

The Early Years

*The next best thing to an
Instruction manual for raising kids.*

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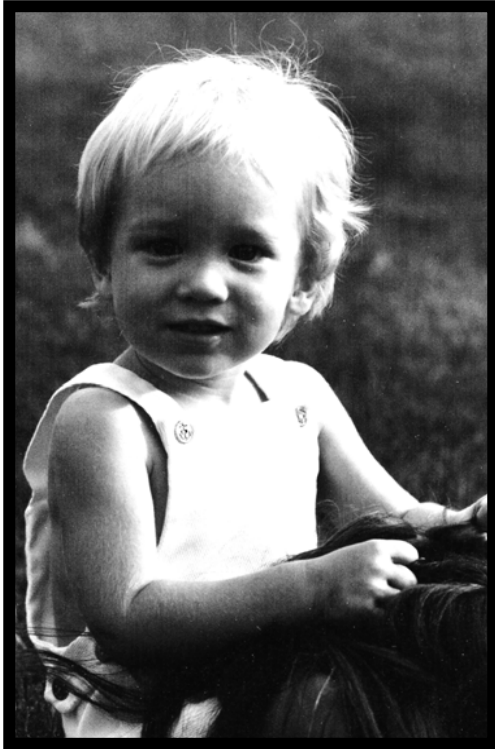
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DEDICATION

To the best parenting teacher I ever had, my son
Darren.



Darren is currently 29 years old and has a Master's degree in ESL. He and his wife are now teaching English at a University in the United Arab Emirates.

INTRODUCTION

When it comes to parenting, you do make a difference!
The following was an excerpted from an email letter.

As a child, my perception of my mother was simply, she hates me. I never did anything right, I was too noisy, (especially as an infant) I wasn't like my siblings, soft, gentle, quiet etc..... I was loud, obnoxious, hyper and uncontainable. I climbed a 5 ft fence at the age of 3 to get to the playground. Mom brought home this baby and said we couldn't go to the park. Well, I decided I didn't need anyone to take me, I just went myself. Mom spanked me all the way home. All through my childhood I tried to get her to love me. I did everything I could. I excelled at ice skating and won a first place trophy for a meet at the age of 11. No one went to see me skate. All the other kids had someone. I was the only one alone. It was the same for baseball. I was good, damned good. She just didn't have time for me. She hated the fact that I wasn't feminine. She would often make fun of me. I spent more than a year between the age of 11 and 13 thinking I was gay. I finally decided I wasn't. I resent her for treating me differently than the others (4 others) She would make me write my name over and over always finding something wrong with my handwriting. All the while, my siblings were in the living room watching the Peanuts Gang for whatever season they were on. She always singled me out. So, its time for me to look at her now.....

- 1) *She resented me because she only wanted two kids (I was third).*
- 2) *She resented her life (she was forced into marriage because she got pregnant with my brother).*

- 3) *She resented me because I am the spitting image of my father (he was an abusive alcoholic).*
- 4) *I truly believe my mother doesn't love me, never has, never will. I was a burden to her and an embarrassment because I was a tomboy (not acceptable in the 60's).*
- 5) *And, last but not least, I can't ever change her but, my question is, how do I get over her?*

The above letter was posted on an Internet chat room.

Some parents justify their lack of parenting skills with, "That is the way I was raised and it didn't hurt me." I could easily believe that this person's mother could have been making this same rationalization.

I have never met an abusive parent who wanted to be a bad parent. Parents don't set out to be abusive; it just seems to happen. Having good intentions does not make you a good parent. What parents mean to do with their children and what children experience may be very different.

When your baby was born, it didn't come with an owner's manual. If you are like most of us, you probably wouldn't have read it if it had. Unfortunately, many people have the attitude, "When all else fails read the instructions," but by then it is too late. When it comes to parenting our children, not reading the manual can have devastating and long lasting results. Even reading books on parenting, if you take them seriously, can be a very daunting process. There are always doubts, you can never really be absolutely sure that you are doing the right thing.

There are many parenting books on the market, most are based on good research but they often don't seem to translate into "what my child does." With this in mind, I have prepared a field-tested, first person approach to parenting. Many of the interventions that I am sharing with you were made up on the spot but they are based on sound parenting principals. I hope you enjoy them more than I did having to live through them.

THE TALE OF TWO MOTHERS

There were two mothers who faced the same dilemma: Should they stay at home and raise their children, or pursue their careers and find a trusted daycare or babysitter? That was the question.

One mother chose to stay home and take care of her little ones. The advantages she enjoyed were being able to see all the stages of development and not miss a thing in their growing-up years. She could set the rules and teach them the values *she* wanted her children to have. By staying home, she would have lots of time with the kids (all day and all night) and she could protect them from predators who might hurt them. She believed that her children were worth any sacrifice she might have to make. She also believed that she had a God-given right to stay home, bake apple pies and take care of her husband and children. She believed she was fulfilling the dream of every American girl.

The second mother chose to work outside of the home and find a trusted daycare or babysitter. She enjoyed the advantages of having complete personal fulfillment inside and outside of the home. She could have it all. In addition to supplementing the household income, she could continue to grow intellectually in her career, and have the joy of being a mother. She believed that the children needed time away from her and she knew that she needed time away from the children. To be complete, she needed both adult time and child time. She considered the work away from home as being mentally challenging, stimulating, productive and

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necessary for her. She believed that by working, her children would be in nursery school or with a sitter, learning respect for other people's rules and how to socialize with other children. She also felt that she was being a good role model for her children so that they would not become dependent adults.

For both of these women, the decisions they made about their lives and their children's lives were made with a lot of thought, care and anguish. Both mothers wanted to *be the best mother they could be* for their children.

Both mothers, to their surprise, discovered that their decisions brought problems and conflicts that they were not expecting. The first mother discovered that, after her second and third babies, she began to see the world through dirty diapers. She did not feel mentally challenged, stimulated or productive. At times, she felt like another child who was completely dependent on her husband for money, adult conversation and interaction. She drank more and more coffee and stared out the window waiting, but not knowing for what.

There were days when she was so worn out that she desperately needed her husband for emotional and physical support. Invariably, that would be the day he would come home from work so exhausted that neither of them were any good for each other or for the children. She found herself feeling resentful toward the children for *having* to stay home with them. Then she would feel terrible guilt and blame herself for being a bad mother. She believed they would have had more money to buy the babies the cute things in the store

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that she wanted for them, "if only... he made more money or if I had a job". She often felt that she was failing and wasn't doing enough, but didn't know what more she could possibly do. She felt more like a harried servant responding to the children's demands than like their mother. There were days she found herself feeling depressed, losing patience and yelling at the children, which made her feel even worse.

The second mother found that she was feeling guilty and angry that she could not be home to watch her child's first steps and had to hear from the babysitter what the child's first words were. She felt guilty that she wasn't there to protect them and comfort them when they were hurt. She felt angry with her husband because she "had to work" and found that she wanted to blame him for the decision she had made. She often felt torn between the demands of her career and her home. Sometimes she would come home from work so tired she could not enjoy her children, and this made her feel even guiltier. There were days when she found herself feeling depressed, losing patience and yelling at the children, which made her feel even worse.

Is the end result the same for both mothers? It doesn't have to be. Someone once said, "Excess is sin." For the sake of their children, it is important for both of these mothers to strike a happy medium.

ONE: make sure that you are clear about your priorities. Either decision you make, to stay home or to go to work, will depend on what is right for you, and you are the only person who can make that decision. You are more than a one-dimensional being. The Bible

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tells us that we should “love our neighbor as we love ourselves.” So how do you love yourself? The message is that you must love yourself first, because that is the standard for the way you will love your neighbor, your children, and your mate.

One of the worst things I’ve ever heard from a mother was “*J-O-Y*” means “*Jesus first, Others second and Yourself last.*” If this is your belief, you will, from time to time, find yourself doing things for others, your children, mate, friends -- just about anybody -- and then resenting what you have done for them. If this is true of you, then it is time to look at your beliefs and values, and the contradictions in these. Your children will be able to tell that you are not taking care of yourself because you will be doing things for them that make them feel that they are a burden and then they will end up feeling resentful and/or guilty.

To be able to do things without feeling resentful, start by being honest with yourself. This is where your “I Should’s” will get in your way. Some examples: A good mother *should make* her child happy. A good mother *should have* children who always behave in public. Your child’s behavior is a reflection of how good a mother you are. These beliefs set you up to feel like a failure.

Do you believe that you *shouldn’t* hurt people? Do you also believe that you want open and honest relationships? These two beliefs are absolute contradictions. If you choose not to hurt people, then you will settle for dishonest, superficial relationships. The rationale that is often used is “I didn’t want to hurt their feelings.” Be honest; it isn’t their feelings you are

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trying to protect; you are trying to protect yourself from their emotional reaction because of your fear of being rejected. You would be amazed at how well feedback, given in love, is accepted.

God doesn’t want good people, He wants honest people He can make good.

TWO: Stay focused on your purpose. Focus on “Being the best Mother I can be for my children,” not on “What does a good mother DO?” Do not put doing, before being. If you focus on what a good mother does, you assume that one mold should fit all children. Who is to set that mold? What should God, church, or society do with those who do not fit your concept of a good mother?

You are the only person who knows what the *right* balance is for *you* to be *the best mother you can be*. Too often, mothers try to please everyone else in their life; their mother, the church, their husband, and lose sight of their purpose. You need to listen to your body. Your body will tell you when you are out of balance because, like a washing machine that is out of balance, it will start making noise, such as:

- ✓ You find yourself yelling at the kids and/or your mate and feeling guilty;
- ✓ You become depressed and stare out the window at nothing;
- ✓ It takes you all day to get an hour’s worth of laundry done;
- ✓ You find yourself singing Rock-a-Bye Baby through clenched teeth;
- ✓ You want a drink at one in the afternoon;

✓ Your husband gets home and you want to hand off the kids to him and run away,
IF YOU DETECT ANY OF THESE SYMPTOMS, YOU KNOW THAT YOU ARE NOT BEING *THE BEST MOTHER YOU CAN BE* BECAUSE YOU'RE OUT OF BALANCE.

BABY IS HERE, NOW WHAT?

Now that you have made it through the months of morning sickness, with feeling like a watermelon with legs, with hearing war stories about other women's 23 hour labors, with stories about postpartum depression and with wondering if your child will be normal, and have made up your mind about staying home or working, it's time to deal with the reality that baby is now here.

At times, it all seemed like it was too much and that you would never get through it, but you did and you were rewarded with a precious, beautiful baby. You made it this far, and now the real work begins. Getting through the next few weeks -- being sore, not getting enough sleep, worrying about breastfeeding, and coping with postpartum depression and with what seems like a hundred things that are not getting done -- is not an impossible task. Don't panic. Let's take these worries one at a time.

Is postpartum depression a real problem? If so, what can be done about it?

Postpartum Depression

Somewhere between 5 and 20 percent of mothers will experience postpartum depression after the birth of a baby. It is not just the hormonal changes that cause postpartum depression. If it were just the hormones, then one hundred percent of women would have postpartum depression, because one hundred percent of all women have hormonal changes after giving birth.

Postpartum depression occurs most often in women with two or more children. When a woman is already a little depressed, and then her hormones change, the hormones act as a magnifying glass for the depression: if there is no initial depression, there can be no postpartum depression.

Babies are a bundle of joy, but they can be enough to test the fabric of the best marriage. This is especially true when a parent is doing the "one-o'clock, two-o'clock, three-o'clock rock," and singing through clenched teeth, "Rock-a-bye baby, on the tree top; when the wind blows, the cradle will rock; when the bough breaks, the cradle will fall, and down will come baby, cradle and all." Add to this scenario a lack of sleep, a controlling mother-in-law, or a husband who doesn't help with anything, and just about anyone would feel depressed. Another problem is the woman who didn't want, or plan for, the new addition but thought, "I don't have any other choice." Feeling trapped and/or powerless is one of the major sources of depression. Now, add in the changing hormonal levels, and there is serious trouble in paradise.

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Like all depression, postpartum depression can run the gambit from just not being able to be happy and enjoy the baby, to life-threatening, suicidal feelings. The problem is, there is another life that is being affected. Medical doctors are very aware of the dangers of postpartum depression and take care that if the mother is nursing, any medication they give to the mother will not affect the baby. The best approach to this problem is prevention. In the book TAKING CONTROL OF YOUR LIFE, there is a section about depression: what you feel first (even before you become depressed) and what to do about it. Pregnancy can be a wonderful and introspective time for you to get into counseling and really look at what is going on in your life.

