

## 5 PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP

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## 5.1 Goals of Parenting

1. To raise a child who loves God (Deut. 6:4-9).
2. To raise a child who is happy, healthy, confident, cooperative, and responsible.
3. To build a strong, lifelong relationship between parent and child.
4. To help children grow to be a responsible adult.
5. To raise a loving and lovable child.

## 5.2 Role of Parents

The Bible is the ultimate authority on the role of parents. It has the following things to say about the role of parents:

**Table 5-1: Role of Parents**

#	Responsibility	Description	Scripture(s)
1	Train your child	Train up a child in the way that he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.	Prov. 22:6
2	Teach your children to love the Lord	“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign in your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”	Deut. 6:4-9
3	Fathers don't provoke the children to wrath	Fathers do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord	Eph. 6:4
4	Discipline your children	The rod and rebuke gives wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame on his mother.	Prov. 29:15
5	Correct your son	Correct your son, and he will give you rest; Yes, he will give delight to your soul.	Prov. 29:17
6	A wise son makes a glad father	A wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish son is the grief of his mother.	Prov. 10:1
7	Chasten your son while he is young	Chasten your son while there is hope, and do not set your heart on his destruction.	Prov. 19:18
8	Remove foolishness from a child with correction	Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of correction will drive it far from him.	Prov. 22:15
9	Do not withhold correction	Do not withhold correction from a child, for if you beat him with a rod, he will not die. You shall beat him with a rod, and deliver his soul from hell.	Prov. 23:13

While fathers are identified as the parents responsible for setting the pattern for child rearing, mothers usually do much more of the training and instructing of families' children. Mothers and fathers need to agree on their approach to child rearing and support one another in their efforts with their children.

Both parents are to be obeyed and honored equally by their children (Eph. 6:1-2). Parental responsibility is set out in two ways: First, what they are *not* to do—“do not provoke your children to wrath.” Parents are not to overdiscipline in a reign of terror that will result in bitterly hostile children (Eph. 6:4) or children who give up on life (Col. 3:21). Second, what parents are to do—“but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.” To “bring them up” involves three ideas:

1. Parenting is a continuous job. As long as a child is a dependent, parents are responsible for rearing them so they become the people God wants them to be.
2. Parenting is a loving job. To “bring up” means literally “to nourish tenderly.” Children should be objects of tender, loving care.
3. Parenting is a twofold job involving:
  - 3.1. nurture (lit., “child training”)—all that children need for physical, mental, and spiritual development
  - 3.2. admonition (lit., “corrective” discipline of the Lord)

Fathers and mothers are God’s constituted home authority (Prov. 1:8, 6:20-22) to nurture children along godly paths and to admonish them away from ungodly ones. Fathers and mothers who do not discipline their children are parents who are themselves undisciplined and disobedient to God’s will.

Prov. 22:6 sets out two stages in the process of godly child rearing: first, the method, “Train up a child in the way he should go”; and second, the result, “when he is old he will not depart from it.”

The method involves three parts:

1. The concept of training—“Train up.” This does not denote corporal punishment but rather includes three ideas:
  - 1.1. Dedication. This is the consistent meaning of the word in its other Old Testament occurrences (Deut. 20:5; 1 Kin. 8:63; 2 Chr. 7:5). Child training must begin with dedication of the child to God; the parent must realize that the child belongs exclusively to God and is given to the parent only as a stewardship.
  - 1.2. Instruction. This is the meaning of this word as it is used in the Jewish writings; the parents are to instruct or cause their children to learn everything essential in pleasing God.
  - 1.3. Motivation. This is the meaning of the word in Arabic, as it is used to describe the action of a midwife who stimulates the palate of the newborn babe so it will take nourishment. Parents are to create a taste or desire within the child so that he is internally motivated (rather than externally compelled) to do what God wants him to do.
2. The recipient of training—“a child.” This is one of seven Hebrew words translated by the English word “child” and would better be translated by our word “dependent.” As long as the child is dependent on his parents he is to be the recipient of training, regardless of his age.
3. The content of the training—“in the way that he should go.” The thought is that at each stage of development the parents or guardians are to dedicate, instruct, and motivate the child to do what God evidently has best equipped the child to do for Him. This is graphically illustrated by Joshua when he said, “But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Josh. 24:15).

Proverbs are wisdom statements: general truths about the most important issues of life. If God’s process has been followed, the desired results usually occur. A child can reject the training of godly parents, but usually godly parenting results in godly adult offspring. The result includes the time of realization—“when he is old”—this is best understood as being parallel with “a child,” hence, “when he is independent,” that is, no longer economically dependent upon parents, referring to the time when the

child leaves the parents' home to establish another home. The result includes the nature of realization—"he will not depart from it." Persistent, careful, godly parenting produces adult children whose Christian faith and commitment are unwavering.

One of the most important things a parent can do for their child is to set a good example. The following poem sums up why:

**BY YOUR EXAMPLE<sup>51</sup>**

*He whipped his boy for lying and his cheeks were flaming red,  
And of course there's no denying there was truth in what he said—  
That a liar's always hated. But the little fellow knew  
That his father often state many things that were untrue.*

*He caught the youngster cheating and he sent him up to bed.  
And it's useless now repeating all the bitter things he said:  
He talked of honor loudly as a lesson to be learned,  
And forgot he'd boasted proudly of the cunning tricks he'd turned.*

*He heard the youngster swearing and he punished him again.  
He'd have no boy as daring as to utter words profane.  
Yet the youngster could have told him—poor misguided little elf  
That it seemed unfair to scold him when he often cursed himself.*

*All in vain is splendid preaching, and the noble things we say.  
All our talk is wasted teaching if we do not lead the way.  
We can never by reviewing all the sermons on the shelves,  
Keep the younger hands from doing what we often do ourselves.*

Parents have a right to:

- Friendships
- Privacy
- Time for yourself
- Respect for your property
- A life apart from the children

### 5.2.1 **The First Parent: God**

Whenever your kids are out of control, you can take comfort from the thought that even God's omnipotence did not extend to God's kids. After creating heaven and earth, God created Adam and Eve. And the first thing He said to them was: "Don't."

"Don't what?" Adam asked.

"Don't eat the Forbidden Fruit," God replied.

<sup>51</sup> Exposing the Myths of Parenthood, Dr. David Jeremiah, World Books Publisher, ISBN 0-8499-3087-1, 1988, p. 94.

"Forbidden fruit? We got Forbidden Fruit? Hey, Eve, we got Forbidden Fruit!"

"No way!"

"WAY!"

"Don't eat that fruit!" said God.

"Why?"

"Because I am your Father and I said so!" said God, wondering why He hadn't stopped after making the elephants.

A few minutes later God saw the kids having an apple break and was angry.

"Didn't I tell you not to eat that fruit?" the 'First Parent' asked.

"Uh huh," Adam replied.

"Then why did you?"

"I dunno," Eve answered.

"She started it!" Adam said.

"Did not!"

"DID so!"

"DID NOT!"

Having had it with the two of them, God's punishment was that Adam and Eve should have children of their own...thus the pattern was set and it has never changed.

But there is reassurance in this story. If you have persistently and lovingly tried to give them wisdom and they haven't taken it, don't be too hard on yourself. If God had trouble handling children, what made you think it would be a piece of cake for you?

### **5.2.2 Role of Fathers**<sup>52</sup>

A girl's father is the first man in her life, and probably the most influential. Absent or involved, loving or rejecting, what he is or was leaves a lasting imprint. Most women have not analyzed their relationships with their fathers, and until recently the father-daughter bond has not received the spotlight it deserves. A woman may speak of her father with pride or revulsion, she may compare him favorably or unfavorably to the other men in her life. But whatever life with father has been, a father's role sets the stage for a woman's performance.

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<sup>52</sup> Portions from Exposing the Myths of Parenthood, Dr. David Jeremiah, World Books Publisher, ISBN 0-8499-3087-1, 1988, pp. 25-37.

It's not easy to define fatherhood in our society, because the roles of men and women have changed so that *parenting* and *parenthood* and androgynous terms. A few generations ago the duties and obligations were more clearly defined: father brought home the bacon and mother cooked it. This generation of kids has grown up in a changing society that accepts women who work outside of the home and men who do household chores; children don't think this is unusual, as long as their basic needs are met. But if women can do the jobs previously done by men, what purpose does father have?

In a two-parent family, the father should provide the bulk of the family income. The Bible says: "But if any one does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Timothy 5:8, NASB). However, to be a *breadwinner* is more than just putting food on the table and a new car in the garage. It's providing the little treats a child will cherish long after the mortgage is paid.

A father is also for understanding. That's a tough one, because more often we dads say, "I just don't understand her!" Perhaps it's because we haven't tried to understand. I admit, a girl isn't easy to figure out; she's a miniature woman, and no man alive would dare say he understood women. As soon as he made that presumptuous statement he would be branded a liar!

Fathers are for role models. It's a scary thing to realize that *what we are* affects our children more than *what we say*. Daughters will perceive how women should be treated (or not treated) according to how Dad treats Mother and other women. A girl gets the picture of what to be from the way she sees her father react to women in general and to her in particular. The days of sharply defined roles for men and woman are long gone. A father may be a career model for his daughter, something which was exceptional in past generations. The popular adage "like father, like son" implies that sons are more like their dads in personality traits. That is not always true. A girl may be a great deal like her father, especially if he spends much time with her. In an article on "How Fathers Influence Daughters," Dr. Alexandra Symons, associate clinical professor of psychiatry at the New York University School of Medicine, made a study of women who had high commitments to work. "Most of the studies show that the highest percentage of women who aspire to careers have been encouraged or influenced by men, their fathers, usually," she said.

We fathers are very important to our daughters lives. And I think we see what a good father means to a girl, it makes it easier to be one.

Below is a poem about how Dad's can influence their sons:

### *Time With Dad*

What shall you give to one small boy?  
A glamorous game, a tinsel toy,  
A barlow knife, a puzzle pack,  
A train that runs on curving track?  
A picture book, a real live pet...  
No, there's plenty of time for such things yet.

Give him a day for his very own,  
Just one small boy and his Dad alone,  
A walk in the woods, a romp in the park,  
A fishing trip from dawn to dark,

Give him the gift that only you have,  
The companionship of his dear Dad.

Games are outgrown and toys decay,  
But he'll never forget it if you give him a day.

If I've learned one thing during these days of growing family awareness in my life, it's been this: there are others who can counsel, others who can make personnel decisions, others who can administrate the organization, but there is only one man in the whole world who can be a father to my children--and that's me! I had better be that father while I have the opportunity!

### 5.2.3 Role of Mothers<sup>53</sup>

*“An ounce of mother is worth a pound of clergy.”  
Spanish Proverb*

If we examine the lives of a couple of outstanding Old Testament mothers—Miriam, mother of Moses, and Hannah, mother of Samuel—we find six principles of success for raising boys that are not found in *Ladies' Home Journal* or *Family Living*. By using these same principles, mothers today may find little need for the “How to” articles which are currently so popular.

**Principle One: Be a mother of faith.** “By faith Moses’ parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king’s edict” (Hebrews 11:23).

Its difficult to imagine that Moses’ mother put him in a little basket and set him down among the crocodiles. However, putting your child’s life in the care of health professionals may be just as frightening as seeing your baby drifting down the Nile. Every mother who has had the terrifying experience of a child’s sudden illness knows the difficulty of trusting the Lord for his safety.

