keeping one's word. The immature have excuses for everything. They are the chronically tardy, the no-shows, the gutless wonders who fold in the crises. Their lives are a maze of broken promises, unfinished business, and former friends.
- Maturity is the ability to live in peace with that which we cannot change.

— Source unknown

PRACTICAL PARENTING SKILLS

How to Really Love Your Teenager

○ Ross Campbell, MD

Rather common today is the role reversal in which a parent demands that a child fulfill the parent's emotional needs...Such parents tend to be "best friends" with their teenagers instead of maintaining healthy parent-child relationships...A teenager treated in this way **cannot** develop normally...If we look to them to emotionally nourish us, we will hurt them — and destroy our relationship with them...I must not use my children as counselors, shoulders to cry on, emotional support, or colleagues...There is no way to be consistently firm if I am dependent on them.

- **As parents**, our first responsibility is to make our children feel genuinely loved. Our second responsibility is to be authority figures and to lovingly discipline them.

- **The foundation** for a solid relationship with your teenager is unconditional love...[which] means loving a teenager no matter what...even when you detest his behavior...Unconditional love is an ideal...You can't love a teenager — or anyone else — 100% of the time...I help myself by constantly keeping in mind that:

- teenagers **are** children,
- teenagers will tend to act like teenagers, and
- much of teenage behavior is unpleasant.

- **If I love them** only when they meet my requirements and expectations, they will feel incompetent. They will believe it is fruitless to do their best because it is never enough...Insecurity, anxiety, and low self-esteem will plague them.

- **Do you know** what is the most important question on your teenager's mind? Without realizing it, he is continually asking, "Do you love me?" And he asks this question primarily through his behavior, rather than with words...**"Do you love me?"**...You need to answer it "yes," but few parents do...The problem is that most parents do not know how to answer yes; they don't know how to convey their love to their teenagers.

How to Really Love Your Teenager (continued)

• **One of the main reasons** most parents do not know how to convey their love to their teenagers is because teenagers, like younger children, are **behaviorally oriented**. Adults are primarily **verbally oriented**...While my verbal expression of love to my son is important, it is simply insufficient to make him really feel loved...For your teenager to know and feel you love him, you must also love him behaviorally...Your teenager sees your love for him by what you *say* and *do*. But what you *do* carries more weight. Your teenager is more affected by your actions than your words...The more a parent loses self-control in a teenager's presence, the less respect a teenager will feel for his parent.

• **Teenagers** ought to be made to feel that they are special...Only focused attention can tell them this...I believe focused attention is the most demanding need a teenager has...Eye contact and physical contact should be incorporated into all of your everyday dealings with your children. They should be natural, comfortable, and not overdone...Even when your teenager is in a non-communicative mood, physical contact can be a means of conveying love to him...Sometimes your teenager may not be able to consciously tolerate your touch. At these times of non-acceptance, you can give physical contact when his attention is directed elsewhere so that he is *unaware* of the touch. Even when your teenager is not *consciously* aware of your physical contact, it registers. Its effect is to help him feel, "My mother and father love me and care for me, even during those times when relating to them is hard for me."

— Ross Campbell, MD, Victor Books

PRACTICAL PARENTING SKILLS

Dare to Discipline

○ James Dobson, Ph.D.

- Even unintentional mistakes can have severe consequences for kids
- I must **demand** respect and responsible behavior from kids
- I must be worthy of respect:
 - Not tolerate defiance
 - No sarcasm, biting criticism, or teasing
 - Don't express my fears
 - Honestly appraise kid's feelings and requests
- Kids want to be controlled yet insist parents earn the right to control
- Defiance, not mistakes or immaturity, demands the most immediate and severe response
- It's vital to properly evaluate any challenge to authority:

<i>If it is:</i>	<i>Kid is asking:</i>	<i>I must:</i>
Rebellious defiance	"Who's in charge?"	Win decisively
Frustration, disappointment, Feeling rejected	"Who loves me?"	Surround with affection