The First Year: A Magical World

The First Year of Life

In the baby's first year, they have much to learn about the world and about themselves. Everything is new and waiting to be discovered. "I wonder if that bug is good to eat?" "How about that piece of dirt?" "Are dust bunnies good to eat?" "What happens to things I can no longer see?" "What happens to Momma when she says Peek-a-Boo and vanishes? She disappears like magic and she reappears like magic. What a fun, magical and exciting world it is and it all centers around ME!"

Babies cannot comprehend the concept of "just out of sight," the idea that things that they can't see still exist somewhere. For the small baby or child, 'If it's not visible, it doesn't exist'. That is why Peek-a-Boo is so

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much fun. The magic words, to make it all happen over and over again, are "Peek-a-Boo."

As a child grows older, he/she will gradually learn about object permanency, but it will take many times of opening the refrigerator to check to see if the food is still there before it becomes a reality. You will see this behavior in the two- and three year-olds. It is summer and your child is supposed to be playing in the backyard, but has to keep going back and forth between the yard and the house, opening the door to see if you and the rest of the house are still there.

THE RUNNING YEARS

Walk at one, talk at two. The one-year-old is fun to watch as they stagger and fall, sometimes looking like a miniature Frankenstein. They are a combination of the brave adventurer and the scared, dependent human that doesn't want you out of their sight. Starting early in his/her life, your child has made some serious conclusions about his/her world. For most children, they have learned that all they have to do is make little squeaking noises and someone will be there to look after their needs or to make funny noises back. They have learned that by crying they can summon help. The first year of life is all about connectedness. It is learning to trust those who provide their care. During this year, they have learned to understand much of what is said to them, even though they can't talk -- that will have to wait a year.

Not all that is learned during this first year is reassuring. For the child turning one, a new and

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frightening realization is dawning. Have you ever tried to leave your one-year-old with a babysitter but your child hangs onto your leg and screams as you try to get out the door? *“I can’t let Mommy leave. I will die. My parents are the only ones I can trust to take care of me and feed me. If they leave me, I could die. I can’t even open the refrigerator to get my milk.”*

The need to be connected reflects the fear of abandonment, and is the fear of death itself. It starts when you are about one and continues throughout your life. Being left with the babysitter is a very frightening experience for the child who believes that when you are not there, you no longer exist; it is where the fear of death starts.

However, for some children, the fear of abandonment can start to build up if a parent dies or there is a divorce. Not too many years ago, there was a case of a little 4-year-old girl whose father committed suicide in front of her. For the next few years, her mother spun out of control and there were a series of “uncles” who would come into her life for a while and then leave: abandonment followed abandonment. When she reached high school, she had a boyfriend, but that relationship didn’t last either: another abandonment. Finally, she found another boyfriend; she got pregnant, married and had two little boys. Then one day when the boys were 2 and 3, her husband came home and told her he wanted a divorce: another abandonment to add to a lifetime of abandonments. She found a new boyfriend and fell madly in love with him, but he would not marry her because she had the two small boys. She heard the ultimatum, “It is the boys or me; you can’t have both.” She had to choose and she chose

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the boyfriend with the tragic consequences of her boys being drowned in the back of her car which she drove into the lake. Abandonment feels like death itself. She was convinced, “I can never stand to be hurt that way again.”

Have you ever said, “I can never stand to be hurt that way again?” What are you saying? It will kill you if you have to go through that intensity of pain again? (Yes, I believe that you have been in relationships where you have hurt so much emotionally that you have hurt physically. But since it didn’t kill you, it proved how strong you are, not how weak you are.)

Abandonment Is a Reality of Life

The child who is never given an opportunity to experience any form of abandonment will never know that they can survive when they are abandoned. There are two important lessons about abandonment that the child needs to learn. First, and most important, is that most people who leave will return. Second, some important people who leave will never return and they will survive and be OK. Emotional pain is not terminal; it is not something you want to volunteer for, but going through it proves how strong you are.

If you over-protect your children by never leaving your child with qualified caretakers, you are teaching your child that there is only one safe person in the world – you.. Teachers will hate you when your child reaches kindergarten and first grade. By your actions, you can literally create children who are school-phobic, who are

scared of the world and who see themselves as powerless and dependent.

Leaving your child with a babysitter is not a problem. It is the way you leave your child which will be the key to success or which will create a problem. First and foremost, NEVER sneak out, leaving your child to believe that you just magically disappeared. Your disappearing act will leave your child believing that you could disappear anytime, and furthermore, disappear without warning. You literally will be increasing your child's insecurity and fears of abandonment.

Here's a way to ease your child into their first session with a babysitter. Days, or even weeks, before leaving your child for the first time, make a little game of leaving the room by waving and saying, "I'll be back!" Gradually increase the length of time you are out of the room. At first it will be almost like a peek-a-boo game. Then, begin to vary the length of time you are out of the room: sometimes a minute, the next time 30 seconds, maybe the next time a minute-and-a-half. Keep varying the length of time. If you can watch your child without being seen, you can increase the time up to five minutes. (If there is no other adult in the house, I would not go over five minutes.) You can also use this routine when you put your child down for a nap or at bedtime. The idea is for your child to get used to feeling okay with being left alone.

Now on the Big Day, when you are finally ready to leave your baby with a babysitter, your child will have already learned that when you say, "I'll be back!" you always come back. This technique doesn't guarantee your child will get through the Big Day without some

tears and trauma, but it will reduce the stress on both you and on your child.

And Baby Makes Four

Your baby just turned two and now it won't be long before you will have TWO little ones. You figured that one child wasn't all that hard to handle. So with two, they could play with each other and entertain themselves; if anything, it should make your life easier, not harder, right? Ha! Two children are not going to be twice as much work; oh, no, they are going to be three times as much work. The workload for children grows exponentially with the number of children. (But don't worry, didn't your Mother say, "Busy hands are happy hands?")

Up to now, you may have been assuming that the way your parents raised you was the way to raise your own children. If your parents did nothing wrong in parenting you, then maybe the same parenting methods will work just fine for your children. But if you think there was room for improvement in what your parents did, perhaps now is the time to consider some new parenting techniques

With a second baby, you can expect a major shift in your life, again starting with the day you bring home the new baby and present it to your other child. Sure, you have been trying to prepare your child for the birth of the new baby, "Come feel Mommy's tummy. Can you feel the baby kick?" What you can't hear is what your child is thinking, "*Sure, whatever you say; now can I go and play with my toys?*" No matter how hard you try --

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and you should try -- the new baby will not be real to your first child until you bring the baby home. That is when you need to be prepared for your two-year-old to regress, right back to being a one-year-old.

Think of it this way, Mom: your husband comes home after work tonight with a beautiful young blonde knockout on his arm. She has a figure that won't quit, and he says to you, "Honey, I want you to meet Ginger. I love her very much and I want you to love her as much as I do. Oh, by the way, she will be sleeping in our room until she gets used to living with us." I don't have to guess how far you would regress. But ... what if that blonde came in and gave you the keys to a brand new Porsche, a half-million dollars and told you she was not going to take any of your husband's love from you? This situation would still not be your first choice, but maybe you would be more willing to wait a little while to see if what she was saying was true (before you scratched her eyes out).

Just as you would react to Ginger, your little one will react when you first bring this potential rival for your love home. One couple's first child was a beautiful girl. About a year later they brought home a wonderful little boy: that is when things started going down hill very fast. After one especially hectic day, when mom had finally gotten the baby's wash all done, folded and put in the top drawer of the baby's dresser, she stopped a minute to straighten the baby's room. As she left, she turned to admire her handiwork just in time to see her two year-old, who had climbed to the top of the baby's dresser, pull down her training panties and pee all over the dresser where it ran down into the drawers and all

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over the baby's clean clothes. That is when I got the phone call....

There are some things you can do to avoid, or at least lessen, the stress on everyone. Once the baby is born, all the relatives, neighbors and friends will start showing up with presents for the baby, wanting to see the baby. RED ALERT: problem coming up! How would you feel if everybody started showing up with presents for Ginger, that beautiful gal your husband brought home, and ignored you?

Solution: Before the baby is born, go to the toy store and get twenty or so inexpensive toys. Wrap them and hide them in a box at the top of the hall closet. Also, get a couple of nice toys that will come "from the baby," to be given to your older child when you come home from the hospital. I would suggest that one of these be a baby doll. (This works for sons as well as for daughters.) This way, when you are busy washing the baby, your child can give their "baby" a bath too. Now, when everybody starts showing up with presents for the baby, and you know that Aunt Maria would not have thought to bring a present for the older child, all you have to do is to grab one of the toys from the top of the closet and "Ta-da"-- magic! -- nobody feels left out.

When you have the second child, it is very important for each parent to spend time alone with each child. By taking each child separately and creating "our special time," you will increase your child's self-image. Always doing things together, "as a family," does not teach children that they are important as individuals.

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Here's an actual case from my files that helps illustrate this problem: His fiancée dragged him in. They were both seniors at Fresno State University and planned to get married after graduation. She initially thought she had found her dream man: he was very popular and was working his way through school by being the maître d' at the local TGI-Friday restaurant.

So what was the problem? She said, "From 6 AM, before we even get out of bed, people start showing up; people come and go from our apartment all day long, and the last of them does not leave until 10 PM, or until I get mad and throw them out. It doesn't bother him that we are never alone. We have no time for ourselves. I am scared that this is what I will have to look forward to, even after we get married." He thought it was "cool" having so many friends.

So I started collecting some history. He was one of 11 children, "somewhere in the middle. We always did things together. There were too many of us not to." What he was telling me was that he never learned how to be alone or how to have a one-on-one intimate relationship with anybody. His parents were too busy to spend any quality time one-on-one with any of the children. For him, being alone with just his fiancée made him uncomfortable and increased his anxiety. He loved being at TGI-Friday where he could be the life of the party and everybody loved him. To him, this was so much more comfortable and familiar than spending time alone with just one person in an intimate relationship.

This case illustrates why parents need to trade off spending time with each child individually, even if it is,

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"I will take Julie to the store with me while you watch the rest of the children." When you do this, the focus needs to be on the child, not the store. Next time, it will be the other child's turn. Each child needs individual time with each parent.

The younger the child, the more often the child needs your undivided attention. Two- and three-year-olds may need individual attention six or seven times a day. It may be only five or ten minutes at a time, but it needs to happen every day. Older children may need it less often, but for longer periods of time. A six-year-old would love a half-hour to an hour, two to three times a week. The messages you will be giving when you spend this type of quality time with your child are:

- "You are important (loveable) enough that Daddy and Mommy want to spend time with you."
- "You don't have to be bad to get attention."

Children with these beliefs will be happier, and in turn, your life will be easier and a lot less stressful.

Start early by spending one-on-one time with your babies. Don't wait until they are teenagers, for by then they will have learned the opposite beliefs:

- "I am not important. I'll join a gang where I can be a big man."
- "I will get a boyfriend and be important to him by having sex. If I get pregnant, at least I will be important to the baby."
- "I can get my parent to pay attention to me by screwing up."

The choice is yours: which set of messages do you want to teach your child?

OH, WHAT BIG TEETH YOU HAVE

Children who bite fall into two categories: The little ones from birth to a year and a half and the big ones, the older ones. Babies and little children bite as a way of checking out their environment, to see what tastes good and/or feels good. Little children also do not know the difference between what has feelings and what doesn't. Biting for these little ones also feels good to them when they are cutting their teeth. Biting for these little ones is not done out of anger or with the desire to hurt.

When my son Darren was 9 months old, he crawled over to my recliner where I was reading the paper, pulled himself up, and with his four humongous teeth, bit my hand. I let out a yelp, reached over, slapped his hand and said, "Don't bite." He got this confused look on his face, then slapped me back. Suddenly, I got it! I wasn't teaching Darren not to bite; I was teaching him to hit. At 9 months old, Darren did not know that the leg of the chair doesn't feel, but that my hand did.

The question for me was, how do I teach a child who cannot talk and probably doesn't understand what I'm saying, not to bite? Mothers whose babies bite while nursing are told to hold the baby close to the breast, cutting off their air until the baby lets go. This can work for very small babies and they can be trained by this cause and effect method. But, I could see no way to use this technique with nine-month-old Darren.