We have been entrusted with these lives for a time and only God can give inexperienced human beings the wisdom to train exuberant, bouncing, accident-prone, wild little creatures into mature manhood.

**Principle Two: Be careful not to be overprotective.** Moses’ mother and Samuel’s mother put their sons in God’s hands with prayers in their hearts. A boy may be robbed of his self-esteem and confidence by a mother who is constantly saying, “Be careful, now...watch out...don’t get hurt.” One man told me that his mother had programmed him as a youngster to believe he was a “delicate child.” As he grew up, he avoided sports because she was afraid he would catch cold or be hurt. He struggled with his concept of manhood and compensated by overdrinking. A boy needs to explore, rough-house, get dirty, and try new things without a worried mother hovering over him. Most mothers have a certain protective instinct built into their make-up that needs to be tempered somewhat with the boys in the family.

<sup>53</sup> Portions from Exposing the Myths of Parenthood, Dr. David Jeremiah, World Books Publisher, ISBN 0-8499-3087-1, 1988, pp. 71-75.

**Principle Three: Teach your children at home.** Too often parents believe that if their children are in Sunday school every week, if they have learned the memory verses which are required to earn their gold stars on the chart, and if they pray before meals, then that is sufficient for their spiritual growth.

Remember how Samuel was sent to Eli, the priest? Eli, of course, had some no-good sons, and Samuel must have grown up with those fellows; however, as a result of his mother's early teaching, and her continual prayers, Samuel grew up to be a great man of God.

Timothy was the young man of whom the apostle Paul said, "I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded now lives in you also." (2 Timothy 1:5).

Today there are Bible stories to read, cassettes to hear, and games to play. Never before has there been such an abundance of Christian music and concerts. Learn some of the catchy songs that children enjoy; sing them when you're in the car or around the house. Too many kids seem to know more jingles from television commercials than they do songs about Jesus.

**Principle Four: Teach them that they're special.** As kids grow up they have many forces attempting to discourage their potential; they need all the reinforcement we can give them. We should avoid as parents saying to our children such things as "He's really very bashful," or speak some other trait into existence by emphasizing it. Calling a son "Stupid," "Knucklehead," "Dummy," "Stumblebum," or some other name, even in fun, makes an impression on him which he will unconsciously follow.

We can see how important self-esteem is from this true story. A certain boy's mother was a dominating person, who displayed no love for anyone. She had been married three times, and her second husband divorced her because she abused him. The child never experienced love or discipline; he as just shoved around.

His mother told him, "Don't ever bother me at work; I don't want you pestering me." He was totally rejected. He had a high I.Q., but dropped out of high school. He joined the Marines, but was given a dishonorable discharge. He had no talent or skill; he didn't even have a driver's license.

He traveled to a foreign country, met a woman and soon their marriage began to fail. His wife rejected him, but he begged her to let him come back. Soon afterward he returned to the United States. The only talent he had was handling a rifle, and on November 22, 1963, he used this ability from the third story of a book storage building in Dallas, Texas, to fire three shots that changed the course of a nation. His name was Lee Harvey Oswald.

His home life, from childhood to adulthood, neglected to give him three important factors: love, discipline, and a sense of self-worth.

Of course, Oswald is an extreme example of what can happen to children who are rejected, but sometimes we need an impression painted in vivid, living color to jolt us to reinforce the special qualities our sons possess.

**Principle Five: Teach your son responsibility.** One mother said she told her boy, "I don't care what job, business, or profession you choose, but one thing that will carry you far in whatever you choose is to develop a sense of responsibility."

Most boys are not responsible by nature, but by training. Make a list, post deadlines for tasks to be done, and avoid the nagging. If a job is unsatisfactory, have him repeat it. “Isn’t there something you forgot?” is much kinder than saying with an exasperated sigh, “Can’t you ever do anything right the first time?” We learn by making mistakes.

Keeping a sense of humor is essential in teaching our children and keeping our sanity. One mother after pleading, demanding, and cajoling her son to pick up his clothes, she draped them on the lamppost outside the front door and when he came home from school they were waving merrily in the breeze. She simply said, “That’s where all your clothes will be that you leave on the floor.” The boy has grown into a young man and still tells the story on himself.

***Principle Six: Show sons that their father has the final authority.*** By doing this, a mother teaches her sons to be strong leaders for God, secure in their masculinity. After all, a boy is the only thing God can use to make a man.

Motto for mothers:

Give of thy sons to bear the message glorious.  
Give of thy wealth to speed them on their way.  
Pour out your souls for them in prayer victorious.  
And all though spendest Jesus will repay.<sup>54</sup>

### 5.3 Role of Children

The Bible is the ultimate authority on the role of children within the family. It has the following things to say about the role of children:

**Table 5-2: Role of Children**

#	Responsibility	Description	Scripture(s)
1	Listen to your parents and heed them	My son, hear the instruction of your father, and do not forsake the law of your mother; For they will be a graceful ornament on your head, and chains about your neck	Prov. 1:8
2	Honor your father and mother	Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother,” which is the first commandment with promise: “that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.”	Eph. 6:1-3
3	Obey your parents	Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord.	Col. 3:20
4	Children be obedient as Christ was obedient to the Father, even to the point of death	“who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.”	Phil. 2:6-8
5	Children heed your father’s	A wise son heeds his father’s instruction, but a	Prov. 13:1

<sup>54</sup> “O, Zion Haste,” a hymn by Mary Ann Thompson, 1870.

#	Responsibility	Description	Scripture(s)
	instruction	scoffer does not listen to rebuke.	
6	Do not curse your father or mother	Whoever curses his father or his mother, his lamp will be put out in deep darkness.	Prov. 20:20
7	Listen to your father	Listen to your father who begot you, and do not despise your mother when she is old.	Prov. 23:22
8	Respect the law and do not hang out with pleasure-seekers	Whoever keeps the law is a discerning son, but a companion of gluttons shames his father.	Prov. 28:7

Both the Old Testament and the New Testament of the Bible agree that children have only one responsibility in the family—to obey their parents. The admonition of Solomon in Prov. 1:8 is more fully explained by Paul in Eph. 6:1-3: “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ‘Honor your father and mother,’ which is the first commandment with promise: ‘that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.’” “Children” is an inclusive term. It is not a matter of either sex or age that is involved.

Twice in Scripture God has intervened and directly stated what He would have children do. The last time was nearly two thousand years ago when He gave a revelation to Paul for the church. The first time was nearly thirty-four hundred years ago when He gave a revelation to Moses and Israel in which He commanded, “Honor your father and your mother.” God’s will for children is that they are to obey their parents. The expression “in the Lord” does not limit the responsibility only to the circumstances where the parents are believers. Col. 3:20 clearly points out that children are to obey their parents “in all things,” not just in those things pertaining to Christian living. “In the Lord” more properly is understood to mean by the Lord or because it is the Lord’s directive (this is what God says children are to do). “For this is right” indicates that for children to obey their parents is righteous or God-like. Such obedience is perfectly illustrated by God the Son who was completely obedient to God the Father, even though that obedience resulted in His death (Phil. 2:6-8).

Two things are promised to children who obey their parents: it will be well with them—they will have a happy life; and they will have a long life. These are the two things that children want most, and obedience to parents is the only way to assure them. That is why this is the first commandment with promise; for it springs all the other important issues of life. Children who have not learned to obey their parents, who are God’s representatives in the family, will not learn to obey God.

Children respecting their parents is the first and most important area where children begin to learn respect for authority, and that respect for authority is needed throughout the rest of their life and in all walks of life, including: 1. Marriage; 2. Job; 3. Church; 4. Law; 5. Government. Respect for authority is the foundation of our civilization, and that respect must begin with respect for parents.

Children have a right to:

- be raised in a safe and loving home
- friendships outside the family
- privacy
- respect for property

#### 5.4 Characteristics of Empathetic and Effective Caregiver Communications<sup>55</sup>

I believe that the most "sensitive" and "responsive" parents in Ainsworth and her colleagues research, the "effective" mothers in White and Watt's research, the mothers providing "optimal maternal care" in Clarke-Stewart's research, the "skilled interactor" of Carew et al's research all were providing consistent gratification of the children's physical and psychological safety needs; their words and actions consistently maintaining the child's state of acknowledgement and contentment.

I believe that the caregivers' level of communication skills, to a great extent, determines how they can provide the child with experiences that both maintain the child's state of acknowledgement and contentment and contribute to his or her accurate perception of experiencing. The communication skills that caregivers display when they interact with a toddler, as in situations described by researchers such as Clarke-Stewart, provide the verbal and non-verbal "tools" that, in turn, the toddler uses when exploring his or her world. On the other hand, caregivers who are not prompt and sensitive in their responding to infant and toddler distress signals are likely to find their toddler's becoming increasingly fearful of them, yet increasingly dependent upon them as well.

Furthermore, caregivers who neither display high levels of communication skills to their young children nor involve themselves in complex, expressive play with them are likely to have toddlers who react with varying degrees of confusion and frustration when faced with demanding tasks. Also, the lack of appropriate models of behavior leaves them without competent directions for actions, and without a maximum amount of resources with which to build their "house." They will lack appropriate "motivation" "tools," "Material" and "skills" for the building process itself.

Based on all the above, I think the most effective and empathetic communications, especially in problem and need-arousing situations, contain all of the following "elements," "ingredients" or "messages" and in the following sequence:

1. Clear and unambiguous, verbal and non-verbal, communications which indicate that the adult is aware of an understands the child's feelings, wishes, and desires, including how the child's social actions derive from these inner experiences.
2. Clear and unambiguous, verbal and non-verbal, communications which indicate that the adult acknowledges the child's feelings, needs, wishes and desires as natural and valid human experiences.
3. Clear and unambiguous, verbal and non-verbal, communications which indicate what the adult thinks and feels about the way the child's expressing his or her inner experiences. The child's feelings and desires are indeed natural and valid human experiences but the way the child is expressing them might be acceptable and arouse specific thoughts and feelings in the caregiver.
4. If the child's actions are not acceptable, clear and unambiguous, verbal and non-verbal, communications indicating alternative ways for the child to express his or her feelings in the present. These alternatives should be provided immediately, not after some period of delay. The caregiver should also ask for, and be open to, child alternatives and open to compromise.
5. If the child's actions are not acceptable, clear and unambiguous, verbal and non-verbal, communications indicating how the child can express his or her feelings, needs or desires in the

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<sup>55</sup> Until We Are 6, Stollack, Gary E.; 1978, Robert E. Kreiger Publishing Company, ISBN 0-88275-653; p. 68-71

future. Again, several alternatives should be offered by caregiver and child and compromises reached.

As I will emphasize in the next chapter, it is essential to consider the future as well as the present when interacting with infants and toddlers. Clearly expressed communications are important regardless of the child's age and whether or not the child is immediately responsive or alters his or her behavior. Whether the child is preverbal or verbal, however, will determine the extent to which the caregiver emphasizes one type of interaction or the other. For example, non-verbal communication of acceptance and gratification of the ten-month-old's needs is more likely to maintain that child's state of acknowledgement than will verbal communication alone. But this is not to say that the verbal expression of the child's affect and needs is meaningless in the context of subsequent development of the child.