- When I demonstrate my authority (win decisively):
 - Kid develops more respect for me and may even reveal affection
 - Use time afterward to explain what happened and reassure my love
- Don't spoil a kid with things. It's harder to say "No" than "We can't afford it" but:
 - Easy gains are not valued (little pleasure and appreciation)
 - Kids need opportunities to long for, plot for, and work for things
- Don't reward to overcome defiance

PRACTICAL PARENTING SKILLS

Dare to Discipline (continued)

- Treat kid with dignity and respect and expect the same:
 - Kid can say anything to parents if said respectfully
- There can be ***too much*** parental love
- Buy a kid's clothes and necessities; let him pay for personal indulgences
- To change behavior: eliminate reinforcement and reward its replacement
- Don't be manipulated; Don't let arguing or bargaining succeed.
 - Take the time to decide; Then a ***No*** means ***Absolutely No***
- When a kid shows academic excellence, it shows intellectual ability ***and*** self-discipline
 - School poses threats: criticism, ridicule, rejection, failure despite efforts
- We cannot guarantee teens will control their sexual urges
- It's difficult, but we must teach that sex is both wonderful and dangerous
- Teens mature sexually 4 to 5 years before they do emotionally
 - Hence "Sex is okay in meaningful relationships" is ridiculous as a value
- Loyalty to parents is an insufficient motivator for morality
 - Also need loyalty to a God, who is known as a God of love ***and*** wrath
- Lasting love and affection often develop through sharing crises together

— James Dobson, Ph.D., Tyndale House

PRACTICAL PARENTING SKILLS

Why Grade "A" Executives Get an "F" as Parents

○ Brain O'Reilly

The qualities that make for corporate success are often not what are needed to be an effective mom or dad...For all their brains and competence, powerful, successful executives and professionals often have more trouble raising kids than all but the very poor...the intensity and single-mindedness that make for corporate achievement are often the opposite of the qualities needed to be an effective parent.



Building your child's self-esteem is an inconvenient, time-consuming, and maddeningly imprecise process...Intuition and good intentions often don't seem to be much help, and you need skills that rival a pilot's ability to land a jet at night on an aircraft carrier.

Serious emotional problems usually start when children are in sixth to eighth grade, and hit crisis proportions by the sophomore year...By junior year they're on track or in serious trouble.



Some 36% of the children of executives undergo outpatient treatment for psychiatric or drug abuse problems every year, vs. 15% of the children of nonexecutives in the same companies...Top executives are so accustomed to functioning at a high level of control at the office that when they get home, they try to exert the same kind of control.

The attributes that a manager must develop to succeed include perfectionism, impatience, and efficiency. Contrast these traits with what it takes to meet the needs of a growing child — tolerance, patience, and acceptance of chaos.

PRACTICAL PARENTING SKILLS

Why Grade “A” Executives Get an “F” as Parents

(continued)

During their teens, kids assert their individuality, rebelling against whatever their parents value most. Unfortunately for the kids of driven executives, what mom and dad value most is achievement...many workaholic executives felt they were mediocre in popularity, grades, and athletics. Frequently, the parent tries to create a child who was everything he was not, or thinks he can steer the kid around every pitfall. Sparks fly, and the youngster refuses to perform.

Given 70-hour workweeks, divorce, or a spouse with a career or demanding social schedule, and complications set in fast. You thought buying a house in a wealthy suburb would bestow bliss on your offspring. Too often it has the opposite effect. Thousands of business people who were No. 1 somewhere else move to towns where everyone else is successful too. All the other kids in school are very bright and also under pressure to achieve.

This is an era of designer children. No parent wants an average child.

Much of the mounting anxiety springs not from overt parental pressure, however, but from the students themselves, whose values are not so subtly affected by mom and dad's affluence. Many well-off kids have grown up using a financial yardstick to evaluate themselves and others. But the prospects for these wealthy kids to improve upon or at least maintain their current lifestyles are frighteningly slim...Successful moms and dads come here because the environment breeds success, but the kids say, "I can never match this. This is the best my life will ever be."