Since Darren could understand the tone of my voice but not what I was saying, I had to come up with something that would communicate pain to him. So the next time he bit me, as I had known he would, I sat on the floor facing him and started crying (this wasn't hard because it did hurt), then I reached over and bit him (not enough to cause bruising) and held him as we both cried. He never bit again; Darren had learned the difference between a chair leg and a person's hand.

Older children do bite and hit. This is one of the most common complaints from nursery school teachers: "Mrs. Jones, your child hit/bit another child again today, and you had better do something about it or your child will be kicked out of nursery school." Yes, it is true, children do get kicked out of nursery school for "anti-social behaviors" and the most common anti-social behaviors are hitting and biting.

Assuming that our child *learned* to hit/bite from us, or from having another child hit or bite him, or from seeing other children do it to each other, then there is hope, because what is learned can be unlearned. I'm not saying it will be easy; in fact, the hardest type of learning is unlearning. In the child's mind, hitting and biting works; it gets other kids to back off or give up their toy. So what if it upsets the teacher and parents?

Learning, Learning and More Learning: The Learning Cycle

From the day the baby is born, we are teaching that child, and it is important that we are aware of what we are teaching. When our first child was born, most of us

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parents were not even aware that we were continually teaching that little one, and much less aware of how truly important what we were teaching was to the child.

Newborn babies don't have an expectation that someone should pick them up and "coo" at them, but they will not grow or thrive, and will even die, if somebody doesn't pick them up and coo at them on a regular basis. The phenomenon is called *merasmus* and was observed in orphans after WWII. Today, the lack of touch and interaction in the newborn is recognized as a form of child abuse and the syndrome is identified as "failure to thrive." The need for a person to feel significant or important is as imperative as food, and without it, the inevitable end is just as certain.

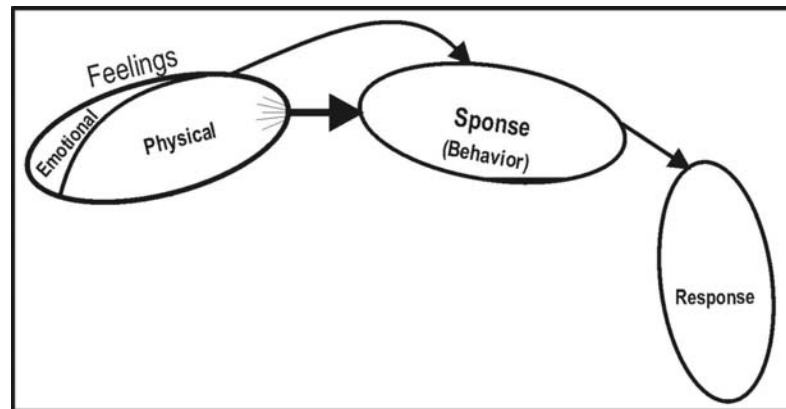
The newborn has only two emotional feelings: the fear of falling and the fear of loud noise. The baby has no idea what things mean or what can be expected. The baby has no concept of what is right and wrong. The baby has no conclusions about what he/she is, or how the world is. When you were born, you did not have an expectation that your room should be a certain color, or even that your mother should love you. You did, however, react when you were experiencing hunger or pain. The Learning Cycle (see illustration below) can give you an idea of how you are teaching your child.

In the Learning Cycle, babies start with just two emotional feelings, but with all the physical feelings. First, the baby feels something, such as hunger. At that point, the baby exhibits some "sponse" (behavior) such as shaking its legs and arms or crying. The parent then responds. (If there are "re-sponses,"

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doesn't it seem reasonable that there must be "sponses"?)



The Learning Cycle diagram

After making the same "sponse" several times (okay, okay, the same behavior), and getting the same response each time, the baby's learning starts to occur. "Every time I cry, someone picks me up." The baby then begins to develop an Expectation, "If I cry, someone is going to pick me up." Once the baby has an Expectation of what will happen, the baby's self-image begins to develop. "When I cry, I get a pleasant response from someone. I must be a powerful person. I must be important."

Notice that when it comes to developing *Expectations*, no response is also a response. If, when the baby cries, no one picks up the baby, the baby still develops Expectations, but a very different kind of self-image; "I'm powerless. No matter what I do, nothing ever changes."

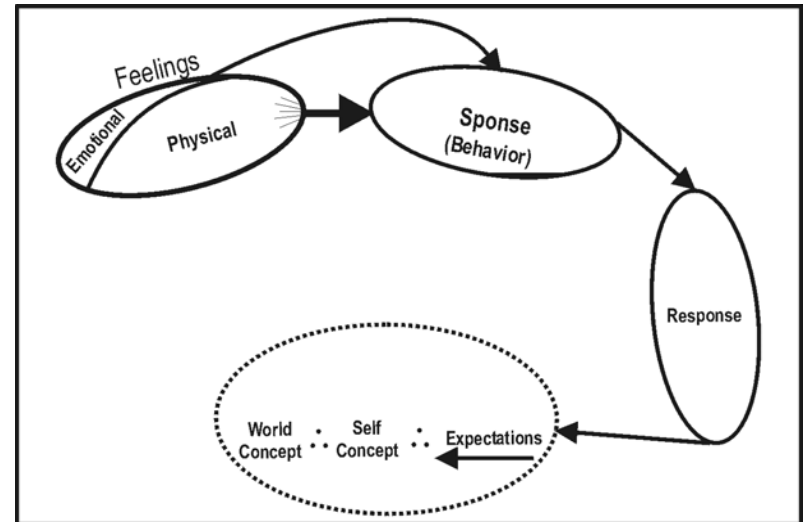
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Almost as quickly as the baby starts developing his/her self-image, he/she starts developing a view of their world. The baby that is picked up begins to believe, "The world is a warm, loving, and safe place. Big people are at my beck and call. Big people really like me, because I am loveable." However, the child who is not picked up begins to believe, "The world is a cold, uncaring place that is indifferent to me. Big people don't like me, so I am not loveable." As the child grows, the way adults respond will determine what meanings the child chooses to reinforce as their view of himself/herself and their world.

Children are not born being afraid of snakes, mice or bugs. Children are taught to be afraid by witnessing the reactions adults have to different stimuli. Our reaction can be verbal, "Don't touch that! It's dirty!" or non-verbal, such as holding the baby tighter when confronted with a mouse or spider. We teach children about sex in much the same way, "Don't touch yourself down there." Often the unspoken message to the child is, "Sex is dirty."

The way you are raised does have a major influence on how you behave as an adult. However, it is not what your parents did to you that made you the way you are. As children, you learned how to "survive" your family. No matter what kind of family you came from, you learned what you needed to do to get attention. You learned about the world around you, whether it was safe, dangerous, or scary. You learned to trust or not trust yourself and others. You learned what you could and couldn't do. You learned how to manipulate your parents or you learned how powerless you were. What you learned became your survival book on how to relate to your world.

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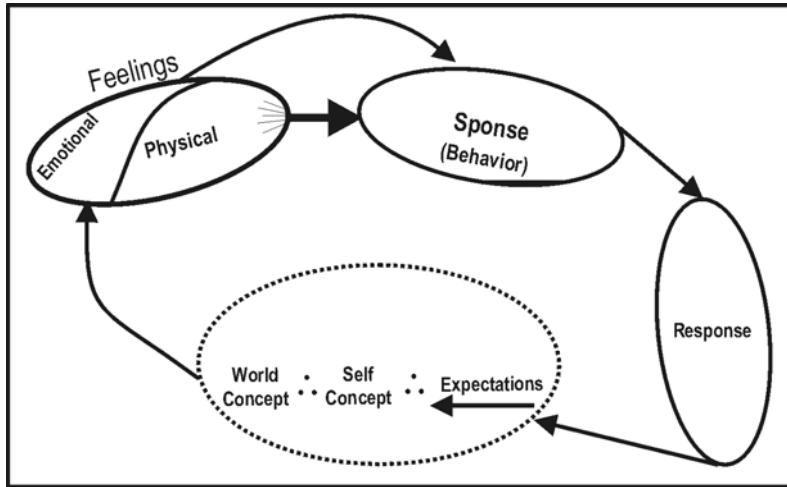


As a baby, most of your spones (behaviors) came from your physical feelings. As you grew older, you developed Expectations, you drew conclusions about yourself and your world, and emotional feelings become more dominant in determining your behaviors. The older you got, the more you expected, and the more you became disappointed when people and things didn't fulfill your expectations.

Many of your Beliefs, Values and Expectations were planted in experiences that occurred before you could talk or understand what was going on. These meanings were then reinforced as you grew older and, for you, reality became what you expected it to be. Before long, you began looking for evidence to "prove" your reality. "See, I did it again. I am so stupid!" "The

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world is a dangerous place where people get hurt.”
“The only way I can get attention is by _____ “
(being aggressive; being helpless; being sick; being
nice and not making any waves; being sneaky; blaming
others -- fill in the blank).



There are two ways in which we learn. *Direct Learning* happened when you stuck your finger in the light socket or did something bad and got punished. Sometimes you deserved to be punished; other times, it was totally unfair. As a child, your parents and teachers were not your only sources of learning. You also learned by watching your siblings and the children at school. "Sissy sure got into a lot of trouble when she wrote on the wall. I don't think I want to do that." This type of learning is called *Indirect or Vicarious Learning*. Just like Direct Learning, Indirect Learning can occur in many different ways, such as observing others, reading, listening to stories, or watching TV. (See illustration above) Sure, you may have received bad parenting when you were growing up, but you also

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drew bad conclusions from what you were observing; in either case, that is no excuse for you to hold on to your negative Beliefs, Expectations, Feelings or Behaviors.

You learned more in your first six years of life than you will learn in the rest of your life. Can you start to see how important parenting is? By the time you reached high school, you learned/developed 90% of your self-image. From then on, you simply kept reinforcing those perceptions that you had formed about yourself and about your world.

As a baby, your physical feelings dominated your behaviors. When you needed to urinate, you did so without a thought about what others might think or say. Today, when you feel the same urge, you don't wet your pants because your emotional feelings win out over the physical feelings. When there is a difference between your values/beliefs and what you feel, what you feel emotionally will usually win out.

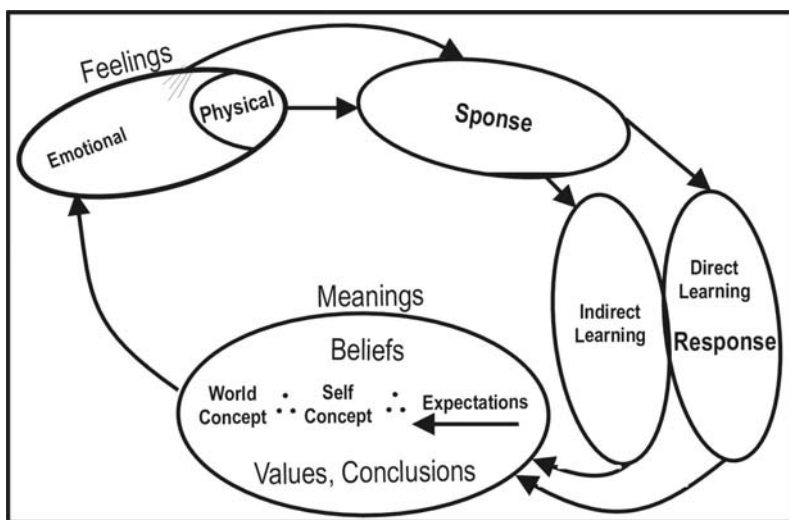
Freud's concept of development seemed to blame the parents when he asked, "And what did your mother do to you to make you this way?" The Learning Cycle model does not support this concept. It is different in that it is not based on what happened to you or what others did to you. Rather, it is based on the Meanings, Beliefs and Conclusions that YOU choose to think. You choose to think, and you can think anything you want to think.

Let's say that I came to your house when you were three-years old. You're sitting on your mother's lap. She reaches over, gets a cigar out of the cigar box, puts it in your mouth, lights it for you and you start

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smoking. At three-years-old, do I blame you or do I blame your mother? Your mother, of course! (And I would probably report her to Child Protective Services.) However, if I come over to your house today and see you walking around smoking a big cigar, saying, "Oh, but my mother started me smoking when I was three years old," will I blame your mother? No way!