The first two "messages" should not only maintain the child's state of acknowledgement and contentment but also help the child to increase his or her repertoire of intellectual, cognitive and emotional skills and capacities including self-awareness and understanding. The adult's constant labeling of child feelings, needs and thoughts results in the child him/herself (through imitation) becoming increasingly able to label and to discriminate among inner experiences. To the extent the child is able to label and discriminate among his or her inner experiences and know how specific situations and people arouse specifiable needs and feelings, s/he will experience fear, rage and jealousy, but not experience "anxiety" or "dread." These latter states of being can be perceived as primarily unlabeled fear. In "psychodynamic" terms, the first two "messages" will prevent the need for, and operation of, "repression" or in older children other "defense mechanisms." In "Rogierian" terms, they will prevent denial or distortion of experiencing. In "learning" terms, they will provide important discrimination training, and in combination with the other adult communications, result in the child not engaging in cognitive and motor escape and avoidance behavior in order to reduce felt anxiety.

I must also emphasize the importance of the sequencing of the above communications. The first two messages take precedence over the next three. Only by first feeling that their needs and wishes are acknowledged and understood [respected], will the child feel safe, and be open and willing to listen to further adult communications. If I express a need and other attacks me and frightens me, then I don't want to hear what the other is saying. I become hurt, resentful, and angry. I want to turn off the other. I want to turn away physically and psychically. I do not want to pay attention. If the other person is able to put into words and convey to me that s/he understands me, and can acknowledge the validity of my experiencing, then I want to listen. I want to be with him or her.

Then, when the other articulately and clearly states how s/he feels about my actions, my whole being would be listening. I would be empathetic, open and receptive. I would be able to experience the hurt or anger my action causes. I would be able to resonate to the anguish or fear of the other and my own reaction to the other's experiencing. I would be with the other. And I would thus be able to know and value both my own and the other's experiencing. I would be able to balance and weight what each of us need and want.

When the other then gives me what they consider appropriate and acceptable avenues or courses of action s/he would feel provide at least some expression and gratification of my needs, I would not only be listening but the arousal of my own mastery concerns and striving for competence would direct me to weight the alternatives, to weight the strength of my own and the other's needs and wishes. I would

be able to weight and balance the courses of action open to me and what I want in the world and the other. Finally, and ideally, I and the other will attempt to reach a compromise. We will attempt to determine courses of action that allow both of us to gratify some of our needs and wishes in at least some minimally acceptable ways at least some of the time.

It is difficult, of course, if not impossible, for children without active language skills to engage in verbal confrontation and compromise. When the above mentioned complex and elaborate person-oriented chain or sequence of communication does unfold and compromise is able to be reached--or for young children alternatives provided and accepted--the child's state of acknowledgement and contentment would not have been threatened. They would be likely to attempt to imitate the adult as best they can and attempt the complex sequences in their communications with others.

In summary, I believe that the large number of specific and varied adult behaviors that provide gratification of physiological and safety needs maintain a child's state of acknowledgement and contentment. Such caregiver behaviors will maintain empathetic responsiveness and arouse these infant's and children's own mastery concerns and motivations. These adult behaviors in conjunction with initiation, stimulation and involvement in highly intellectual activities and modeling of altruistic, generous and pro-social behaviors will be those imitated and used by the young child in his/her struggle to know and master the world s/he encounters. As these behaviors succeed in producing positive personal consequences the gratification of his/her own mastery and competency concerns--not adult approval--will result in these behaviors becoming habitual ways of responding. Finally, the mastery and competence motives when aroused will maintain high involvement in the world, and with caregiver guidance and consultation ever increasing skill development.

## **5.5 Importance of Encouragement**

When parents believe in children, they help children believe in themselves. When parents show their children respect, they help children respect themselves and others.

Show that you believe in and respect your child. There are many ways to do this. One of the best is by being *encouraging*.

### **What Is Encouragement?**

**Encouragement is a skill to help children grow in self-esteem. It is a way to show children that they belong and are:**

- **accepted**
- **capable**
- **loved**

Look at the words *encourage* and *discourage*. They both include the word *courage*. Courage is an important part of self-esteem. It means a willingness to make an effort.

An encouraged child has strong self-esteem. This child has the courage to cooperate, to try new things, and to be responsible.

A discouraged child has little self-esteem and won't make an effort. This child doesn't have the courage to choose positive ways to belong.

Encouragement is based on the idea of respect. Like respect, it is something children need all the time. You can learn to get in the “encouragement habit.” Learn and practice some skills to show that you:

- Love and accept your child
- Notice when your child tries or improves.
- Appreciate your child.
- Have faith in your child.

## 5.6 Types of Misbehavior

All children want to belong. They get a feeling of belonging through both useful behavior and misbehavior. When children misbehave, they have a goal. They may feel the only way to belong is by:

1. Attention.
2. Power.
3. Revenge.
4. Display of inadequacy.

Children don't know that their misbehavior has a goal. Children may also use the same behavior to seek different goals. Be aware that parents don't cause children's misbehavior. By our own behavior, though, we may reinforce it. The key to knowing the goal is to look at the three clues: how you feel, what you do, and how your child responds.

Children have beliefs about how they need to belong. We call beliefs that lead to misbehavior “faulty.”

### Children's Faulty Beliefs:

- *Attention*: “I belong only by being noticed—even if that makes problems for Dad or Mom.”
- *Power*: “I belong only by being the boss—even if that leads to a fight. If I can get Mom or Dad to fight with me, I have power.”
- *Revenge*: “I am not lovable. I belong only by hurting Dad or Mom. I want them to feel as hurt as I do.”
- *Display of Inadequacy*: “I belong by convincing Mom or Dad that I can't do things. In fact, when I try to do something and fail, I don't belong.”

Each of these beliefs of the goals of misbehavior has a flip side—a positive belief that can lead to better behavior.

### The Flip Side: Positive Beliefs:

- *Involvement*: “I want to be a part of things. Please help me learn to contribute.”

- *Independence*: “I want to be independent. Please give me choices so I can learn to be responsible.”
- *Fairness*: “I want things to be fair. Please help me learn to cooperate.”
- *Being competent*: “I need time to think by myself. I want to succeed. Please help me learn to trust myself.”

Knowing the flip side of the four goals helps. We can use this information to help our children move:

- From attention to involvement
- From power to independence
- From revenge to being fair
- From displaying inadequacy to being thoughtful and competent

### 5.6.1 Attention-Motivated Misbehaviors

All children need attention. But some children seem to want attention all the time. If they believe they can't get attention in useful ways, then they seek it by misbehaving.

A child who misbehaves for attention will do something that is annoying to the parent. The parent steps in to correct the misbehavior. The child has gotten attention. All may be well for a short while. But it's not long before the child wants more attention.

Sometimes, children ask for attention more quietly. A child might do nothing, expecting to be waited on. We call this passive misbehavior. It is still a bid for attention.

### 5.6.2 Power-Motivated Misbehaviors

Some children believe they belong only by being “the boss.” These children seek the goal of power. A child who seeks power is telling the parent, “I am in control,” “You can't make me!” or “You'd better do what I want!” The child might yell these things or fight out loud with the parent. Or the child might silently refuse to budge.

When a child seeks power, the parent feels angry. If the parent fights the child, the child fights back. If the parent gives in, the child has won the power struggle and so stops misbehaving.

Sometimes a child will do what the parent wants, but will do it extremely slowly or sloppily. This is a form of passive power. The child is saying, without words, “All right, I'll do it—just to get you off my back. But I'll do it *my* way. You can't make me do it *your* way.”

### 5.6.3 Revenge-Motivated Misbehaviors

Some children want to be the boss but can't win in a power struggle with their parents. These children decide that the way to belong is to get even. Drikurs called this goal *revenge*. A child who wants revenge may say or do something hurtful. Or the child may stare angrily at the parent. Either way, the

parent feels hurt and angry and tries to get even. The result is often a growing “war” of revenge. Both the child and the parent have angry, hurt feelings.

#### **5.6.4 Displaying Inadequacy-Motivated Misbehaviors**

Some children just give up. For them, the way to belong is to get others to leave them alone. Their behavior says, “I can’t do it.” Drikurs called this *displaying inadequacy*. When a child gives up, the parent feels like giving up too. When this happens, the child’s goal has been met. The parent has agreed to expect nothing from the child.

For most children, this helplessness is not total. It usually happens in certain areas of the child’s life. This might be in schoolwork, sports, or other social activities. It can be in any area where the child feels unable to succeed.

#### **5.7 How Parents Can Fight Their Irrational Beliefs<sup>56</sup>**

Beliefs cause emotions. If you choose to think of unpleasant events, you will have unpleasant feelings. How you feel results from your thoughts. Your irrational beliefs cause problems and interfere with your happiness. They take the form of demanding, complaining, and blaming.

Your discouraging words and self-talk reflect your beliefs. When you believe absolute words such as *I should, I must, or I have to*, you place conditions on yourself.

Learn to think rationally:

- Choose new thoughts.
- Learn to look at negative situations in a logical way.
- Look at your wants as preferences, not “musts”
- See your “catastrophes” as the simple disappointments or inconveniences they are

Ask yourself these questions to help fight irrational beliefs

1. What am I thinking? Am I demanding or blaming?
2. Is my belief rational or irrational? How do I know this?
3. What are the consequences of continuing these beliefs?
4. What are the consequences of changing my beliefs?

#### **5.8 Disciplinary Communications Fostering Social Responsiveness and Competence**

Disciplinary communications can be compared to positive and negative reinforcement and punishment. The focus of discipline is learning and empathy administered with love while the focus of punishment techniques is fear and negative reinforcement.

##### **5.8.1 Positive and Negative Reinforcement<sup>57</sup>**

<sup>56</sup> *The Parent’s Handbook*, Don Dinkmeyer, 1997, American Guidance Service, ISBN 0-7854-1188-7, p. 40.

The terms positive and negative reinforcement have most meaning to me when used to evaluate the effects of the environment on, for example, a child's behavior. If specific child behaviors occur again or increase in their frequency and duration within a relatively short time interval after some environmental events or stimuli have occurred, then those environmental events or stimuli have occurred, then those environmental events (e.g., adult verbalizations and/or actions) can be described as having positive reinforcing effects on, or consequences for, the child's behavior. Similarly, environmental events that are found to decrease specific child behaviors (such as removing positive reinforcement) can be described as having negative reinforcing consequences. These terms, then, have the most heuristic value when they are used as an after-the-fact description of the effects of specifiable environmental events on a child's subsequent behaviors. Whether environmental events indeed are positively or negatively reinforcing to a child can only be known through the measurement of the frequency, duration, and intensity of the behaviors that the child displays after such events.

### 5.8.2 Punishment<sup>58</sup>

Punishment has most meaning to me as a description of negative environmental events (e.g. adult verbalizations and/or actions) that do not differentiate between a child's actions and his/her inner experiencing. The lack of such clear distinctions arouses physical and psychological safety needs. When caregivers do not acknowledge the validity of the child's experiencing and do not provide the child with any alternative outlets for expressing his/her needs, wishes, or desires their actions and communications are punishing. The focus for the child is to gain back caregiver approval and thereby feel "safe" once again.

Punishment, then, is a complex set of caregiver behaviors whose impact is perceived by the child as a verbal and/or physical attack on the self. Punishment arouses children's physical and psychological safety needs--and sometimes even his/her survival needs. Punishing caregivers provide only directions by which the child can gain the caregiver's forgiveness.

Often, there is a decrease in the frequency, duration, and intensity of certain child behaviors after punishment, since punishment usually--but not always is a negatively reinforcing event. Even in the "short run," though, punishment sometimes can be positively reinforcing event! For example, in those not-so-rare instances where the child "needs attention," the child's actions that result in his/her being punished are the very ones that gain and hold the caregiver's attention. Even punishing attention can provide--if not physical safety need gratification--psychological safety gratification.