Don't ignore the possibility that the apple of your eye simply is not as smart as you are. Children have roughly the same IQ as the average of their parents', but there are plenty of deviations. About 7% of the time, a child will be 15 points higher or lower than the parents' average.

You can always put things off for the future, but you can't get back the years with your kids.

Listening sympathetically to kids...is a skill that is particularly difficult for men to acquire...Men are not trained to be empathetic listeners. We're taught to listen to our opponents to discover their weaknesses. Men see themselves as problem solvers, not as shoulders to cry on.

— Brian O'Reilly, *Fortune* magazine, 1/1/90

Do Your Kids Bully You?

○ J. Archer

Some parents are reluctant to say no because they want to give their children all the things they never had. In a sense, they are really indulging themselves...They are attempting to buy affection...Rewards that are **sought** and **earned** are far more precious than gifts given for no particular rhyme or reason.

Others over-indulge their offspring because they are afraid to exercise their authority. They resort to bribery to get a child to do what he should simply be told to do...Some parents are so afraid of exercising their authority that they give elaborate reasons along with every order...The kids on the block with the biggest line of talk are usually the ones whose parents resort to lengthy explanations in the place of decisive action.

Many parents dread being thought of as wet blankets. But this is part of the job of being a good parent.

Some parents are afraid to exercise their authority for fear of driving their children to open rebellion...They have no confidence in their own authority because they have rarely used it. Often, in fact, they permit their own rights to be invaded and trampled upon, rather than risk taking a firm stand.

Parents who pamper their children sadly wonder why their children don't respect them...Children feel more secure when they are firmly **told** what to do — not coaxed, enticed, or reasoned with interminably. They respect discipline, but feel only contempt for the parental **easy mark**.

Parents shouldn't mistake the protests, squawks, and dramatic flareups of youngsters for serious discontent with discipline. Teens, especially, fight out of the need to strive for the independence they secretly know they're not ready for...They want the luxury of letting off steam — plus the reassurance of knowing that parents won't let them run wild off into trouble. When parents surrender instead, they feel lost.

Discipline is true love...Children respect only parents who respect themselves.

— J. Archer, 1986

PRACTICAL PARENTING SKILLS

When I Say No, I Feel Guilty

○ Manuel J. Smith, Ph.D.

In becoming assertive, you have to realize that *no one can manipulate your emotions or behavior if you do not allow it to happen...* To make yourself as effective as possible in stopping manipulation you also need to question the childish attitudes and ideas that many of us have been reared with...These childish expectations and their consequent behavior deny us much of our dignity and self-respect as human beings.

I like to think that being assertive means being confident of yourself and your abilities. "No matter what happens to me, I can cope with it."

Assertive Right #1

You have the right to be the ultimate judge of yourself.

- Childish belief: *You should not make independent judgments about yourself and your actions. You must be judged by external rules, procedures, and authority wiser and greater than you are.*

Manipulation occurs when extraneous rules are imposed upon you that you have not previously agreed to...[This] is the prime assertive right which allows no one to manipulate you...The particular judgment each of us makes about ourselves may not be systematic, consistent, permanent, or even sensible to everyone else...It is your life, and what happens in it is up to you, no one else.

Assertive Right #2

You have the right to offer no reasons or excuses to justify your behavior.

- Childish belief: *You should explain yourself to other people since you are responsible to them for your actions.*

Assertive Right #3

You have the right to judge whether you are responsible for finding solutions to other people's problems.

- Childish belief: *You have an obligation to things and institutions greater than yourself...You should sacrifice your own values to keep these systems from falling apart. If these systems do not always work effectively, you should bend or change, not the system.*

When I Say No, I Feel Guilty (continued)

Assertive Right #4

You have the right to change your mind.