As with all learning situations, Direct or Indirect, your childhood Conclusions and Meanings, right or wrong, were what you learned and what you used to survive. These survival techniques may have worked for you as a child. You saw them as what you needed to do to protect yourself and your family. For example, here is how a few survival strategies from the early years become terribly wrong as an adult:

- "It is okay to allow myself to be molested because then he won't hurt my little sister." (As an adult, is it okay to allow abuse because if you

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do something about it, financial support for the family may be lost?)

- "When the molester comes, if I lay real still, it won't be so bad." (As an adult, is being passive the way to respond when in an abusive relationship?)
- "If I don't tell, then Daddy won't have to leave." (As an adult, is it important to take abuse to keep the family together?)
- "When things get too bad at home, I won't get hurt if I run away." (Is the way to handle problems to run away?)
- "The harder I work to get good grades, the more attention I get." (Is being a work-alcoholic the way to get ahead, even if it destroys emotional intimacy?)
- "Keeping quiet is the way to keep from getting spanked." (As an adult, is the way to stay out of trouble just not to speak up?)

It is the survival beliefs you learned as a child which help to shape your adult behaviors, for better or worse. In the book TAKING CONTROL OF YOUR LIFE, I have a section entitled the Seven Deadly Sins Against Children and Other People, where you can read about some very harmful parenting techniques. If you have not read this book, I would strongly suggest that you read it soon.

Freedom to Fail – Freedom to Learn

Darren was four when he came to me with a disposable BIC razor he had found somewhere. He wanted to use it to make little roads. My first thought was to tell him no and take it away from him. Then the

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question came to mind, “What would I be teaching him if I did that?” So instead I said, “Darren, I really don’t want you to play with that razor. I’m afraid you might cut yourself.” (This was before the time of AIDS and I knew that he could not do major damage to himself with the razor.) Darren’s reassurance was emphatic, “No I won’t,” and out he went.

It wasn’t but a few minutes later that he was back crying and holding his finger with one little drop of blood on it. I simply responded with, “That is a hard way to learn about safety with razors. Let’s go and get a Band-Aid.”

Two weeks later, we were by the swimming pool when Darren came out of the apartment with a glass of water. “Darren, you shouldn’t bring a glass out to the pool; it could hurt you.” No sooner were the words out of my mouth, than he got this stricken look on his face and let go of the glass. I just barely caught the glass he had quickly dropped before it hit the cement deck. Darren had learned to accept that when I said something might hurt him, he should believe it.

Do you ever wonder how young people learn not to listen and get to the point where they have to make all their own mistakes no matter what the cost? What would have happened if I had responded like so many parents do by taking the razor away from Darren and putting it up some place? My belief is that when I wasn’t looking, he would have gotten it down, played with it, cut himself but wouldn’t have come to me to about it, because he was afraid I might say, “I told you so. You never listen to me. If you would do what I tell you this would have never happened. But n-o-o-o!

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You had to find out the hard way.” The response of the child to this parental harangue is usually not spoken aloud: “Maybe you got me this time, but next time I will be more careful and you won’t catch me!”

* * * *

I don’t know many people who learn by “trial and success.” Most of my own learning experiences have been from my failures. So what is the purpose of protecting our children from making mistakes? When you protect your children from the consequences of their mistakes, are you really helping them or are you just trying to protect yourself from what others might think of you and protecting yourself from feelings of guilt? It seems to me that when you are protecting yourself, your focus is on the wrong person; your focus is on yourself and not your child. There is an old saying, “Good judgment comes from experience and experience, well that comes from making bad judgments.”

Rats, Children and the Learning Cycle

Much to my chagrin, I learned a valuable lesson about parenting from a rat named Hector. Hector lived comfortably in a wire rat cage. At one end of the cage were a number of rat toys, including a wheel in which he could run to get it spinning, then hold tight while it spun round and round like some carnival ride. When he got hungry, he could go to the other end to get his food and water. Food was always easy to obtain; all he had to do was press the little pedal and one pellet of food would drop out.

For research, an undergraduate student was to sit there with a stopwatch and record how much time Hector spent playing with his toys and how much time he spent at his food station. It soon became evident that almost 95% of Hector's time was spent playing.

Little did Hector know, but his life was about to become a lot more difficult and frustrating. First, Hector discovered that now he would have to push the little pedal twice before any food came out. As soon as he got used to pushing it twice, he then had to push it three times, then four times. Before Hector realized what was happening, he was having to push the pedal 20, then 30, then 40 times before he could get just one pellet of food. All that time the student watched and timed where Hector spent his time. At first, the time Hector had for play didn't change all that much because he had the fastest paws in the West, and he didn't seem to mind all that much. However, the next thing Hector knew, it was up to 60, then to 70 times before he was rewarded with his one pellet; but that was okay, because he would eat his one piece of food and then go right back to playing.

That is when **the** evil struck, in the form of "Intermittent Reinforcement." Now, when Hector went to get his pellet of food, he never knew when the pellet would appear. Sometimes it would come out on the first push of the pedal, sometimes on the 68th push; the next time, it might be the 18th time. There just was no way to know when the food would appear. Suddenly there was a major change in Hector's behavior: 90% of his time was now spent working that pedal and only 10% of his time was spent playing. He would stay at

the pedal until he had a large cache of food pellets, then he would eat one or two and start working the pedal again. With intermittent reinforcement, since Hector never knew when the food would appear, he took no chances on not getting more food, and didn't stray far from the pedal.

One day while I was taking care of Darren and cooking dinner, he came up to me and started tugging on my pants, "Daddy, Daddy, Daddy." I was feeling pressured and frustrated, and said, "Darren I'm cooking and Mommy will be home soon. I need to get the food ready. You need to go play with your toys and let me cook" (as if this explanation meant anything to a three year-old). He just stood there looking at me with his big eyes. "Not now; in a little while," I said. Then it started again, the tugging on my pants, "Daddy, Daddy, Daddy, Daddy."

"Later, Darren; in a few minutes. Daddy is busy." The tugging started again, "Daddy, Daddy, Daddy."

"Darren, what do you want?" There was silence, then he responded, "I forgot."

At that moment I remembered Hector -- his little paws working the pedal but never knowing when the food would drop out. Just like Hector, I had trained Darren with evil Intermittent Reinforcement to keep tugging on my pants and "Daddy, Daddy, Daddy-ing" me to death. At three, Darren had no concept of "a few minutes," or of "later." What was worse, sometimes "a few minutes" was three minutes; sometimes it was five or ten minutes; or sometimes I forgot and "later" never came at all. Darren never knew when the time I had

promised was at hand, so he had learned to keep tugging on my pants until I finally responded and gave him my attention.

I knew there had to be a better way. I decided the next time I would be ready. I started looking for the kitchen timer, the big white one with the real loud ticking noise. Now I was ready, and all I had to do was wait, because I knew it would happen again.

I didn't have to wait long. "Daddy, Daddy, Daddy," and the tugging began again. This time, I did it differently. "What is it Darren?" This time he was ready also, "Play with me."

"I tell you what I will do, Darren. I will set the timer for four minutes. When the timer stops ticking and the bell rings, I will play with you, but you must get whatever you want us to play with together and bring it here to the kitchen table. If you want me to read, then get the book you want me to read. If you want to play cars, then you need to get the cars. When the bell rings I will stop doing what I'm doing now, and I will play with you."

Darren was off like a flash. This time he brought his color book but then had to race back to his room for the crayons. When the kitchen bell went off, I stopped what I was doing and said, "I'm going to set the timer for five minutes. When it rings it will be time for me to go back and finish what I was doing." With that, the two of us had a wonderful time coloring and talking about what our favorite colors were. At the end of the five minutes, he was ready to go back to playing by himself, at least until the next time he had an urge for Daddy's attention.

By trial and error, there were several lessons I learned. One was that once the timer was set it didn't matter what I was doing: I needed to stop and pay attention to him as soon as it rang. That was our rule. I had given my word. Another was that during the time set aside to play, no matter what happened -- phone ringing, someone coming to the door -- I would say "I can't talk with you now but I will be with you (or call you back) as soon as I get through playing with my son; that will be in about three minutes." I could see in Darren's eyes, "I am important."

As Darren grew, an interesting thing happened. The older he was, the longer the time set for playing needed to be, but the time I set for waiting also could be longer. Over the next couple of years, the waiting time was extended to ten minutes, then fifteen minutes, and playing was also extended to ten then to fifteen minutes. Another thing also got bigger: Darren's confidence about being able to get my attention continued to grow and so less and less often the "Daddy urge" would strike.

By the time Darren reached school age, the kitchen timer was long gone but his ability to get my attention remained constant. As I look back, during this time we had both changed and life was a lot less stressful on both of us.

I Hate You

In every family there are words that are unacceptable. If you have a child, at some point you will be faced with

this dilemma: What to do when your child uses “those words.” How you respond can be tricky. You can always rely on what your own parents did. But you might suspect that their way hadn’t been the best way to respond, because you sure didn’t feel good when your parents responded that way to you.

When Darren was three, I discovered that what he learned at nursery school was more powerful than what he learned at home. Darren hadn’t been home from school for more than an hour one day, when I must have done something he thought was wrong, because the next thing I heard was, “Daddy, I hate you!” I felt my hand going up just like my father’s used to do and I heard his words forming in my mind, “Don’t sass me!”

I knew I didn’t want to repeat that old behavior, so slowly I brought my hand down. Then I tried something new. I responded to Darren with the same intensity that I heard in his voice, “Yeah, Darren, sometimes I get real angry at you, too, and it’s all right, isn’t it?” Darren just looked at me with a puzzled expression and walked away. I suspect that wasn’t the response he had heard at nursery school.

So often we teach children what not to say, but we don’t teach them what are acceptable ways of expressing their feelings. The result is they learn to stuff their feelings and when the feelings get big enough they act them out by hitting, swearing or doing something equally “bad” to let off the steam. There is a line from an old movie that goes something like, “By the time I was grown, I had a degree in what not to be.”

About a week later, I again did something that displeased Darren and again heard, “Daddy, I hate you!” This time, I was prepared and, with the same amount of intensity as his, I responded, “Yeah, Darren, and sometimes I get real angry at you, too, and it’s all right, isn’t it?” Again the puzzled look. It was as if he was thinking, “This isn’t how it is supposed to be.”

A few days later it happened again. “Daddy, I hate you!” And again he got the exact same response from me, “Yeah, Darren, and sometimes I get real angry at you too, and it’s all right, isn’t it?” He looked less puzzled but didn’t respond. I had no idea if this was going to work, but I did know that I didn’t want to be a reactor who ended up just doing what my own parents had done.

It must have been about a week later when I again did something that Darren didn’t like. This time his face was set, and I could see the anger in his eyes. With all the force he could muster, he said, “Daddy, I’m angry at you! It’s all right isn’t it?”

From that day on, I never heard him say, “I hate you” to anybody.

Taming the Terrible Two’s

The first three or four months of your baby’s life can be a test of your endurance. The next crisis is the *terrible two’s*. “NO, I do it myself!” becomes the mantra for the two-year-old and the challenge for the parents. Power struggles with two-, three- or four-year olds are common. Most parents soon learn that you can’t win a

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power struggle with a child, because even if you win, you lose. But don't despair; there is help. The following two ideas can help you avoid most of the trauma connected with the *terrible two's*.

Your child is born dependent; that is the normal state. The process of going from dependence to independence is where the struggle lies. From two years on, your child is learning to be independent. Your child's autonomy starts coming into play when he or she approaches their second birthday. This is the time that your child starts to demonstrate independence. (This is good -- trust me -- you don't want a 32 year-old dependent "child" living with you.) Power struggles are children's first steps toward independence and toward building the confidence that they are capable of making decisions and having some control in their lives.

Darren was not quite two when Mom started working weekends and I got to care for him all by myself. It was important for me that Darren and I not get into a power struggle as we had done in the past, so one Saturday morning I thought I would try something different. "Darren, if you would like, you can go down to your room and choose what you want to wear today." He was delighted and raced off to his bedroom. Soon, he returned with his favorite pajamas, the ones with the feet and the baseball players. My heart sank. I tried to hide my disappointment in the face of his excitement. What would the neighbors think? Worse yet, what would my wife think? I neglected my son? I was a terrible father who never changed his son's clothes, and just let him run around in his pajamas?

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It took me a few minutes to sort out my priorities. Of course it was more important for Darren to make his own choices than for me to worry what anybody else might think. I had learned a valuable lesson.

The next day, I went to his bedroom and laid out two outfits that were acceptable to me. Then I went to Darren and told him he could choose which of the two outfits he wanted to wear. He was just as excited at being able to make that choice as he had been the day before.