I realize that punishment can result in certain child behaviors being kept under control so that they occur with less frequency (at least in the presence of the caregiver or observers). However, I believe that it is crucial to evaluate the effects of punishment that do not necessarily appear during the caregiver-child encounter in which punishment has occurred. I believe that punishment, especially in these early years, is extremely damaging both to the "foundation" and "self-acceptance" of the child and to his/her abilities to perceive accurately and value his/her own, and others' experiencing. The result of punishment is the decrease, over time, of the child's empathetic responsiveness, and of his/her expression of a wide variety of intellectually competent, socially responsible, and independent

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<sup>57</sup>Until We Are 6, Stollack, Gary E.; 1978, Robert E. Kreiger Publishing Company, ISBN 0-88275-653; p. 104.

<sup>58</sup> Until We Are 6, Stollack, Gary E.; 1978, Robert E. Kreiger Publishing Company, ISBN 0-88275-653; p. 105-106.

behaviors that even children of this age can perform. Thus, punishment will diminish the development and expression of those very characteristics that, given our best intentions, we all wish to encourage.

Whether or not punishment, in fact, controls and limits some undesirable child behaviors and social actions, punishing events always diminish the ability of the child to advance toward the actualization of his/her human potential in the present and in the future.

### **5.8.3 Disciplinary Communications**<sup>59</sup>

The punishing event is defined as one that lacks educational elements or messages. Caregiver verbalizations and/or actions that contain such educative elements are what I would call disciplinary communications. Thus, communications of all the messages that I have listed above and have discussed previously are important because:

1. Through communication of understanding and acknowledgement of experiencing, they will maintain the child's "self acceptance," "self-esteem," and the child's state of acknowledgement and contentment. Thus, they will help increase the child's repertoire of intellectual, cognitive, and emotional skills and capacities, including those that contribute to self-understanding.
2. Through clear communication of caregiver reactions, they will help the child increase his/her repertoire of interpersonal awareness, understanding and acceptance of the feelings, needs, wishes and desires of the others.
3. Through the presentation of alternative courses of action, they will allow at least partial gratification of needs and desires, and, thus, increase the child's willingness to confront and compromise.

Such messages also will help increase the child's ability to communicate clearly and acknowledge other's experiencing. Thus, this total set of caregiver messages is a positively reinforcing event in the narrow sense of this concept, since the child is likely to choose the selected alternative course of action in similar situations in the future. Moreover, such a set of messages also is a positively reinforcing event in the broader sense that such messages will increase the subsequent expression of a large variety of behaviors that are indicative of personal and social competence. The total set of messages, by maintaining the child's state of acknowledgement and contentment and by arousal of the child's mastery and competence motives, provides the words, actions and directions--the "materials"--for the building of the best possible "house."

### **5.8.4 Communication of Adult Feelings and Expectations**<sup>60</sup>

This discussion leads me to conclude that punishment has no net positive disciplinary function that can be fulfilled by more acknowledging and helpful techniques. Punishment is never useful nor is it ever *educational* in a positive sense. I do not believe that caregiver anger, disappointment, and resentment, when aroused by child behavior, can and should be communicated to the child. Such communications can provide relief for an aroused caregiver, and when expressed clearly and comprehensively, can help the child maintain empathetic responsiveness. But communication of caregiver reactions should only be made AFTER communication of understanding and acknowledgement of the validity of the child experiencing, and always should be FOLLOWED by a presentation of alternative courses of action

<sup>59</sup> Until We Are 6, Stollack, Gary E.; 1978, Robert E. Kreiger Publishing Company, ISBN 0-88275-653; p. 106-107

<sup>60</sup> Until We Are 6, Stollack, Gary E.; 1978, Robert E. Kreiger Publishing Company, ISBN 0-88275-653; p. 107.

that provide at least partial gratification of the child's needs and wishes. I know how very hard it is to follow this sequence of messages. Our "normal" response to our children's expression of unacceptable behavior is a "reflexive" attack on their actions and a defense of our own position. We often are so personally hurt or disappointed, and our anger and resentment so great, that we do not want to let them have any gratification. Most often, and for a wide variety of reasons, we reflexively interpret our children's display of unacceptable behavior as a direct personal attack on us, on our being and identity, and on our perception of ourselves as competent and good parents whose children should never do such things. As "civilized" adults we have contempt and disdain for anyone's, even our own children's, expression of unacceptable behavior.

Research does indicate that it is important to expect appropriate, responsible behavior from our 3-6 year-old children. Research also indicates, however, that such expectations must exist with a relationship that is warm, loving, and nurturant.

### **5.8.5 Examples of Good Disciplinary Communication**

The examples below are intended to show optimal ways that parents can communicate with their children in various situations that require discipline. They are written from the child's point of view and demonstrate the positive affect that empathetic disciplinary communications can have on the child.

#### **5.8.5.1 Sibling Problems**

*"Hello, my name is Nicky. I have just finished watching a television program and as I walk into the kitchen to get a glass of milk, I see my younger brother Danny playing with the toy Grandma bought for me for my birthday.*

*I grab the toy away from Danny and yell: 'You leave my toys alone. This is mine! Grandma bought it for me.'*

*Danny begins to cry, and tries to grab it back, and we start to pull on it.*

*Danny yells: 'I want to play with it!'*

*I am stronger than Danny and I pull the toy away from him.*

*Just as Mom walks in Danny angrily yells at me: 'You're just a dumb-dumb.'*

*Mom says: "What is going on in here?"*

*'Danny was playing with my toy and I don't want him to.'*

*'He never lets me play with his toys. He's a dumb-dumb.'*

*'I'm not a dumb-dumb. This is mine.'*

*Mom kneels down and says: "Hold everything! Stop! Let me see if I understand what is happening. Danny, you want to play with Nicky's toy.' Danny nods. 'And Nicky, you don't want him to.' I nod. 'The toy is special to you and you don't want to share it with*

Danny. When you took it away from Danny, Danny, you became so angry at Nicky that you couldn't stop yourself from calling him names.<sup>61</sup>

*'There are two problems here. The problem of sharing and the problem of expressing your anger. I want to talk to both of you about these problems. Let's all sit over here.'*

*'First, I want to talk to Nicky.' She looks at me and then says: 'I want you to know that I don't feel that you have to share your special toys with anyone. If you don't want to share your things with Danny or me or Daddy, I'll understand. I will always respect your wish for others not to play with things that are bought just for you, or you buy for yourself. There are many things that I have that I don't like to share. However, if Grandma or Dad or I or anyone buys something for both you and Danny, like crayons, or clay, then I think you and Danny will have to cooperate in playing with them. So Danny, Mom looks at Danny, 'I know that it makes you sad and angry that Nicky won't share his toy with you, and makes you jealous and envious of what Nicky has. I'm also sorry that it makes you so sad and angry, but Nicky's toys are his and I must help him protect his toys. If Nicky wants to play with your special toys, and you don't want him to, I want you to know that I will not let him play with them without your permission. I think it is important for both of you to know that I will help you protect your special things. And I think that it is important for both of you to find out what happens when you don't share. So, Nicky, you can keep your toy now and I won't let Danny play with it without your permission. I am sorry, Danny, but that's the way it will have to be now.'*

*Danny, with a big frown, and almost crying, says: 'All right for now, but I'm not going to ever let Nicky play with my toys. Never!'*

*Mom says: 'Yes, I know how angry you are. I think I would be angry too if someone didn't share their toys with me. I would be so angry that I wouldn't want to share my toys with them. Maybe I would be so angry that I would want to call them names.'*

*'I want you both to know that feeling angry is natural and happens to all of us. I know that I make both of you angry at me sometimes and you know that both of you make me angry sometimes.<sup>62</sup> But I don't like some of the ways you express your anger. I'm not sure, but maybe, Nicky, you were angry at Danny for something he said, or did, or maybe you were angry at me or Dad or your teacher or somebody else, and you expressed your anger by not sharing your toys with Danny. I'm not sure you were angry at anyone other than Danny, but if you are angry about something, not sharing isn't the best way to express it. And Danny, I don't think calling names is a good way to express anger, either. I think the best way is to tell the person who is making you angry how you feel about what he's doing and how you wish he would act so that you wouldn't be angry anymore.'*

*'Danny, if you're angry at Nicky for not sharing, I would like you to say, in a very loud and angry voice, something like: 'Nicky, I am very angry at you. When you don't share your toys with me, I get very, very angry at you. I am so angry that I want to hurt you. Maybe I won't share my toys with you. Maybe I won't want to be with you and play with you., I don't like to be angry, and I wish that you'd share your toys with me. If I did something to make you angry maybe we could talk about it and we could work it out. I*

<sup>61</sup> We are likely, as a first immediate response, to become angry, to accuse Nicky of being possessive and stingy, and begin ordering one or the other child to do what we want. The first response of this mother is to convey her understanding of the event and to convince both children that she understands the various possible wishes, needs and even fears occurring in this encounter, including her own feelings and wishes.

<sup>62</sup> The above statements from the mother attempt to convey acknowledgement of the validity of each of the children's experiencing. She then expresses her own thoughts, feelings and wishes.

*am really sorry you won't share your toys with me. I wish you would.' 'Is that how you feel, Danny?'*<sup>63</sup>

*Danny nods.*

*Mom says: 'Why don't you say that to Nicky right now?'*

*Danny looks at me and says just what Mom said. I really feel sad that I made Danny so angry but I am afraid he would break my toys. If you would break them then I would be very angry at you. I'll let you play with the toy if you take special care of it. I promise that when I play with your toys, I'll take special care of them. All right?'*

*Danny smiles and says: 'I'll be very careful, Nicky. Thank you.'*

*I turn to Mom and say: 'Mom, can I have a glass of milk now?'*

*'I'm glad that Mom understood how I felt. I'm afraid sometimes that someone will break or take away things that are very important to me. I'm very glad that she would help me protect my toys and special things. I feel better now.'*

*Being angry is all right and natural. The best way to express it is to tell the person what he's doing to make me angry and how I wish he would act so that I don't get angry.*

*I don't have to share my special things if I don't want to. I should tell the other person why I don't want to share so that he will understand my reasons. But when I don't share I have to realize that the other person will probably get angry and won't want to share with me or play with me."*

Implicit in both of these stories, and in so many other sibling (and other peer) situations, is the issue of how important it is for the caregiver to be a fair and equitable dispenser of justice, to the extent that the siblings or peers feel they have been dealt with fairly regarding the dilemma. Often the caregiver must determine "ownership," must help work out—and often for younger children, state explicitly—the compromises that allow equal usage of objects and materials over time, or must plan ways to provide equal amounts of unique ways to share experiencing with *each* of the children for whom they care.

### 5.8.5.2 Peer Aggression

Children often find themselves hurt by peers. Here is an incident involving peer aggression.

*"My name is Jeff. Something terrible happened in school and I'm really scared I have just run home from school. I rush into my home and all excited tell Mom: "Mom, Mom! You should have seen what happened!"*

*"What happened?"*

*"Al and I were walking home from school and all of a sudden some big guys from the sixth grade came by and pushed Al onto the ground and then they ran away laughing. I'm afraid of those guys."*

<sup>63</sup> The mother attempts to give Danny some way of expressing his concerns and feelings right *now* in the present so that there will be no need for him to repress, deny or distort his experiencing.