- Childish belief: *You should not change your mind after you have committed yourself. If you change your mind, something is wrong. You should justify your new choice or admit that you were in error.*

Assertive Right #5

You have the right to make mistakes — and be responsible for them.

- Childish belief: *You must not make errors. Errors are wrong and cause problems to other people. If you make errors, you should feel guilty. You are likely to make more errors...Other people should control your behavior and decisions; in this way you can make up for the wrong you have done.*

Assertive Right #6

You have the right to say, “I don’t know.”

- Childish belief: *If someone else behaves toward you as if you “should” know specific results of what would happen when you do what you want, he is assuming you have the childish belief: You should have answers to any question about the possible consequences of your actions, because if you don’t have answers, you are unaware of the problems you will cause others and therefore you are irresponsible and must be controlled.*

Assertive Right #7

You have the right to be independent of the goodwill of others before coping with them.

- Childish belief: *You must have the goodwill of people you relate to or they can prevent you from doing anything. You need the cooperation of other people to survive. It is very important that people like you.*

No matter what you or I do, someone is not going to like it...People get so frightened if someone threatens not to like them or doesn’t like them. They get paralyzed and don’t function to their own benefit...Sometimes one feels like telling people: *You’ll never be loved if you can’t risk being disliked!*

PRACTICAL PARENTING SKILLS

When I Say No, I Feel Guilty (continued)

Assertive Right #8

You have the right to be illogical in making decisions.

- Childish belief: *You must follow logic because it makes better judgments than any of us can make.*

Logic is not much help in dealing with our own and other people's wants, motivations, and feelings.

Assertive Right #9

You have the right to say, "I don't understand."

- Childish belief: *You must anticipate and be sensitive to the needs of other people if we are all to live together without discord.*

Few of us can read minds...yet many people try to manipulate us...by hinting, implying, suggesting, or subtly acting as if they expected us to do something for them.

Assertive Right #10

You have the right to say, "I don't care."

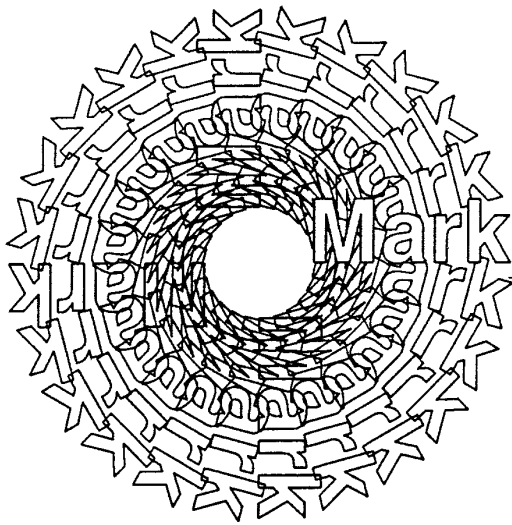
- Childish belief: *If someone points out how you can improve yourself, you are really obligated to follow his direction. If you do not, you are corrupt, lazy, degenerate, and worthless, and therefore unworthy of respect from anyone, including yourself.*

One common thread...is the assumption that if you are a human being, even if you are not perfect, you "should" strive for perfection, and if, heaven forbid, you cannot improve yourself, you "should" at least *want* to improve your human, ungodlike ways of doing things...This belief is the ultimate "sucker's play."

You have the assertive right, however, to say that you don't care to be perfect according to anyone's definition including your own, since one man's perfection is likely to be another's perversion.

The manipulation produced by believing that you "should" want to improve yourself is, in many situations, the kind of manipulation that can be the subtlest and the hardest to cope with.

— Manuel J. Smith, Ph.D.



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Afterword

Well, thanks for reading my book. I hope it gave you some ideas, and perhaps helped you build some new skills.

If you would like to comment on anything contained herein, please feel free to contact me. I always love to get feedback and talk with other parents just to see how they are doing. We can all learn a lot from each other, and we can all increase our effectiveness with our kids.

Congratulations on being a caring parent, and one willing to improve. God bless you.

Mark