The valuable lesson I learned was it is easy to side-step power struggles with a two-year-old by offering choices which are within acceptable limits.

Start offering choices first thing in the morning. "Do you want to eat your food with a fork or with a spoon?" "Do you want milk or juice?" "Which of these outfits do you want to wear today?" When you start offering choices, I believe you will be surprised at the results. When children feel they have some control in their lives, power struggles over choices will all but disappear.

But there are times when there are no acceptable options. Taking a bath, picking up toys or leaving the playground often are not negotiable. In these situations, the *Slow Count* is a fantastic technique that also avoids power struggles. The Slow Count is based on the fact that *anxiety is the difference between here-and-now and some time in the future*. Anxiety is a feeling that most of us would rather get over as soon as possible.

At the age of three, Darren loved to “snuggle” with us in our bed. But when it came time to go to his own bed he would put up a fight. Sleeping in our bed was not an option. Question: How to get our kid out of our bed and into his? “I’m going to count to ten, and when I get to ten, it will be time for you to get out of our bed and go to your bed.”

The trick to making this work is to count very, very, v-e-r-y slowly. “One..... two..... three..... four..... five we are half-way there. When I get to ten it will be time for you to go to your own bed..... six..... seven..... eight..... nine..... ten. Now, do you want me to carry you to bed or do you want to walk to bed?” The response you may get to the slow count is, “Hurry up and count!” I found that if I counted v-e-r-y slowly, by the time I got to the last number, he was saying, “Count faster!” The key to making this work is the length of the interval between the numbers, which should be at least 10 to 15 seconds. In this way, you are creating anxiety so the tension will build, waiting for you to get to the end.

As Darren got older, he got smarter: “Don’t count to ten. Count to a hundred-million-three.” Negotiating is an okay part of empowering your child and avoiding power struggles. “Darren, I won’t count to a hundred-million-three but if you can tell me what number comes before 15, I will count to 15.” This meant he would have to count to 15 to figure out what the number before 15 was. Then I would slowly count to 15 and he would be off to bed without a fuss.

Notice that by combining both of these techniques, you and your child can avoid getting into power struggles. And, you will get to feel like a great parent!

TEACHING, TEACHING AND MORE TEACHING

How to Teach Your Values

As I sat beside Darren's crib, looking down at that little God-given life, it was impossible to imagine him going to high school, playing football, serving in the Armed Forces, or getting married. What would he look like? What would he do? What values would he have? What would he believe? At that moment, I knew that it was very important for me to train him so that he would have values and beliefs which would hold him in good stead for the rest of his life. Therefore, what I did, what I said, and *how* I responded to him for the next 18 years would, to a large degree, shape his life, either helping or hindering him in his search for happiness and success.

In the years that have passed since that day, my clients have often asked me, "How should I teach my values to my children?" The best I can do is to share my own process, which started with my recognition that before I could teach my values to my child, I must first know what my values were.

Some of the values and beliefs that I had learned as a child did not prove helpful to me as an adult. So, as a first step, I stress the importance of looking at your own values and beliefs to identify the ones you want to pass on to your children. Many find, as I did, that some taught beliefs were simply not true, i.e. “The opposite of love is

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hate or anger.” Actually, hate or anger is not the opposite of love. Hate is simply an intense degree of anger. When you become angry with your children, does that mean you don't love them? The truth is that you become the angriest at the ones you love the most. The opposite of love, then, is indifference, apathy, or not caring. When your wife is angry with you, and you don't respond to her, or you leave the room, what she hears is, "I don't care."

Another belief I often hear is that "emotional pain is terminal." Of course, it is never said that way. Instead, what I hear is "I can never stand to be hurt that way again." However, as discussed above, if you have been hurt that way once, and you obviously made it through your pain, it proved how strong you are, not how weak you are!

I had been taught other contradictory beliefs which had created double-binds and a sense of powerlessness in me. These included, "absence makes the heart grow fonder," or, "out of sight, out of mind." I remember being told, "If you can't do a job right, don't do it at all. " Later, my Dad would come along and say, "What's the matter with you? If at first you don't succeed, try, try, again." It was years before I discovered how contradictory those two statements were and how they affected the way I approached each new job or situation. I wasn't sure whether to keep trying or to give up, to become a perfectionist or to attempt nothing. Surely, I didn't want to share these contradictory or false beliefs with my own children.

Other confusing beliefs are, "You should never hurt anybody," versus "You should have open, honest

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relationships.” These two values cannot exist together on the same plane because, at any given time, one belief will take precedence over the other. In his book, Why Am I Afraid To Tell You Who I Am, Frank Powell writes, "Most of us feel that others will not tolerate such open and honest communications. We would rather defend our dishonesty on the grounds that it might hurt others, and having rationalized our phoniness into nobility, we settle for superficial relationships."

Another conflict resulted when what was said and what was done did not match up. I was repeatedly told that I shouldn't be concerned about trying to impress people, "God looks at the heart." At the same time, my parents were always concerned that I was well dressed when I went to the Lord's House!

Once my clients become clear on which values and beliefs they want to keep as their own, I can help them learn effective ways of passing on these values to their children.

One of the most helpful and powerful ways of teaching values to pre-adolescent children is through STORYTELLING.

Storytelling

I have used several variations in storytelling. The first is easy to use with very young children. Ask the child to name three characters he would like to hear a story about. The characters could be people, animals, or things (fictitious or real). The chosen characters are really not important, for bears can always be made to

talk and dinosaurs made to fly. The important thing is sharing with your child both unhealthy or unhelpful ways, as well as healthy and helpful ways, of solving problems. In your story, one of the characters can do something that is not good, resulting in certain natural consequences. At this point, you can stop the story and say, "Now that wasn't a very good decision. What else could the little bear have said or done?" This type of teaching is very important in helping children to learn from the mistakes that others have made, so they won't be apt to repeat them.

Another variation of storytelling, useful for children aged 5 through 12 years, is to have them tell you a story that they have never heard before or seen on TV. This story must be completely made up. Whenever a child does this, they are really telling you about their **own** world, as well as their own values and beliefs. If you listen closely, you can learn a tremendous amount of what that child thinks, feels, believes, and how they solve their problems . . . usually not in the best or most mature ways. After they have told their story, take the basic elements and retell it, giving better endings, better solutions and suggesting better meanings such as, "When the little fox rejected baby bear it was because little fox was afraid that baby bear wouldn't like him and he was really the one that was most afraid. So thereafter, baby bear would always smile at little fox and offer to share a toy with him. *How do you think little fox felt after that?*"

The second teaching technique that I use (and that we all have experienced at some time in our lives) is repetitive short phrases.

Repetitive Short Phrases

Here are some very familiar repetitive phrases: "Children are to be seen and not heard!" "Spare the rod and spoil the child!" "Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise!" "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy." "Busy hands are happy hands." "A penny saved is a penny earned." "If you feel guilty, you must have something wrong." "Waste not, want not." "What you do speaks so loud, I can't hear what you say." "If you can't do a job right, don't do it at all." "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again." Some of the phrases that I just quoted can be constructive; others are destructive.

The first problem with short repetitive phrases is that they may teach what you don't want your child to learn and they may not teach the message you really want to convey. Do you really believe that children should be seen and not heard? That they have no value? That what they have to say is of no worth?

A second problem with short repetitive phrases is that they tend to be either absolute or contradictory, and they are often given as quick answers or easy solutions to complex problems. However, the use of short repetitive phrases can be a powerful teaching tool if you first take time to evaluate the actual message you are conveying.

A fun family exercise for school age children is to write down as many of these phrases as possible and then discuss the truth of each, as well as what possible exceptions need to be made. For example, a woman who has been raped is often overwhelmed with guilt.

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This guilt comes from the belief she was taught that she should not have sex with anybody she did not love or care about deeply. Although this belief or value may be good, no exceptions were ever discussed with her. As a result, when she was raped, i.e., had sex with somebody she did not love, care about or even know, she felt a destructive type of guilt. She also acquired another learned belief; "If I feel guilty, I must have done something wrong." Now she felt even more guilt, but didn't know what she could have done wrong. She is then ultimately convinced that somehow the rape was all her fault.

The third technique I use is one that my own father used quite effectively with me. This is vicarious learning.

Vicarious Learning

My father was a state dairy inspector for more than thirty years of his life, and in his travels, took me to places such as Folsom State Prison. While he inspected the prison's dairy, I had the opportunity to observe what happened to people who got in trouble with the Law. My father also took me to a state facility for juvenile delinquents. Again, as a young teen, I had an opportunity to look around the facility while my father inspected the dairy.

As a lay person in the church, my father took me to a skid row mission, where he would sometimes preach. The smell and the sights were lessons enough for me on the evils of drinking. Visits to a home for unwed mothers, several old-age homes, and migrant worker camps were other experiences that gave me

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opportunities to learn.

When using the vicarious learning technique, an important consideration is to be sure that you don't preach, raise your voice, or make a big issue about what your child is observing. Simply answer your child's questions in a quiet, non-emotional, straightforward way. The situation itself will make a sufficiently strong statement. Giving your children an opportunity to see what can happen if they make certain unwise choices can be an important part of their learning. Other kinds of vicarious experiences can occur naturally when you point out, in a casual manner, examples from news articles or from the radio or television of people who have gotten in trouble. Be careful not to overuse this learning tool.

In all instances of vicarious learning, it is important to check with the child later as to what they might have learned from the experience. Ask "What did that experience mean to you?" Depending on the meanings they have placed on the experience, it might be important to suggest alternative meanings or interpretations. As a young man, my older brother was emotionally hurt in a relationship by a girl he was dating. My initial meaning was "Girls will hurt you and it's best to avoid close relationships with members of the opposite sex." It was only because my parents were able to offer other possible interpretations that I was able to see this in a more healthy and constructive way. "Perhaps when someone rejects you, it is because they are too blind to see how neat you really are."

The fourth, and probably the most long-term, value-teaching method, is by being a *role model*.

Role Model

The “Do as I say, not as I do” idea has never worked. Children learn their communication skills (or lack of them), how relationships with others “should be” and problem-solving patterns by watching adults. Therefore, it is very important that we carefully choose the type of model we want for our children. The way I treat my wife in front of my children will become the model my sons will take into adulthood. My daughters will identify with my wife and expect the same behaviors from their husbands. It becomes imperative, then, that my values and beliefs about the way a husband is or the way a father is have been evaluated and are very clear to me, as well as to my mate. As a role model, I must be careful not to give the illusion of being perfect, which is a model no child or adult can fulfill.

I suggest that, as a role model, there are two questions which must be asked:

- 1) What is my child learning when I respond the way I just did?; and
- 2) Is what I am doing now getting me what I want in the long run?

It is when our behavior is looked at in the light of these questions that our behavior toward others and toward ourselves becomes more appropriate, constructive and helpful to our children.

Teaching Self-Confidence

We can either increase a child’s self-confidence or decrease it by the way we react. Children look to us to learn what is safe and what is not. A mother who is holding her baby and sees a spider (or snake, mouse, etc) and reacts by tensing her body and letting out a little cry of alarm, is teaching her child that the creature is dangerous. “If this big person who protects and feeds me is afraid, then it certainly is not safe for me.”

Let me give some examples. First is a woman who, when people came to her door, would grab the children and they would all hide in the closet. If the person wouldn’t leave she would make the oldest boy crawl to a side window and peek out to see who it was. What was she teaching her son? The world is not safe. People are dangerous. An extreme case, you say? Unfortunately it is more common than you think. That woman had Panic Anxiety with Agoraphobia, but I have seen the children of parents who used and/or sold street drugs and used their children as lookouts. These parents invariably feel paranoid and view the world as a dangerous, scary place. They pass this view of the world on to their children. Children who see the world as dangerous tend not to take risks; they see themselves as victims and allow others to victimize them. They have few friends: in this kind of world who can you trust? As adults, their personal relationships are typified by breakups and the lack of emotional intimacy.

Teaching Insecurity

At eight months old, Darren had the crawling thing down pat. He was the typical kid who loved to explore

anything that moved, didn't move or made noise. One day, on my wife's day off, the hospital called Margie to work. So, she brought Darren down to the office for me to watch. This worked fine until my 10 o'clock client showed up. That left the receptionist in charge of both Darren and the phones.

The client had brought her two-year-old daughter. Mom complained, "She is afraid of everything. I can't even give her a new stuffed toy without her freaking out." As mom explained how hard it was with such a clinging child, the little girl cowered behind mom's chair.