*Kneeling down, she gives me a hug and then says: “My, my. Those guys frightened you. You were afraid they were going to push you down and hurt you, too.”<sup>64</sup>*

*“Yes. Als’ lucky he didn’t get hurt even worse. He cried a little bit, but he’s all right. Even though we were afraid, we wanted to beat those guys up.”*

*“When they pushed Al down, you were not only afraid, but they made you so angry that you wanted to hurt them back. You wished you were bigger so that you could really give it to them to show them that they can’t push you around.”*

*“Yes. I’d like to show them. I’d like to knock them down.”*

*“You’d knock them down and tell them that they better not pick on you again.”*

*I nod and say: “Yes.”*

*“I think that you were not only afraid and angry but that you also wondered why they pushed Al down and then ran away laughing. That didn’t seem to be a nice thing to do. I really don’t know for sure, but those guys might not have been feeling good inside. Somebody, probably some adult, might have been hurting them in some way and because they were afraid of the adult, they took their anger out on someone they’re not afraid of, like smaller boys. By hurting someone smaller, by taking revenge on someone else, they feel good for awhile. It’s sad when, to feel good, someone has to hurt others. I can understand how when these boys frightened you, and hurt Al, both of you would want to take revenge and want to hurt them back.*

Although it’s natural to want to hurt others who hurt you, and to think about how you’d go about hurting them, you have a difficult decision to make. Should you only think and imagine what you would do or should you actually try to hurt the other person by yelling at them or hitting them? I can’t tell you the best way to express your anger toward someone who is only hurting you because he has, himself, been hurt by others. I can only tell you

### 5.8.5.3 Stealing and Lying

Children may do many things which we regard as unacceptable. I will focus on two, stealing and lying. First, an incident involving stealing and also lying:

*“Hello, my name is Bob. I saw a great toy at the store the other day and I really wanted it. I asked Mom and Dad to buy it for me and they said “No...” They don’t understand how much I really wanted it. I’m home today and I’ve just found Dad’s wallet on the table. I’ll see if he has some money. Maybe I’ll take a dollar from it. Maybe he won’t miss it. Let’s see. Here’s a dollar bill, here’s another dollar. Wow, he even has a ten dollar...I suddenly hear Mom yell, “What are you doing?” She surprises me and I quickly put the wallet behind my back. I say “Nothing, just looking around.” She says, “What do you have behind your back? Walking over to me she looks behind my back and says, “Oh, I see that you have Dad’s wallet behind your back.”*

*I don’t want Mom to punish me. I say, “Oh, it fell on the floor. I was just picking it up.”*

<sup>64</sup> Our very first set of responses might include asking for further details and expressing *our* feelings. Here and in the next few comments the mother is trying to convey to Jeff that she is aware of *his* and even the older children’s experiencing.

*She sits down, puts me on her lap, and quietly says, “What you’re saying is that you found the wallet on the floor and were picking it up when I walked in. That could be. I think, though, that you were looking at the money in the wallet and wondering whether you should take some because you want something very, very much and needed money to buy it. And, you’re afraid to tell me this because you’re afraid I will punish you if I know the truth.”<sup>65</sup> I’m sorry to see that you’re afraid of me now. Listen carefully now. I want you to know that I will never punish you for telling me the truth about things. If I have in the past, I’m sorry. I will try not to do it in the future. I’m also sorry that you didn’t come to me if there was something you needed or wanted. Sometimes Dad and I say “No” to you when you ask for something and that makes you disappointed and angry with us. And I know that sometimes your wanting something will be so strong that you’ll think about stealing it or stealing money to pay for it.<sup>66</sup> But I don’t like stealing. I believe that stealing is wrong and hurts others. I don’t like people to take things from me without my permission or my not knowing about it. I makes me very disappointed and angry to look all around and not find something that belonged to me. You are disappointed, too, when you are missing something you own when you need or want it. Sometimes we misplace things; other times people take them and do not tell us. But, again, I know that children often want things very, very much and sometimes adults don’t listen enough and temptation is very strong. I hope that in the future, you’ll be able to tell me what you want, when you want it. I will try to listen harder and possibly help work out a time when we can get you what you want. I hope you could tell me now just what you needed the money for. Could you?”*

*Mom and I talk about what I want and work out a solution that I am not unhappy with.*

*I now realize that taking things without permission makes people disappointed and angry when they can’t find it. I would be angry and disappointed, too, if I couldn’t find things I own.*

*Even though they sometimes can’t get me things just when I want them, maybe Mom and Dad and I could work it out so I can know just when I can get what I want or something almost like the things I want.*

*Maybe they will not punish me when I tell the truth. Telling the truth is always worth a try.*

*Sometimes temptation is very strong and my resistance is very weak. I wish they could tell me that they understand how something could be very attractive to me, how I might want something very much. They should know that I might steal just because I am not being heard and understood.*

*I might lie because I’m afraid of being punished. Hitting me and yelling at me might cause me to lie even more.”*

### Another incident involves “passive” lying.

*“Hello, my name is Eve. It was my birthday last week, and Mom and Dad bought me an expensive toy. I really wanted it and I was so glad that they got it for me. But while I was playing with it yesterday, it broke. I was so sad. I know that Mom and Dad wanted*

<sup>65</sup> In this brief monologue the mother is taking guesses as to what Bob is experiencing and his possible motives for stealing *and* lying. Indeed, our guesses or interpretations might be wrong, but the emphasis is on the *attempt*. More often than not our guesses will be correct, and when we are correct, the child will *know* that s/he is not alone, and is safe with us.

<sup>66</sup> The mother is conveying her guesses as to her contributions to Bob’s experiencing *and* actions. She then follows with more of her experiencing, wishes, and recommendations.

*me to take good care of it because it cost so much money. I know that they'll yell at me and punish me. So while everyone was watching television yesterday, I took all the broken pieces and put them in the bottom of the trash can. No one will find it there and when the garbage men come tomorrow, they'll take it away. No one will know that the toy was broken and I won't be yelled at.*

*I am eating breakfast now. Suddenly Dad shows me the pieces of the broken toy! I am very surprised and frightened now.*

*He sits down, looks at me, and says: "I see that you're very surprised that I found these broken pieces of your new toy. I think that you hid them in the trash can because you were afraid that Mom and I would be very angry and punish you for breaking your toy."*

*I nod and say, "Yes."*

*"I want you to know that I am very sad and upset that such an expensive toy is broken. I wish it wasn't broken. But I am sure that you didn't want it broken either. I am also very sorry that you were so frightened and afraid of Mom and I that you had to hide the broken pieces because you thought we were going to punish you.*

*I have yelled at you for breaking toys in the past and I am worried that such punishment has made you afraid of me. Listen carefully now. I want you to know that I will try not to punish you for breaking your toys, either now or in the future. I expect that you will accidentally break other toys. The important thing when you break toys, whether accidentally or even in anger, is to bring it to Mom or me so that we could try to fix the toy. If I can't maybe Mom can. We'll try our best to fix it so that it works again. If we can't, we'll all be sad. You know we can't get you another one like this for a long time. That's the way it has to be. The best we can do is try to determine when we can replace it. All right?" Dad smiles and hugs me close.*

*I'm so glad that Dad understands that I didn't want to break the toy, that it was an accident. I'm also glad that he knows that punishment only scares me and will only make me lie and hide things, and try to make sure he doesn't find out what happens. I feel better when I can tell the truth and not be punished.*

*Although it's all right to get angry and upset when I accidentally break things, punishing me will not make me more careful. I don't like to break things. I like my toys and don't want them broken either. Punishing me makes me want to hide the accident and hope that no one finds out. Punishment only makes me afraid of the adults.*

*I feel good inside when adults let me know that they understood my fears about being punished.<sup>67</sup>*

#### **5.8.5.4 Child Desires for Immediate Gratification**

One of the most troublesome and frequent problems between children and their caregivers concerns a child's desire for his/her needs to be gratified immediately; to get what s/he wants when s/he wants it.

<sup>67</sup> We all have fears, periodically, that our children will become too selfish and too self-centered. We want them to be generous and giving. We believe that our children will lie, steal and cheat if we don't stop these behaviors early, as they first occur. Although our children's behavior might disappoint us and make us anxious and angry we must first allow ourselves to become aware of *their* possible intentions and motives and then let them know that we are attempting to learn about and become aware of the origins of their actions. We must control our first impulses to attack and berate. We must attempt to be a model of the person we want our children to become.

Here are several examples.

### A telephone interruption:

*“Hello, my name is Raymond. I am so excited! Billy had brought his pet turtle to school today and I want to tell Mom all about it.*

*As I rush into the house, I see Mom talking on the telephone. I yell out: “Mom! Mom! You should have seen Billy’s turtle. It...”*

*But she stops me, saying: “Just a second Raymond” and says to the person on the telephone: “Eleanor, I want to talk to Raymond for a moment. Please hang on.”*

*She then kneels down and says to me: “Raymond, I can see you are very excited and want to tell me about what happened in school today. I want very much to hear what happened. As soon as I finish talking with Mrs. Maxwell, which will be in about two minutes, I’ll ask you to tell me all about what happened in school.”*

*And you know what? After finishing her talk with Mrs. Maxwell, she sits down next to me, smiles, and asks me to tell her what happened. After I tell her and we talk about school for awhile, she says: “I know that sometimes you are so excited that you can’t help interrupting me when I am on the phone. What I would like you to do when I am talking on the phone and you would like to talk to me is to tap me on the arm three times. Whenever you do this, I’ll try my best to get off the phone within a minute or two, and then listen to you. All right?”*

*When Mom talks that way, I feel so calm inside. She knows the way I feel. She tells me how she feels. And she helps me learn what to do so that she doesn’t get angry and I don’t get disappointed.*

*Sometimes adults are paying attention to others and don’t like to be interrupted. When I interrupt them, they will get angry and not want to listen to me.*

*Maybe I can work out a signal to my mother, father, or teacher to tell them I would like their attention.*

### An incident around bedtime:

*“Hello, my name is Clare. I am having a lot of fun with my constructions toy but It’s 8:00 at night and I hear Dad say: “Clare, it’s 8:00 and time for bed.” I don’t want to go to bed now so I say: “I’m playing. I’ll go to bed later.”*

*Dad gets up from his chair, kneels down next to me and says: “Clare, I know that you don’t want to go to bed now. I can see that you’re having a lot of fun with your construction toy and working very hard to finish what you’re building. When you start something you like to finish it, and you want to finish what you’re building right now. I’m glad that you like to finish what you start. But, you know that 8 o’clock is the time for you to get ready for bed.” Dad picks me up.*

*I say: “No, No! Please, Dad, let me finish.”*

*He carries me to my bedroom saying: “I would be angry at my father, too, if he made me go to bed when I didn’t want to or wasn’t ready to, and I’m sorry that I have to make you angry at me now. I wish I didn’t have to, but it’s time for bed. When we get upstairs and*

*you're in bed we'll talk about the best plan for future bedtimes. Maybe we could work something out."*

*After I wash, get into my pajamas, and am in my bed, Dad sits next to me and says: "There are different ways to handle bedtime. Some parents let their children go to sleep whenever they want, and I think you sometimes wish that we would let you decide for yourself when you could go to bed. When you are in the seventh grade we'll let you decide your own bedtime.*

*So far, Mom and I have been telling you when to go to bed. You know, you do go to bed by yourself without us yelling too often. After you're in bed we have come and given you a kiss 'good-night,' but I don't think that's the best way to do it anymore. First, I think that one-half hour before bedtime will be a time to settle down, so there won't be any running, or jumping for the half-hour before bedtime. I think then that there will be twenty minutes before bedtime and lights out. I, and I am sure, Mom would like to spend some part of this time being with you. We could talk about what we did or what happened to us that day or play or read together. If you want to spend all twenty minutes with me, that will be just fine. If you want to finish a toy or game by yourself so that there will be only fifteen or ten or even five minutes for me to be alone with you that evening, that would be all right too. Remember though, that the last twenty minutes before lights out you have to be in bed. What you do by yourself or what you and I or you and Mom do during that time will be up to you.*

*Something else now. Maybe the best way to help decide bedtimes is to decide each Sunday, we could look at what T.V. program would be on that week. We could think about special things going on in the family or at school, and any other things that could help us decide on the best time for each night. After we decide, I'll write down the bedtimes for each night on a card and we'll put it on the bulletin board so you'll know. What do you think?"*

*It sounded pretty good to me. I still wish that I could decide my own time for bed. Someday I will. But I think that it would be nice to be alone with Dad or Mom even for ten or fifteen minutes everyday. Most of all I will have a part in deciding my own bedtime and that makes me feel more like an adult.*

*I like adults to take care of me and help me decide how to handle my life. I have to learn to schedule my play better so that I'm ready for bed and sleep when it is close to the bedtime hour. Bedtime is a good time to be alone with Mom and Dad, even once or twice a week, ten or fifteen minutes a night.*

*I don't like to be ordered around. I like to take part in decisions that affect me. Bedtime and sleep time can be a family decision that I can help decide."*

### Another incident involves a desire for candy:

*"Hello, my name is Larry. I am shopping with Mom. It is almost dinnertime and I am really, really hungry. We are just finishing shopping. While checking out, I see a stand, right next to the cashier's counter, with all kinds of my favorite candies. I really want a candy bar—right now. I say: "Mom, I want a candy bar."*

*"It is too close to dinnertime. You'll have something to eat when we get home," she says, and continues to put the groceries on the counter.*

*I am hungry, I say: "No, I don't want to wait. I want something now. I promise to eat my supper. Please?"*

*Mom says angrily: “I said NO, didn’t I? NO CANDY!”*

*Why doesn’t she understand that I am hungry. I really would eat my supper. Why does she get so angry? Why does she look at me that way? She really doesn’t care how I feel. All she cares about is some stupid dinner.*

*When she acts this way, I get very angry. When I get angry, I feel like hitting, so I hit my mom with my fist and yell: “I want a candy bar.”*

*Mom kneels down, her face close to mine. Looking straight into my eyes, while holding my arms firmly to my sides, she quietly says: “Larry, I can tell you’re angry at me for not buying you some candy. I made you so angry you had to hit me and yell at me. I think that maybe you’re most angry at me for not telling you that I understand how much you want a candy bar and how good it would taste right now.”*

*I nod.*

*“I was so busy with shopping that I wasn’t able to listen to you. I’m sorry for not listening better, but I don’t like to get hit. I don’t like you to hit me. When I am not listening, ask me to listen to you. Say, “Mom, please listen to me, I want to tell you something,” and I’ll try my best to stop what I’m doing and listen. Please say that to me now. Tell me again what you want.”*

*I ask Mom to listen to me, and I tell her that I want a candy bar.*

*She smiles and says: “Yes, I know that you are very hungry now, and because dinnertime is so near, these candy bars look especially good to eat. I want you to know that I, too, am hungry and I think I would like something to eat too, right now. If you really want a very special candy bar, we can buy it. I can’t let you eat a whole one now, but I could let you have a small piece now, and then save the rest for after supper. But if you are just hungry, why don’t you and I share a box of raisins, or an apple or pear? I think that some fruit could satisfy both of us until we eat at home. What would you like to do?”*

*I say: “Let’s buy the candy bar now. I’ll have just a little piece. Then lets share an apple, all right?”*

*She says: “Sure.” While Mom continues checking out, I run and get an apple from the fruit section of the store.*

*After Mom gives me a small piece of candy, which really tastes great, she and I leave the store sharing the apple.*

*You know, I really feel good. I like it when Mom lets me know that she understands how I feel, how I was hungry and wanted candy. I also like it when she gives me choices to make. When I’m allowed to make a choice, I feel more grown up.*

*Sometimes I would like something very special to eat. Adults should let me know they understand how I really love candy and cake and other sweets. Sometimes I am just hungry and they should help me decide what is all right to eat by giving me different choices to make.*

### **5.8.5.5 Child Sexual Behavior**

What should we do when children engage in sexual behavior? This is a very difficult area for almost all caregivers. I shall focus on two situations, masturbation and group exploration.

First, an incident involving masturbation:

*“My name is Diane. I am alone in bed. It is 10 o’clock at night. I am usually asleep by this time, but I have been restless and thinking about a lot of things like school, my friends, my parents, a television show I saw tonight. Sometimes when I lie awake at night thinking about things, I like to touch my vagina, and rub my clitoris. It feels good when I rub it. It’s exciting. I rub it for a little while, then stop. A little later I rub it again.*

*Suddenly, Dad comes into my room. I am surprised and I pull the blanket up to my chin. I think he saw me rubbing my clitoris.*

*Sometimes I have to lie to my parents. I’m afraid that if I told the truth Dad would have yelled at me and when he yells at me I get afraid. Most of the time when I rub my clitoris, Mom and Dad get afraid. Most of the time when I rub my clitoris, Mom and Dad yell at me to stop and tell me it’s not “ladylike,” that “nice” children don’t do it. It’s all right to scratch my arms and legs, isn’t it? Why do they always punish me for things I like to do, that feel good? I am sorry I have to lie so that I don’t get punished. Adults don’t understand things sometimes.*

*He walks to my bed, sits down next to me, and says: “I can see that you’re surprised by my walking in. I expected that you would be asleep. I came in to tuck you in. But I see that you’re awake. I have a feeling that it has been a little hard to get to sleep tonight. That happens sometimes. Because of the way you pulled the cover up, I also have the feeling that you’ve been touching your vagina and rubbing your clitoris and didn’t want me to know it. I think that maybe you’re afraid that I’m going to punish you for touching and rubbing your vagina and clitoris.”*

*I nod and say: “Yes, will you?”*

*He says: “No. You know, I’m sorry if I have made you afraid of me. I know that Mom and I have asked you, sometimes in a very loud voice, not to touch your vagina. But I don’t think we have been as clear with you as we could have been. I want you to know that I know that touching your clitoris does feel good and exciting, and makes you tingle. Sometimes when you’re bored, or even a little afraid, touching and rubbing it makes you feel better. I want you to know that I think it’s natural and all right to want to touch it. But if you want to touch your clitoris, I want you to do it only when you’re alone. It is a private matter, just like going to the bathroom is a private matter. Some things, like eating and scratching our arms and legs we can do even when there are a lot of people around, in public. There are other things, though, that you do by yourself when you’re alone, in special places, in private, like in the bathroom or alone in your room at night. So, if you do touch your vagina when people are around, I am going to remind you that it is something I don’t like you to do in public. I won’t punish you. I’ll just remind you how I feel. If I see you touching your vagina in your room at night, I’ll just let you know that I know how good it feels. Maybe I’ll ask you if something is bothering you that I could help with, or ask if you have some questions about your own or another person’s body. Okay?”*

*I smile and say: “Okay, Dad.” He asks me: “Is there something bothering you that you would like to share with me? Do you have any questions?” I say: “No, not right now.” He says: “Anytime you do have any questions about your body or other people’s bodies, and you want an answer, I hope you will come to me and I’ll try my best to help you. Okay?”*

*I nod. Dad kisses me on the cheek, smiles and says: “Well, goodnight now. I hope that you’ll be able to fall asleep soon. See you in the morning.” He gets up from my bed and leaves.*

*I am so glad that Dad understands how good it makes me feel when I touch my vagina and clitoris. I also am glad that he helps me understand things like the differences between doing things in private and other things in public.”*

Second, an incident involving group exploration:

*“My name is Lisa. I’m having a lot of fun. My friends, Nancy and Harold, and I are under the blanket on my bed. We don’t have our clothes on. We are tickling each other and touching each other’s genitals. It’s fun. It feels good rubbing and falling over each other. We are all laughing a lot. Suddenly, the door to my room opens up, and I hear Mom ask, “Lisa, what’s going on in here?”*

*She comes into the room and says: “Oh! Excuse me for barging in without knowing, but I wanted to know what was going on.” Sitting down on the bed and smiling, she says: “It looks like everyone is having a lot of fun. We wear clothes so much of the time that it’s fun to get them off and be naked sometimes. All of you were tickling each other and rubbing and falling over each other. It must be a lot of fun to be nude and touch each other’s sex parts. I know that it feels good and it’s exciting when you or somebody else rubs your penis or vagina. I know that all of you must be very curious about vaginas and penises, breasts and nipples, and the differences between boys and girls, and men and women. By touching each other’s body, you can satisfy your curiosity.”*

*“I want you to know that whenever you have any questions about your body or other people’s bodies and all the different parts of the body, I’ll try my best to answer them. Do any of you have any questions now that I might be of help with?”*

*We have some questions and Mom answers them for us. Then she says: “I want you all to know that although I do mind you playing together in the nude, I don’t know if Nancy’s and Harold’s parents mind. If you, Nancy, and you, Harold, won’t mind, and you give me your permission, I’ll call your parents. I’ll tell them what happened, how I feel about it, and ask them if they will permit you to play in this way. If they don’t want you to, I will not be able to allow you to play in the nude, or touch each other’s sex parts. If they say “yes,” then when you want to play in the nude, please come and ask me and I will be with you when you play. I prefer that you do not play in the nude without my being with you. I want you to know that I feel uncomfortable when children play in the nude and especially when they play with each other’s sex parts. I am afraid that you may hurt each other’s sexual parts or bodies without meaning to. You might also do things that I might find unacceptable, and I might have to ask you to stop. But, in any case, I want you all to remember that I will do my best at any time to answer any questions you have about your and other people’s bodies.”*

*I’m glad Mom understood that I like to touch different parts of my own body and like to touch and explore other people’s bodies.*

*She makes me feel that it is all right to be curious about my body and other people’s bodies and to have questions about the differences between boys and girls and men and women. Maybe adults can answer my questions and help satisfy my curiosity.”*

*I am aware of how different it is to confront and respond to children’s sexual behavior. I believe it is critical first to respond to the child or children’s experiences, especially its exploratory and pleasurable aspects. Only after conveying acknowledgement of the validity of the pleasurable feelings, the curiosity, and the desire to explore and experience, then and only then, should the caregiver express his/her own reactions in as calm and as forceful manner as possible. The very strongly and deeply felt pleasure experienced by the child, if followed immediately by intense verbal and nonverbal caregiver expressions of rage and contempt, can produce conflict and guilt within the*

*child that is very difficult to overcome in adulthood. If possible, some set of alternative courses of actions that the caregiver deems acceptable and that provide some gratification of the child's need to know, touch and explore should be provided. I have found in discussions with adults that my own alternatives provided above for the children are very unacceptable to many of them. We all have strong conflicting feelings about sexual exploration and, so, there are no easy answers to problems in this area that would be acceptable to everyone. But, I believe that caregivers—especially during the encounter—must provide some directions and alternatives that show dignity and respect for the child's experiencing and wishes.*

### 5.8.6 Summary

I believe that children who encounter caregivers who communicate these complex, comprehensive, elaborate and person-oriented sets of messages frequently and consistently—especially in need-arousing conflict situations—will be less resistant and disobedient, and will engage in decreasing amounts of disapproved behavior as they grow older. Of even more importance, I believe that these children, during these and future years, will engage in increasing amounts of active, positive, and pro-social behavior. Further, the child's imitation of positive caregiver behaviors when s/he interacts with other adults and peers likely will be positively reinforced by others, and this reinforcement, in turn, will increase the child's empathetic communications skills, which are a major component of both social responsivity and responsibility.