It was about at this point that Darren escaped from the receptionist, pushed my door open, and crawled into the office, heading right for the little girl's hiding place. The little girl started screaming as if her very life depended on it. Immediately mom stood up, reached down, picked up the child and said, "It's okay. It is just a baby. The baby won't hurt you. The baby loves you." She then walked to the other end of the room and set the child down. For Darren, this was better than a pull-toy that makes noise. He started toward the little girl, who started screaming again. Mom again picked up the little girl and reassured her, "The baby won't hurt you. The baby loves you." She again crossed the room and set her behind her chair. I could see that Darren was starting to enjoy this game and off he went in hot pursuit. Once again, mom picked up the child, gave me a dirty look and told her daughter, "The baby won't hurt you. The baby loves you," as she moved to the other end of the room.

"Mom, are you aware what you are teaching your daughter?"

A blank look crossed her face.

"If the baby won't hurt your daughter, why do you need to keep protecting her from him?"

I asked mom to leave her daughter with Darren and me for the rest of the session. Once mom was gone, the two-year-old quickly surveyed the situation. Figuring that I was less dangerous than the baby, she stood behind my chair this time. Darren once again zeroed in and headed right for her. The girl started screaming, "The baby is going to get me. The baby is going to get me." I picked up a piece of paper, pretended to read and responded, "Yes, it looks like the baby is going to get you. But he won't hurt you." By the end of the session, the little girl was no longer panicking and the two of them were interacting the best that an eight-month-old can with a two-year-old.

Mom came back to see me another day by herself to reinforce her understanding of how and what she was teaching her daughter. What I have found is that most problems with small children are more often problems in how the child is parented than actual problems with the child. Once mom and dad have gotten the same information and start working from the same page, it is amazing how the child's issues seem to disappear.

Teaching Responsibility

Making A Game of Cleaning

Three-year olds hate picking up their toys and cleaning up their rooms, but they love games. By three, your child will take a puzzle apart and put the pieces back where they belong because, like magic, the picture is there again. You can use this same concept when it comes to cleaning the room. The best kind of child's room has shelves that the child can reach, and toy boxes where all the stuffed bears, baby dolls and fire engines live when the child is sleeping or out on a trip with mom or dad.

Make "clean the room" a game. Take a picture of the room with all the toys in their place on the shelf or in their toy box. There might be a picture of each wall and maybe an overview from the doorway. Have the pictures blown up to at least 8½ by 11 inches. You might put them in plastic sleeves and then put them in a clear plastic report folder and mount them on the back of the bedroom door. "Let's play a game. Let's make your room look like the pictures." This will require your help at first, with both of you having to refer to the pictures numerous times. "Let's see, are all the toys are back home where they belong?" Later on you can make it a timed game, "Let's see if you can beat your personal best."

If you are consistent, in just a month or two, , the room will be cleaned every time before "we go to sleep", or "we go to nursery school."

Learning Responsibility and Cause and Effect

It started in his fourth year, Darren didn't want to go to bed at his bedtime (which was set by me; how dare he? Didn't he know "Parents know best"?). His excuse was that he wasn't sleepy.

I had to give it to him, I didn't like going to bed when I wasn't sleepy either, but by 9 o'clock I was tired and wanted to go to bed. I hated it when my child made sense, because it made me have to think. My parents had always had a bedtime for me and I was just expected go to bed when that time came. So okay, maybe it was time to rethink this one.

Darren, here is what I'm willing to do. You can stay up as long as you want if you stay in your room and read or play with your toys (no TV was allowed in his room). Yes, you can get up to get a glass of milk but then you have to go right back to your room and you can't make a mess. And, you must be willing to get up in the morning, at 7 AM without grousing or making me have to get you up, so we can get you off to nursery school. If I have to get you up or you make a lot of fuss about getting up, then I will know that you stayed up too late and you will need to go to bed at 9 o'clock the next night. What time do you think you will need to set your clock radio for in the morning? Do you want me to set it or do you want to set it?

Okay, I got his agreement, but you know that the next morning he did not get up without grousing -- in fact, I had to wrestle him out of bed. "Darren, *what was our*

agreement?” “Okay, then I accept your decision that you want to go to bed at 9 o’clock tonight.”

This process worked off and on, but I always tried to be consistent and follow through on our agreement. By the first grade, it was working most of the time, but at times it just didn’t seem to be going any place fast.

At one point, I picked Darren out of bed, pajamas and all, put him in the car with his school clothes and started off to school. “When we get to school, if you are not dressed, I will put you on the sidewalk outside of school and you can get dressed on the sidewalk.” As I drove, it was very quiet in the back seat; not a creature was stirring. So, I started giving a slow count on how far we were from school. “We are six blocks from school... We are five blocks from school... We are four blocks from school... We are three blocks from school... We are two blocks from school. One more block and we will be at school and I will put you on the sidewalk with your clothes.” Suddenly there arose such a clatter that I sprang from my seat to see what was the matter. From the back seat of the car there had appeared a vision, a blur of arms, legs and clothes all moving at breakneck speed. By the time I reached the school and stopped the car, out stepped a completely dressed young man, except for his shoes that he put on, with dignity, there on the sidewalk. I smiled as I watched him walk into his classroom. From that day forward, Darren was always dressed for school when we walked out of the house. Christmas had come for me: time and consistency had succeeded at last.

Problem Solving Without the Struggle

Bob and Darlys had two preschool boys who loved to wear their cowboy pants, their cowboy boots and play cowboy games all day long. At night, when it came to time to go to bed, they did not want to take off their cowboy pants and boots and put on their pajamas.

“We want to sleep in our clothes, ‘cause we will just have to get dressed in the morning again.”

It is hard to argue with that logic but you try. “But everybody sleeps in their pajamas.” You already know that is not going to cut it.

Very quickly you fall back on your old stand-by, “Because I said so.”

For a few nights Bob and Darlys tried wrestling the boys into their pajamas. All this did was to get everybody upset. Finally, they just gave up and let the boys climb in their beds to sleep in their pants, shirts and boots.

Children will respond to logic that makes sense to them. So I suggested that they take the boys to their beds to really look at the sheets and blankets. They were pretty dirty after several nights of the boys sleeping on them with their dirty boots and pants.

“Boys, it looks like the sheets and blankets are not doing very well. That means I’m going to have to wash them more often. When I wash them, it costs money for soap and water, the sheets and blankets wear out faster and it costs money to buy new ones and that

means I won't have enough money to buy you the toys you want." Suddenly there was no more problem in getting the boys into their pajamas.

In the beginning, the boys could not see how going to bed in their boots could be a problem for them. The technique which worked with them was finding something that made going to bed dressed in their play clothes a problem for them; the concept of not being able to get toys did the trick.

This technique doesn't always work because it is not always possible to find something that will cause a problem for the other person, but it is worth thinking about how you can do it without saying, "Do it because I said so!"

Teaching Delayed Gratification

Avoiding Shopping Trauma

Have you ever been grocery shopping with a child who wants every candy, cookie and toy you pass? The further you go into the depths of the store, the more unruly and louder they become. You try everything you know, "I don't have enough money." That is a loser from the get-go; your child has no concept of money and they aren't buying that one. "You can't have everything you see." Another losing argument, you obviously get everything you want. Finally desperation starts to set in, "You can't have it because I said so." Three strikes means it is time for the temper-tantrum and you lose big time. Now it is time to beat a hasty

exit, just leave the groceries and head for the car. You have lost another round, beaten by a three year-old.

There is a way to avoid this trauma to you and your child. For a moment, put yourself in your child's place. You watch as mommy takes any and everything she wants from the shelves, money obviously being no object (at least it looks that way to the child). Of course money is an object, but how does your child know that you are counting your pennies, comparing prices and looking for bargains?

The best way to teach is through example. As the two of you are walking toward the store, say out loud, "Boy, I hope I've got enough money to get everything we need." Once in the store you start looking at different things, "That would be great to get if we had enough money, but we need to save our pennies for some peanut butter and jelly." Every so often stop and do a rough count of how much you have put in the basket, then check how much money you have in your purse.

Now when he/she asks for something, go through the same process of checking what you have and how much that would add to the bill. If you can't get everything you want then it will not be as hard for your child not to get everything he/she wants.

Won't all this talking about money make my child insecure? The short answer is "no", because you are not going to do it every single time you go shopping for the next five years. You only have to do it long enough to teach your child that big people can't get everything they want and that they too have to be careful about spending.

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The lessons you are teaching are many; here are just a few:

- Nobody gets everything they want
- It is important not to over spend
- It is important to shop for bargains
- It is important to set priorities for what we want
- We can tolerate delayed gratification. “Let’s see if we can save enough money to get it next time.”

Parents who give in to their child’s every whim or fold under the pressure of a tantrum, are also teaching their child. What do you think you are teaching when you say to yourself, “It is just easier to give them what they want, than to put up with their screaming”?

- I am the center of the universe
- My wants are more important than anybody else’s
- If I make enough noise, I’ll get what I want
- Other people are not important
- I can’t tolerate delayed gratification

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As a parent, teaching children is what you are doing all the time, even when you are not aware of what you are teaching: just make sure you are teaching what you want to teach.

See the Appendix for more information about delayed gratification in preschoolers.

Teaching a Child That They Are Capable

A perfect parent is not a good parent. As a parent, it is okay to not know everything; it is okay to make mistakes; it is okay to apologize and say, “I blew that one”; and it is okay to say, “I don’t know.” If you could be the perfect parent, what would you be teaching your child?

Climbing the Ladder of Success

Darren was crawling, but not walking, when it happened. It was during that transitional stage between when you can put a child down and they stay put, and the running years. I was hanging curtains in our new home. I had the five-foot stepladder in the front room and left to get a better screwdriver. When I returned, I saw Darren standing on the top step, hanging onto the top of the ladder. For a split second my heart stopped. He was smiling and rocking back and forth, just enjoying a daddy’s view of the world. The first thing that went through my mind was DON’T PANIC.

If I panicked, my fear was that Darren would panic and let go. It is easy to miss a teaching moment and I

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almost missed that one. In a calm voice, I called Margie, "Come here but don't panic or react." When she came around the corner her eyes got real big, but she didn't panic. I figured that since Darren had climbed up the steps without help, he should be able to climb down the steps without help. "Margie, stand on one side of the ladder and I'll stand on the other, so we can catch him if he falls. Now let's encourage him to climb down."

The smile never left Darren's face as he slowly and carefully climbed down. When he reached the bottom, we both excitedly told him what a good job he had done. I believe this was one of the reinforcing points in Darren's growing self-confidence. He had learned that he could make good decisions and didn't have to "prove" to anyone that he was not afraid.

TEACHING ABOUT "MY STUFF, YOUR STUFF"

Children learn to share by **NOT** being shared with.

"Honey, you need to share your toy with your friend." You can say this until you are blue in the face but your child will never learn to share.

When you try to make them share, all your child will learn is that they don't have control in their life, that big people have the power and that little people are powerless.

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In nursery school, most fights are over who gets to play with the favorite toys. Telling a child that they *should* share does not work.

What does work is saying something like, "It sure didn't feel good when Suzy wouldn't share her toy with you, did it?" Your child will make the connection, "When I don't share it hurts other people. I don't like to feel that way, so maybe I should share."

"Do I have to share all my toys?"

You have stuff that is your very own personal stuff, stuff that you are not willing to share with your own children, such as your lipstick, computer or that favorite heirloom from Grandmother. You are even less likely to share your stuff with a casual friend. You have a right not to share your personal stuff. Your child has this same right to not share all their toys with their friends.

"Johnnie is coming over to play. Are there any toys that you don't want your friend to play with? If so, we can put them up in the top of the closet until he goes home."

Having their personal stuff gives your child the pride of ownership and a sense of responsibility and that leads them to want to take care of their things.

VERBAL AIKIDO & THE TV ADS

Christmas is a-coming (for children, Christmas is always a-coming) and all the children's shows are just

one long commercial for toys you can buy interspersed with cartoons. If you are a parent, then you know I am not being cynical. Companies test their commercials on children before they ever run them Saturday morning. They know what will work the best to get your children to drive you nuts. "I want that toy. I want this toy." "I want every toy that I see (and I will drive you nuts if you don't get it for me)."

There are some simple ways of fighting back without leaving the house on Saturday morning. The secret lies in the fact that children (and most adults) would rather be listened to than to get their way. The next time you hear "I want that," respond with some verbal aikido, "That does look like a fun toy. I bet it would be fun to play with." In aikido you do not resist, defend or attack, you simply take the other person's energy, blend with it and let it go on past. Of course that will not be enough to end it, for in just a few minutes, here comes another ad for a different toy. "Oh, Daddy, Daddy, look. I want that toy!" And again respond with aikido, "That looks like a fun toy also. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could get every toy we see?" Don't expect a response; he/she is too busy watching for the next toy ad.

Remember this secret and keep validating your child's excitement. At some point it will be necessary, when the TV is off, to start narrowing down the list. "Which of all the toys you saw looked like the most fun? Which toy looks like the least fun? If you could have one toy which would you choose? If you could have two toys which would choose?"

Be aware that by going through this process with your child, you are teaching him/her to prioritize things that are important, teaching how to set goals, and how to deal with delayed gratification. You are also having quality time with your child which will be remembered as, "I am special enough for Mom/Dad to spend time with me talking about things that are important to me."

PARENTING ON THE SAME PAGE

Parenting, by any measure, is an imprecise science with plenty of room for parents to disagree. The problem is most parents don't consider parenting a science that needs to be studied or learned. "My parents raised me this way and I turned out okay." Unfortunately, your spouse was not raised the same way you were. "Well, my parents raised me differently and I turned out okay." There are as many ways of raising a child as there are parents, so which is the "correct" way to raise a child? When parents don't agree, the child can become the center of a power-struggle between the parents. There is an old African saying, "When the elephants fight, it is the grass that gets killed."

In many families, there is one parent who is too strict and/or too harsh and the other who tries to compensate by being too lenient and/or too soft. The stricter the one parent becomes, the more lenient the other becomes. Children who get caught in this type of schizophrenic home become the battlefield for the parents' inability to communicate with each other and to solve problems.

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It doesn't have to be this way. Sit down with your mate at a time when you are not fighting, your child isn't around, and there are few distractions. Get a piece of paper and ask this question, "What qualities, traits, and behaviors do we want our child to have when he/she is 21 years old?" Start a list that both of you can agree on: "Caring, Helpful, Loving, Energetic, Resourceful, Independent, Creative," etc.; make the list as long as possible. Don't rush it: enjoy how good it feels when you both agree on something.

My guess is that there will be little or no conflict over what qualities the two of you want your child to have as an adult. The only question the two of you have been fighting over is what parenting techniques do you use to impart these qualities and behaviors? The goals you have are the same; the means is where the conflict lies. Once the two of you clarify your shared goals by making the list, you will discover an interesting change. Now, problem solving and communication become easier. Parenting is now a team project, "We are both on the same team, going for the same goal."

There are a couple of questions that can help the two of you stay focused on your goals:

- What are we teaching our child when we are too lenient or too harsh? What has our child just learned?
- Is what I'm/we're doing with our child going to produce the goals we say we want?

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This is not about "the way I was raised" or "is it right or wrong." Our parents may have had different goals for us, or maybe they were just mindlessly doing what their parents had done with them. But we have a chance to break any negative cycles and give our children a better parenting model than the one we received.

The next time you believe your mate is being too harsh or being too lenient, ask your mate, out of earshot of the children, "What did you just teach Michael?" Or "I wonder what little Mike just learned when you did . . . ?" Be gentle when you ask your questions; remember you're on the same team, wanting the same goals.

Is it possible to have different perceptions of what you are teaching?

"I just taught him not to sass us."

"I wonder if that is what he learned? Could he have learned that he is powerless and big people can 'do it' to little people? I think if I was small and a big person had said that to me, I would have felt shamed and confused."

Don't get into another power struggle. People on the same team can have different opinions without one being a winner and one a loser.

An Italian couple in their late thirties, who had a two-year-old girl, came into counseling because they were "fighting all the time." One Monday they came and reported, "We have been fighting all weekend, and it was bad." When I asked what the fight was about, I

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was told, “We can’t agree. Should 18 year olds have to register for the draft?”

My response was, “What difference does it make? You’re both way too old for the draft and your daughter will probably never be required to register for the draft unless you move to Israel. Are you planning to move?” As I talked with them, I discovered they held the belief, “Married couples should agree on important things,” and this had somehow become very important to them.

You don’t have to agree on everything, but it is important to listen and respect each other’s points of view and perceptions, especially about parenting, if you don’t want to hurt your child.

Do words have power? Yes, but only to the extent that you give them power. The problem is that children don’t know this, so they are very vulnerable to what their parents call them and say to them. Even though children may try to learn the concept that words have no meaning, the little verse “sticks and stones can break my bones but names will never hurt me,” is no defense to the power and authority that their parents’ words have.

The principal of a grade school called me up with a question about one of his students, “I have this fifth grader in my class who is threatening to kill himself. I can’t tell if he is serious or is just trying to manipulate out of going to school. Could you see him right away? His parents can bring him down.” Within the hour, he was sitting in my office, a bright young man with his two very concerned parents. As we talked, I became convinced that if left alone, he really would take his

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own life by “running in front of a big truck” on the busy highway near his school.

I started to explore what was so terrible in his life that he wanted to end it, and to cause the pain he seemed to be in.

He explained, “All the kids at school talk about me. They say I’m dumb and stupid.” His mother interrupted, “He is not stupid, his grades are good and he plays the trumpet and is in the band.”

“Are you on the playground when they are saying these things about you?” I asked.

“No, I’m in my room at home.” He went on to describe that he could hear the kids walking past the house saying these bad things. “In fact I can hear them talking about me when they are in the school bathroom.”

“And you are at home when you hear them?”

“Yes.”

“How far do you live from school?”

“Five blocks.”

From his parents, I learned that when they had company over, he wouldn’t come out of his room and that he had no friends of his own who ever came over. Next, I turned to the parents, “What kind of relationship do you have with your son?” Mother said she and her

son had a very good relationship, “We talk while I make supper.”

Father said he had a great relationship with his son, “Ever since he was a baby, I would play with him almost every night. I have my pet names for him. He has always been my ‘little dumb-dumb; my idiot child’. I’m just teasing, he knows I don’t mean it.”

Children do not have a filtering system to protect their self-image. If we, as parents, don’t protect them by being conscious of what we are teaching, we are dooming them to a lifetime of problems.

The thirteen-year-old girl and her parents had been ordered into counseling because she had been found on G Street in Fresno, working as a prostitute. Her parents had been born in Italy and I could hear them screaming from the moment they hit the door. Once I got them back to my office, I started sorting out the story. Mother was indignant, “She never listens to me. Every since she was eight-years old, I have been telling her she was going to grow up to be a whore and a prostitute. She just wouldn’t listen.”

I responded with, “I think she has been listening too well; she has become what you told her she would be.” Mom defended herself, “My father called me that but I never became one.”

What works with one child may not work with the next. My guess was that the culture back in Italy was a lot different; while that type of parenting might have worked there, it obviously wasn’t working here.

As parents, everything you do with, to and for your child is teaching. Is what you’re doing getting you what you want?

TO DISCIPLINE, OR NOT TO DISCIPLINE

Discipline is not punishment. The word discipline comes from the Latin *discipulus*, to pupil, and from *discere*, to learn¹, a word meaning to disciple. Note: the purpose of discipline has nothing to do with punishment. Punishment does not help a child learn; it often teaches them to conform to your superior strength out of fear. Punishment is reactive; it is designed to control and limit unwanted behaviors. People are put in prisons as a way of controlling them, “keeping the criminal element off the streets,” not as a way of rehabilitating them.

¹Excerpted from *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Third Edition* Copyright © 1992 by Houghton Mifflin Company.

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In parenting, the most effective punishment – and one of the least desirable -- is conditional love. Conditional love tells the child, “I only love you when you perform to my standards (when you are perfect).” They may get messages such as, “If you can’t do a job right, don’t do it at all”, or “If you do that you will break Mother’s heart (kill her).”

Worst of all, is probably the rejection or abandonment ploy, such as refusing to talk to the child or ignoring him/her.

By using conditional love, you can teach a child that they have no value except when they are perfect. These children cause no problems for their parents or their teachers, but at an enormous price: often, these well-behaved children tend to be suicidal and/or homicidal.

Discipline, on the other hand, teaches children that in the world there is “cause and effect,” both in the good things that happen to us as well as the bad things. Discipline teaches that the child is capable, that he/she makes a difference and that he/she is able to wait for good things in their life (to accept delayed gratification - see *From Dependency to Independency* article.)

Getting Started

Start by making very clear what you want from your child by avoiding the use of vague or abstract terms. Instead, use concrete behavioral terms that draw a picture for the child. You may want to take some time writing a list of your expectations, rules and boundaries. “Clean your room,” is not a clear picture

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for any child to try to follow. What does a clean room look like? For small children, actually taking a picture of the child’s room when it is clean and the toys are all put in their right places on the shelves can make cleaning up a room a game. “Let’s see if we can make your room look like the picture.”

Don’t rush in making your list, and remember to update your list about every six months or more for children ages 1 to 6 years old. As the child gets older, you should review your list once a year on their birthday. Birthdays are good anniversary dates to have discussions with your child on what new privileges and responsibilities they have earned “Now that you are a big girl.”

In discipline, the consequences which will result from misbehavior are laid out ahead of time. For best results, it is always good to let the child choose the consequence for their misbehavior. However, for small children two and three years of age, you will probably have to set the consequences, because they are not very good at setting reasonable consequences. “You could send me to jail,” is not a good choice.

By four years of age, most children can set reasonable consequences with a little help. Take your list of which behaviors you want and don’t want and review each expectation/behavior with your child. For example, “If you don’t _____ (picture and describe the behavior) how do you want me to respond to you?” Or “What would help you remember to _____ (picture and describe the behavior)?”

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The first response you get will probably be one of the extremes, “Don’t do anything”; or, “Don’t feed me for a week.” In either case, simply respond with, “That is not acceptable. What else could help you remember?” At that point, the child will likely say the classic, “I don’t know,” followed by a shrug of the shoulders.

This is where you are permitted to give some suggestions, but be real sure you are willing to follow through. DO NOT choose or suggest consequences you are not willing to enforce, or you will become a powerless parent. Children will not believe or trust someone who doesn’t follow through on what they say.

Start out with something like, “If you can’t think of anything, let me suggest that we could take away your cartoons for a week, or we could have you go to bed an hour earlier for a week, or not let you play outside for a week. Which one do you think would help you remember to _____ (picture and describe the behavior, again)?”

If the child won’t make a decision, then you can add, “If you can’t make a decision then I guess you are asking me to make a decision for you and I am likely to choose the one you want least.” At that point almost all children will be willing to choose a consequence.

Small children think in the here-and-now. They do not think about contingencies, the “what if’s” of life. Here is an opportunity to teach them about thinking ahead. “Can you think of anything that might prevent you from doing _____ (picture and describe behavior)?” “What if it rained. Would that keep you from cleaning your room? No. What if you went with Grandmother’s

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and stayed at her house for three days. Would that keep you from cleaning your room? Yes. Then do you think you would have to clean your room if you go over to her house? Could you remember to clean it before you go?”

If you cannot stand the idea of your child forgetting and having to pay the consequence, then you can add, “If I think you are going to forget, is there some non-verbal sign I can give you before it is too late and you have to lose your privilege?” I had one mother who had a twelve-year-old boy she was having a hard time getting to take a bath. He was much more interested in talking to the girls who would come by the house. The son’s agreement was that when it came to the time they had agreed on for him to take his bath, she would come out onto the porch and tug on her right ear. Then, if he didn’t come in within 10 minutes, she would have the freedom to say, in front of the girls, “It’s time for Mike to take his bath.” Needless to say, she never had to utter those fateful words.

This whole process may seem like it will take a long time, and at first it will. But soon you and your child will have this down to a routine and in the long run you will save yourself many hours and years of frustration.

The next step is to gently review the complete agreement, “What was our agreement?” Get the child to state back to you in behavioral terms what they are to do and what the consequences will be if they don’t follow through. If they miss anything, be sure it is included until the child can repeat it.

Now, it is important not to do any nagging or reminding. If you nag or keep reminding, then you will be setting a power-struggle, something they can resist to prove “You don’t control me.”

Time comes and goes, and your child does what he/she was supposed to do. This is the time to give lots of praise. The rule of thumb is that if you consistently repeat a behavior for thirty-two days, it becomes your, or in this case your child’s, behavior. However, if you are inconsistent, you get the doghouse because your child will be out of control and you will not want to be in your house.