Below is a summary the optimum empathetic response pattern that each of the previous examples used:

- (1) What is the child feeling and how can I articulate and express his/her experiencing so that s/he knows that I understand the variety of his/her positive and/or negative intentions, needs, and feelings?
- (2) What might be the causes of the experiencing? What events in the world, including my own or another's past behavior, could be contributing to the child's experiencing?
- (3) How can I help the child to understand how his/her social actions emerge from intentions, feelings, wishes and conflicts?
- (4) How can I best share my own past experiences with the child to help him/her understand the universality of the experiencing?
- (5) How can I express most clearly my reactions to his/her experiencing and actions so that s/he will not become frightened or angry, but, instead will want to listen to me?
- (6) Are there acceptable and alternative ways for him/her to express needs, wishes and feelings right now and in the future?

## 5.9 Discipline and Problem Solving Techniques

### 5.9.1 Strategies for Identifying and the Motive of the Misbehavior and Applying Discipline<sup>68</sup>

Remember, to decide your child's goals for the misbehavior, look at:

1. How you feel when the misbehavior happens.

<sup>68</sup> *The Parent's Handbook*, Don Dinkmeyer, 1997, American Guidance Service, ISBN 0-7854-1188-7, p. 42.

2. What you do about the misbehavior.
3. How your child responds to what you do.

A child's beliefs and feelings are the source of a child's motives for misbehaviors. They affect how a child decides to belong. Beliefs come from a child's view of what is important in the family, the child's place, what parents say and do, and the style of parenting.

All beliefs and feelings have an underlying purpose. Parents have feelings about their parenting situation because they believe they need to control their children. Parents get upset with their children (feelings) because they think their beliefs about wanting to control their children are being violated. Likewise, children have feelings about their relationship with their parents because they believe that they need to belong. Children's misbehavior and the feelings that go with it are in turn caused by their need to belong (belief).

To help your child form positive beliefs, you can:

- *Help your child take part.* Encourage your children to help with family projects. Show them how to cooperate with other people. In this way, they can be part of things and can be helpful to others too.
- *Give choices.* Let your child live with the choice. When possible, let your child do things alone. In this way, your child will grow more confident. Your child will begin to make better choices.
- *Be fair.* Guide your child to play and share equally. Treat your child fairly and with respect so your child will trust you. In this way, your child will see that people can be fair and trustworthy. When this is true, there is no need to get even.
- *Notice and teach courage.* Teach your child to try things and to keep trying. Encourage your child to use words to explain worries or to talk about problems. Notice your child's strengths. In these ways, your child learns courage.

Feelings come from beliefs. You can change your beliefs and feelings as a parent by changing your self-talk. This can help you respond to misbehavior in a way that helps your child.

Below is a chart that describes how to deal with the various types of misbehavior and the feelings that might be generated in the parent as a consequence of these misbehaviors:

Table 5-3: Types Of Child Misbehavior and Their Motivations

<i>Goal</i>	<i>Parent' feelings</i>	<i>Examples of misbehavior</i>	<i>What parents can do</i>	<i>Ways to encourage positive goals and beliefs</i>
Attention	Annoyance	<b>Active:</b> Interrupting, clowning. <b>Passive:</b> Forgetting, not doing chores, expecting to be waited on.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Don't give attention on demand.</li> <li>2. Ignore when possible.</li> <li>3. Don't wait on child.</li> <li>4. Give attention for good behavior at other times.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Say thank you when child helps.</li> <li>2. Notice when child contributes.</li> </ol>
Power	Anger	<b>Active:</b> Throwing tantrums, making demands, arguing.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Refuse to fight or give in.</li> <li>2. Withdraw from power</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Give choices.</li> <li>2. Let child make decisions.</li> </ol>

<i>Goal</i>	<i>Parent' feelings</i>	<i>Examples of misbehavior</i>	<i>What parents can do</i>	<i>Ways to encourage positive goals and beliefs</i>
		<b>Passive:</b> Being stubborn, doing what parent wants slowly or sloppily.	contest. 3. If possible, leave room. 4. Let consequences occur for child	3. Ask for help, cooperation at other times.
Revenge	Anger	<b>Active:</b> Being rude, saying hurtful things, being violent. <b>Passive:</b> Giving hurtful looks, hurtfully refusing to cooperate.	1. Refuse to feel hurt or angry. 2. Don't hurt child back. 3. At other times, work to build trust. 4. Help child feel loved.	1. Be as fair as you can. 2. Say thank you when child helps. 3. Notice and appreciate when child contributes.
Display of inadequacy	Helplessness	Passive only: Quitting easily.	1. Do no pity. 2. Stop all criticizing. 3. Notice all efforts, no matter how small. 4. Don't give up on child.	1. Focus on child's strengths, talents. 2. Notice when child makes wise choices. 3. Notice when child thinks of others. 4. Give lots of encouragement.

When children misbehave, we should:

1. Help the child form more positive beliefs:

- 1.1. Help your child take part
- 1.2. Give choices
- 1.3. Be fair
- 1.4. Notice and teach courage

2. Do the unexpected. When you do the unexpected, you do the opposite of what a child expects. This way, the child won't get the usual payoff. Your response won't support the misbehavior. Then the child may need to find a more useful way to belong.

- 2.1. Decide to change
- 2.2. Change your purpose.
- 2.3. Change your beliefs and feelings.

3. Discuss and model correct behavior ourselves.

- 3.1. Talk about values
- 3.2. Act as You'd Like Your Child to Act.

4. Encourage the positive by:

- 4.1. Helping children take part. Encourage children to help with family projects. Show them how to cooperate with other people. In this way, they can be part of things and can be helpful to others too.
- 4.2. Giving choices. Give your child choices. Let your child live with the choice. When possible, let your child do things alone. In this way, your child will grow more confident. Your child will begin to make better choices.
- 4.3. Being fair. Guide your child to play and share equally. Treat your child fairly and with respect so your child will trust you. In this way, your child will see that people can be fair and trustworthy. When this is true, there is no need to get even.

5. Continually examine yourself and eliminate irrational or faulty beliefs. Beliefs cause emotions. If you choose to think of unpleasant events, you will have unpleasant feelings. How you feel results from your thoughts. Your irrational beliefs cause problems and interfere with your happiness. They take the form of demanding, complaining, and blaming.

### 5.9.2 Who Owns the Problem?

When children misbehave, we need to develop the ability to decide who owns the problem so we can assign responsibility for the misbehavior. To decide who owns the problem, parents must ask themselves four questions:

1. **Are my rights being disrespected?**
2. **Could anybody get hurt?**
3. **Are someone's belonging's threatened?**
4. **Is my child too young to be responsible for this problem?**

- **If the answer to *any* of these questions is yes, then you own the problem.**
- **If the answer to *every* question is no, then your child owns the problem.**

The person who owns the problem is responsible for handling it. Sometimes parents want to help children solve child-owned problems.

When you talk with your child about a problem, use open questions, which begin with:

- where
- when
- what
- who
- which
- how

When you are angry and in conflict with your child, you can:

- Look for how you are alike.
- Stay respectful
- Talk about the real problem
- Agree not to fight

Below is an example of how to decide who owns the problems and the best way for dealing with them:

**Table 5-4: Examples of Who Owns the Problem**

<i>Problem</i>	<i>Who Owns It?</i>	<i>Possible solution</i>
Child is unhappy about losing a game	Child	<u>Reflective Listening</u> : "You're disappointed that you lost."
Child refuses to talk to a new stepparent	Stepparent	<u>Reflective Listening and I-Message</u> : "It's hard to get used to a new stepparent. When you won't talk to

<b>Problem</b>	<b>Who Owns It?</b>	<b>Possible solution</b>
		me, I feel discouraged because I really want to get to know you.”
Children are poking each other in car, creating a disturbance for the driver	Parent	<i>I-Message and Choice:</i> “I’m finding the movement in the back seat very distracting.” If I-message produces no change, give choice. Parent pulls to side of road, says: “When you have settled down, I’ll drive on.”
Child has trouble sleeping on night before test	Child	<i>Reflective Listening:</i> “You feel really worried about your test because it’s a big part of your grade.”
Child is having trouble getting along with teacher	Child	<i>Exploring Alternatives:</i> “You’re angry with the teacher because you think he’s unfair. Would you like to talk about how you might get along with him?”
Older child wants to go on unsupervised camp-out with friends	Parent	<i>Exploring Alternatives:</i> “I’m worried that some emergency might happen and no adult would be around to help. So I don’t agree with your going without supervision. Would you like to talk about going camping with adult supervision?”

### 5.9.3 Discipline and the Consequences for Misbehavior

When children are nine or younger, the parents should decide on the consequences for the problem and offer these consequences as a choice to the child whenever there is misbehavior. When the child is ten, a different approach is warranted. The approach that should be followed is called *contracting*, where you ask the child what he or she thinks the consequences should be for the misbehavior.

The following guidelines shall be followed when parents discipline the child:

1. Discipline helps children learn to cooperate. It helps them learn self-control.
2. The keys to effective discipline are:
  - 2.1. Show respect for your child and yourself.
  - 2.2. Expect your child to cooperate.
  - 2.3. Provide choices.
  - 2.4. Apply consequences.
  - 2.5. Be consistent.
3. Instead of giving orders, set limits and give choices. Limits and choices give everyone some control.

A consequence happens when a child makes a choice. Consequences are a way to set limits and give choices. Consequences:

1. Show respect for you and your child.
2. Should immediately follow the misbehavior so that there is immediate punishment for the misbehavior.
3. Should be posted in writing a conspicuous place for the child to read. This poster should be reviewed periodically so the child clearly knows the limits that have been set.
4. Be enforced and applied consistently and fairly among all the people in the family.
5. Should fit the misbehavior
6. Are for bad choices, not bad kids.
7. Are about now, not the past.
8. Are firm and friendly.
9. Allow choice.

Some guidelines for using consequences are:

1. Be both firm and kind.
2. Talk less, act more.
3. Don't fight or give in.
4. Use respectful words.
5. Respect the child's choice.
6. Make it clear when there is no choice.
7. Let all children be responsible for their choices.
8. Don't worry about what others think.
9. Stay calm.
10. Be patient with yourself and your child

With older children (10 and older), negotiating consequences is important. They are more likely to follow consequences they have helped decide. Ask what they think would be fair or what they would do if they were the parent. If the child refuses to help decide or chooses unreasonable consequences, you will need to set the consequence.

At times, negotiation isn't needed. Maybe the problem is too small, or too serious, with limited choices. There will be many opportunities to involve your child in negotiating consequences.

The table below shows the current Consequence List for all misbehaviors in the \_\_\_\_\_ Family. This table is to be applied for children younger than 10 years old.