If the time passes and your child didn’t do what they agreed to do, then it is time to confront him or her. “What was our agreement?” Get the child to repeat the agreement. Then say, “I accept your decision that you will not get the privilege of watching cartoons for one week.” (See, I’m not doing it to you, you are doing it to yourself.) More than likely, your child will not give up easily at first, because he/she is used to getting you to buckle under pressure. “But Mommy, it is not fair. What if I do it now? Then could I watch the cartoons?”, or “I’ll be sure to do it next time; please, Mommy, please let me watch cartoons!”

This is the time to be strong but not cruel. “Honey, it is hard not getting to watch cartoons isn’t it? But in this house we -- Mommy, Daddy, all of us -- keep our agreements. Now what will help you to remember to do (picture and describe behavior)?” And start the process all over again. Remember only thirty-one more days to go (Doc promised).

What About Yelling and Screaming?

Yelling and screaming are okay for little children; they do it when they are out of control. For you, screaming is never okay. Screaming is an indication that you are out of control and your children can tell that you are. A screaming parent is not a safe parent to be around. No need to say more: don’t allow yourself to get to that point. If you do find yourself getting out of control from time to time, then it is time for you to get some help from a good counselor. There is a story of a lady who had eight children. When one of them was being bad she would give him castor oil. When all eight of them were bad, she would take the castor oil because she figured that she was the one that had the problem.

The only time yelling has a place in discipline is as a warning of danger, “Don’t touch that stove!”, or as the last statement in a series of progressive warnings. Normal voice: “You children need to quiet down and use your indoor voices.” Of course they don’t quiet down, so you raise your voice a notch or two (but not yelling or screaming): “Alright, you need to quiet down now.” Nothing changes. Now you can yell: “That’s it! If I have to say something again you are all going to your rooms!” Then, if nothing changes, you get up in a normal voice and say, “OK, it is time for you to go to your rooms and spend some time alone.”

The problem is that many parents go from silence, 0 to 120 without any warning. For the child, this makes the parent like a bomb which can go off at anytime. Parents who do this are not very safe or fun to be around. Some of you have worked with this kind of

boss. The result is a very stressful work situation. And you wonder why some children run away from home. They don't have the option of quitting and finding other parents.

What About Spanking?

Spanking is often thought of as punishment. My favorite cartoon on this is from FOR BETTER OR WORSE. It shows the father dragging his 7-year-old son across the street while spanking him and yelling, "This will teach you not to hit kids." All too often, spanking and/or screaming are used as a way to relieve the parent's frustration rather than as a way to discipline the child.

Spanking can be used as a discipline; however, the more you use it the less it will work. Have you ever known a child to stand in defiance and be spanked without shedding a tear? Long before this point is reached, the spanking had stopped working. Yes, the Bible does say, "Spare the rod and spoil the child." The Bible also says, "Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." The staff was the hooked end of the rod; together, the rod and staff were used to rescue and to set limits for the sheep. A good shepherd never beats his sheep. The sheep follow the shepherd because they know that the shepherd will care for and protect them, not because they fear the shepherd.

If you have to spank (and spanking is always the last resort -- what are you going to do next? Break their arm?); *the consequence should have been spelled out clearly ahead of time, as discussed above.*

From my experience, if you have to spank a child more than four times in their entire life, then you are doing something wrong. I would strongly suggest that no child under three should be spanked. There are much better ways of disciplining children of all ages, such as a timeout or taking their favorite toy away for a period of time (the younger the child, the shorter the time).

Never spank a child by holding his/her arm and trying to hit him as he jumps around. That is a good way to pull a child's arm out of its socket. If you must spank, then lay the child face down on a firm bed and apply no more than three swats that are hard enough to sting but not hard enough to leave marks.

FOSTER PARENTS: It is against the law in most states to use any form of physical punishment on a foster child. Don't even think of doing it.

What Else Can I Do?

There is no one disciplinary method that works all the time. What works on one child this week doesn't work the next week. What works with this child, doesn't work with the next child. In parenting, the rule is NOTHING WORKS ALL THE TIME. So, the best I can do is to give you a toolbox with many different techniques and then you can be on the lookout for any great ideas that have worked for your friends and family.

Here is one my wife Margie taught me. She, our three year-old son Darren, and I were in a Charleston, South Carolina department store. It was the Christmas season, and Darren wanted to go to the toy department

to see Santa. But I was working at Oak Grove, a residential treatment center for children, and needed to get back to work. Of course, it would be at this time, Darren decided he could not wait to see Santa, had to see him NOW, and threw himself down on the floor with his arms, legs and voice all going at once. At that point, I'm looking for the closest exit where I can toss out everything I know about parenting.

It is then that I see Margie sit down on a display next to Darren. While Darren's screaming like a child possessed, she says very softly, "Darren, tell me when you can listen to me." No child making that much noise could possibly hear anything, but he could see that her lips were moving. A few seconds later, she repeats the request softly, "Darren, tell me when you can listen." by now, some of the fervor has left his screams. Again, she repeats the request. Now, his screaming is down to more of a whimper.

"I can listen now."

"Darren, we can't see Santa Clause right now, but I promise we will come back tomorrow and see him. Now we need to leave."

The little voice responded, "OK"; he got up and mother and son walked out to the car. I followed in sheer amazement. Does this technique work every time? No, but when it does, it is a joy to watch.

THE MIDAS TOUCH

King Midas wanted everything he saw, but he did not have enough gold to get everything he saw. He would become very upset if he couldn't have everything he wanted, when he wanted it, and would throw temper tantrums and pout and take it out on his wife and beautiful daughter. His wife would tell him that he should save his gold and so he could get what he wanted, but he wanted what he wanted NOW.

One day, the fairy godmother showed up and asked him what the problem was. "There is not enough gold to get everything I want." The fairy godmother said she would give him only one wish. "I want everything that I touch to turn to gold. Then I will have all the gold I will ever want."

You know that this story is not going to have a happy ending. He got his wish and everything that he touched turned to gold, including his daughter, who turned to hard, cold gold when he tried to hug her. There is a price to be paid for not being able to accept and/or tolerate delayed gratification. However, delayed gratification can be taught, and you need to teach it to your children. (Again see Appendix.)

Your child's allowance can be an opportunity to teach delayed gratification, or it can be something you do just because other parents give their kids money. I was uncomfortable about just giving Darren an allowance with no strings attached. So, we bought a bank where, when you put the coins in, they would roll down and fall

into the proper slot; the quarter slot would hold ten dollars.

At four, Darren got his first allowance of one dollar; actually, we gave him four quarters. The agreement was that he had to put two of the quarters into the bank and watch them roll down and drop in the quarter slot. The other two quarters were his to spend any way he wanted when we went to the store. We told Darren that when the quarters reached the top of the slot, ten dollars, he could take the ten dollars to a big toy store and get whatever he wanted with his money. At first this was not fun for him: he wanted all four of the quarters to spend right away, "You can't get anything with two quarters."

This changed after our trip to the toy store with his first \$10.00 savings. A word of warning: that first trip lasted over an hour while he looked and looked, asking how much everything in the store cost. It also gave us a chance to show him what he could get if he had \$20. But at that age, it was hard enough for him to wait to get the ten dollars.

As he got older, his allowance grew but the split always remained 50/50. By the time he reached junior high, his limit before he could spend his savings was now \$100. With his first hundred dollars, he bought a modem for his computer. The older he got, more often, but not always, he would put all his allowance into the savings account. In high school, I noticed another change; now he would "invest" in comic books, saving them in plastic covers and storing them in boxes that he treated as if they were gold bullion. Darren had

learned about delayed gratification and I knew that he would always be responsible with money.

WHAT CHILDREN WANT FROM THEIR PARENTS

A Parent-Child Contract

Being in a family requires agreements by both the parents and the children. These agreements work best when they are clearly stated and accepted by both sides.

Although for slightly older children in "the later years," here are the expectations of a group of young Boy Scouts for their parents. *Thanks to Keith Williams, Scout Leader and Committee Chairman for Troop 58 for the following:*

As A Young Person, This Is What I Want From My Parents:

- Someone who will take part in activities with me
- Someone who will be fun
- Someone who will "hang loose" – let us kids be kids
- Someone who is approachable
- Someone who will be understanding of my point of view, who will listen and paraphrase me
- Someone who wants to be a parent
- Someone who does not expect perfection from themselves or me
- Someone who will set fair standards and be firm

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- Someone who makes kids do what they need to do even if they (the kids) don't want to do it
- Someone who will trust us
- Someone who will be a teacher but not give too much detail
- Someone we can look up to and be proud of
- Someone who is able to talk to us at our level
- Someone who does not always have to be right
- Someone who accepts my feelings and doesn't try to talk me out of them
- Someone who will be honest and admit when they make a mistake
- Someone who I can depend on. Who does what they say they will do.

I _____ agree to give the above behaviors to my son/daughter.

Dated _____

This Is What I Will Give In Exchange:

- I will do what needs to be done now, and I will not stall or have to be told over and over
- I will do the best I can the first time
- I will respect you (no smart mouth)
- I will trust you and listen to what you have to say
- I will try to see and understand what it is like to be a parent
- I will work as a team with the family
- I will say "thank you", once in a while
- I will be responsible for myself, my room, my pets, etc.

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- I will be honest with both the content and with my feelings, even if it is scary or painful to do so

I _____ agree to give my parents the above listed behaviors.

Dated _____

Contracts are important documents and, as such, should be taken seriously by both parties with the understanding that if either party breaks the contract, then the contract will become void, unless it is renegotiated. This process of developing a *working contract* is not easily accomplished. Consider it a work in progress which will probably require a number of evolving and expanding contracts where concepts such as: "I will set fair standards," or, "I will be responsible for myself, my room, my pets, etc." are written in behavioral terms with time lines clearly stated.

Good communication, listening and problem solving skills are essential to this process. In getting compliance, both parties must be on board. The best way to do that is to have both people give their input in developing the contract. You cannot arbitrarily give someone a contract and expect that they will have any vested interest in making it work.

GOOD NEWS, BAD NEWS

Having children is not for the faint of heart. As a parent, you will experience sights, sounds, and smells that you never dreamed existed in this world. Yes, at times the early years will leave you shaken and scratching your head, but I have good news and bad news.

The good news is that children grow up The bad news is that children grow up.

Now, what you have to look forward to are “The Later Years.”

APPENDIX

Preschool Self-Control and Pretzel Logic

Published in the Fresno Bee Newspaper

Author: B. Bower

Do you want a couple of small cookies now, or can you wait 15 minutes for 5 pretzels?

Children as young as 4 years of age who hold out for the bigger reward on tests of this kind cope better with frustration and stress as adolescents and may perform better academically, according to a report in the May 25, SCIENCE.

Young children develop specific psychological strategies to maintain self-control in the pursuit of future goals, say psychologist Walter Mischel of Columbia University in New York City and his colleagues. The ability to delay gratification, they add, constitutes an important aspect of intelligence that researchers have often overlooked.

In the early 1970's, the researchers tested 53 4-year-olds from middle-class families. An experimenter presented each child with a pair of treats before leaving the room. To attain the preferred treat – five pretzels as opposed to two cookies, for example – youngsters had to wait for the experimenter to return about 15 minutes later. They could press a buzzer any time to end the waiting period and obtain the less preferred treat.

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When rewards were hidden from view, children waited longer on average than when rewards were in plain sight. But the way children thought about the treats appears critical to their self-control, the researchers contend. Waiting time decreased for children asked to focus on “arousing” features of a reward, such as the taste of a pretzel. Delays increased if they were told to imagine “abstract” qualities of a reward, such as thinking about pretzels as long, brown logs.

The spontaneous use of abstract thinking to foster self-control emerges between ages 9 and 12, Mischel and his co-workers say.

In a 10-year follow-up of the preschool sample, children who delayed longer when rewards were visible were rated in adolescence by their parents as significantly more attentive and able to concentrate, goal-oriented and intelligent. Their parents also viewed them as more able to resist temptation, tolerate frustration and cope with stress.

Scores on the Scholastic Aptitude Test, now available for 35 subjects, are also substantially higher for those who delayed gratification longer as preschoolers. A larger sample needs to be studied to confirm this finding, the researchers caution.

Nevertheless, they say, teaching children self-control strategies to attain desired goals may improve their academic and social skills later in life.

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