**Table 5-5: Child Misbehavior Consequence List**

<i>Circumstance</i>	<i>Activity or Problem</i>	<i>Choices (Keep respectful tone)</i>	<i>Consequences</i>
<b>SITUATIONAL BEHAVIORS</b>			
Morning/School	Getting up on time	“You may get up on time or go to bed earlier.”	If child gets up late: Goes to bedroom earlier that night.
	Eating breakfast	“You may eat breakfast or pack a healthy snack.”	If child gets up late: Misses breakfast.
	Having things ready for school	“You may get up on time to pack your lunch or pack it the night before.”	If child misses breakfast: Takes healthy snack.
		“I leave for work before you’re up. I can sign your field trip slip the night before.”	1. If child doesn’t pack lunch: Goes without or uses allowance to buy own lunch. 2. If child forgets or loses lunch money: Goes hungry that day.
Trouble on the bus	“You can follow the rules on the bus or get kicked off.”	Natural consequence: Child gets kicked off the school bus if he misbehaves..	
After School	TV	“You may watch TV for one hour, either after school or after supper.”	Once limit is reached: Parent turns off TV.
		“You can watch shows we’ve agreed to or find something else to do.”	If child argues or watches “off limits” program: Parent turns off TV. Child finds something else to do.
	Video games or computer	“You may only play video games for 30 minutes or I will lock up the games. You decide.”	If child plays too long, parent locks up the video games and says he can play again tomorrow.
	Homework	“You may do your homework after school or after supper. You decide.”	Child does homework before or after supper. If child does not do homework: Does homework after school next day.
		“I can pick you up at the library at five, or you can walk home.”	Child is on time or walks home.
Phone	“You may talk on the phone after you’ve finished your homework.”	If child uses phone before homework: May not use phone rest of that night.	
	1. “You can do homework on the phone if you can be off in twenty minutes.” 2. “Please limit phone calls to ten	When limit is reached: Parent respectfully interrupts child to end phone call.	

<i>Circumstance</i>	<i>Activity or Problem</i>	<i>Choices (Keep respectful tone)</i>	<i>Consequences</i>
		minutes or talk to your friends at school.”	
Evening	Kitchen chores	“Please do the dishes, or we’ll run out of clean ones.”	If a child does not wash dishes: Parent allows dishes to pile up.
	Eating dinner	“You can	
	Activities	“You can sign up for baseball or soccer. You decide.”	If child doesn’t choose: Does not sign up for either, or parent chooses for child.
		“You may play in the band if you agree to practice. It’s up to you.”	If child does not practice: Parent returns instrument to school or rental store.
		“You can go to the mall if Ted’s dad or older sister goes too.”	If child goes to mall without adult: May not go to mall. Parent sets time when child can try again.
	Bedtime	“You may go to bed or do something quiet in your room.”	If child plays or reads until too late in room: Has natural consequence of being tired in morning.
“You can head for bed, or I can walk you there. You decide.”		If child doesn’t go to bed on own: Parent takes child to bedroom.	
<b>SITUATIONAL BEHAVIORS</b>			
Visitation with divorced parents	Won’t come to in-person visitation or won’t leave visitation with one parent	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <u>I-Message</u>: “When you won’t visit your father/mother, I feel sad because it makes me think that you don’t love me.”</li> <li>2. <u>Choice</u>: “You can go to visitation or we’ll have to lock up all your toys until the next visitation. You decide.”</li> <li>3. <u>Encouragement</u>: When child goes to visitation voluntarily, “You were so good today and I’m so proud of you!”</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Child is encouraged to comply. If he doesn’t, then offer the choice.</li> <li>2. Child loses use of toys till next visitation or until he complies.</li> <li>3. Child feels encouraged by attending visitation..</li> </ol>
Home	Is rude to one parent	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <u>Do the unexpected</u>: Ignore the rudeness.</li> <li>2. <u>I-Message</u>: Later, when alone, use an I-message to tell child how</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Child’s behavior isn’t reinforced.</li> <li>2. Child is encouraged to change behavior.</li> <li>3. Child chooses the path. If chooses</li> </ol>

<i>Circumstance</i>	<i>Activity or Problem</i>	<i>Choices (Keep respectful tone)</i>	<i>Consequences</i>
		parent feels: "When you call me names, I feel discouraged. It seems like you don't respect me." 3. <i>Choice</i> : "I will drive you to the library if you can be respectful. Otherwise, you can stay home. You decide."	the wrong path, is stranded at home.
	Won't clean up his mess	<i>Choice</i> : "You can either clean your room or we won't watch any more TV or play video games from now on. You decide."	Room is messy and child can't watch TV if doesn't clean room.
	Won't go to church with parents		
School	Can't get along with kids at school	1. <i>Explore options</i> Talk with child to understand the situation. Say: "Do you want to talk about how we can be friends with Johnny?" 2. <i>Encouragement</i> : "You feel rejected when Johnny isn't nice to you, but I know you can learn to get along with him!"	1. Child learns techniques from parent for dealing with the situation he owns. 2. Child is encouraged to continue working on ways to get along better.
	Child gets poor grades in class	1. <i>Explore options</i> Talk with child to understand the situation. Say: "Do you want to talk about how we can improve your grades?" 2. <i>Encouragement/help</i> : "I know you feel discouraged when you get bad grades, but I know you can change that if you work harder and smarter. Can I help you with your homework every night till you come up to speed?"	1. Child learns options for dealing with the situation and is empowered to fix the problem. 2. Child will feel encouraged and may try harder, but is reminded that he owns the problem and needs to take responsibility.
Sporting events and games	Child is a poor loser	1. <i>Choice</i> : "You can either be a good sport or we won't come here anymore. You decide." 2. <i>I-message</i> : "I feel embarrassed when you act like a poor loser because the other players think you are	1. Child can't go to game unless he is respectful of the other players. 2. Child learns the affect his behavior has on others and is encouraged to change.

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<i>Circumstance</i>	<i>Activity or Problem</i>	<i>Choices (Keep respectful tone)</i>	<i>Consequences</i>
		inconsiderate and selfish.”	

### 5.9.4 Cooperative Problem-Solving Techniques

When there is a problem between parent and child, parents and children shall use the following problem-solving techniques:

1. Ignore the problem.
2. Use reflective listening
3. Use an I-message
4. Parents should help the child to see the choices and the possible consequences.
5. Talk through the problem with the child.

### 5.9.5 Talking Through Problems by Exploring Alternatives

The fifth cooperative problem-solving technique described in the previous section was “talking through problems”. This section describes how that technique works.

Talking through the problem consists of the following steps:

1. Understand the problem. Make sure the problem is clear to both you and your child. Use reflective listening. Ask questions that help you understand. Explain the problem clearly and respectfully. State your own feelings with I-messages.
2. Brainstorm ideas to solve it. To brainstorm, ask your child for ways to solve the problems. Suggest your own ideas too. You can help by saying, “What might happen if you \_\_\_\_\_?” These ideas are the *alternatives*. Stay open-minded for this step. Sometimes, ideas sound silly or impossible. Don’t be quick to judge them. One “silly” idea might help you or your child think of another really good one. For now, just think of *any* ideas.
3. Discuss the ideas. Now is the time to consider the ideas. Both you and your child should feel free to “try on” the different ideas. If you don’t agree with an idea, challenge it respectfully. Don’t say, “I’m sure that idea won’t work.” Instead say, “I worry that sticking to that plan will be hard for you.” This clearly gets your concerns across to your child.
4. Choose an idea. Pick an idea you can both accept and commit to it.
5. Use the idea. Agree to test the idea you have accepted. Decide together how long to use it. Plan enough time to give the idea a fair test.

### 5.9.6 Use of I-Messages

A good way to talk about problems is with an I-message. I-messages tell how you feel when a child ignores your rights. They focus on you, rather than the child. I-messages don’t label or blame. When you use an I-message, you simply tell how you feel.

#### **I-Messages Have Three parts**

**To use an I-message, do three things:**

1. **Tell what is *happening*.**
2. **Tell what you *feel*.**
3. ***Explain* why you feel that way.**

**Here is an I-message:**

- **“When you don’t call, I feel worried because I don’t know where you are.”**

**Table 5-6: I-Message Example**

#	It uses these words	Example
1	When	<i>“When you don’t call,</i>
2	I feel	<i>I feel worried</i>
3	because	<i>because I don’t know where you are.”</i>

Once you understand the parts of an I-message, use words that feel natural to you:

- “I feel scared when I find the iron left on. We could have a fire.”

Decide if you want to tell about your feeling, or just the problem:

- “I can’t set the table when it’s covered with toys.”

These are the most important things to remember about I-messages:

- **They focus on *you*, not your child.**
- **They do not place blame on anyone.**
- **They are most effective when they focus on encouragement of positive behaviors rather than bad reactions to negative behaviors**
- **They focus not on selfish needs of the speaker but on the needs of others**

It is important to realize that when we use I-messages, we need to be careful not to blame or create guilt in our child. For instance, as a single parent, when we say:

- “I feel sad when you say you would rather be with mom than dad because it makes the statement that you don’t love me.”

This is creating guilt in your child and making them feel blamed. Instead, we should always make references to only positive feelings when we are dealing with children 18 years or younger. Therefore, we might rephrase the statement above to make it more positive:

- “I feel good when you spend time with me because you are demonstrating love by sacrificing your time with mom to be with me.”

## **5.10 Answers to Common Questions Children Ask**

### **5.10.1 Does God really know me?<sup>69</sup>**

The Bible passage of Luke 12:7 helps us answer this question. God knows each of us in every detail. He knows what we like to eat, what kind of music we like, and our favorite color. Jesus said that God cares so much about each one of us that he has even numbered every hair on our heads!

<sup>69</sup> The Devotional Bible for Dads, Robert Wolgemuth, Zondervan Publishing House, 1999, p. 1136.

Think about someone you know very well. You may know what time this person wakes up every day, what makes him or her laugh, and even whether or not he or she likes tomatoes. But do you know how many hairs are on this person's head?

The average person has about 125,000 hairs on his head or her head. Every day when you brush your hair, you probably lose about fifty to seventy-five hairs (most of which grow back!). So every single day, the number of hairs on your head changes. But God still knows how many are there!

Jesus gave us this example so that we would understand just how personally God knows us. We're extremely important to him. Nobody knows us better!

### **5.10.2 Does God want me to be afraid of him?<sup>70</sup>**

The Bible passage of Leviticus 25:36 helps us answer this question. God doesn't want us to be afraid of him like we'd be afraid of something mean or evil. But he does want us to fear him—kind of like we fear police officers.

What does that mean? Well, police officers are good people. They protect us from those who might want to hurt us or steal from us. They're able to protect us because they have the authority to punish people who break the law. Because we "fear" the authority of a police officer and don't want him or her to punish us, we don't break the law.

To "fear" God means to be in awe of him, to recognize his authority and to respect and honor him. Likewise, it says in Proverbs 8:13 that "The fear of the Lord is to hate evil; pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverse mouth I hate." Therefore, to fear God is to loathe these kinds of bad behavior but to love the person who is doing them.

God doesn't want us to run from him. He loves us dearly. A philosopher once said wisely, "He who truly fears a thing runs from it, but he who truly fears God, flees unto him." Isn't this wonderful?

### **5.10.3 Does God need me to pray so that he can do what he wants to do?<sup>71</sup>**

The Bible passage of Daniel 9:17-18 helps us answer this question. God is the Creator of the entire universe. He spoke and the planets and stars came into being. His plans for the world and for our lives will be accomplished. Our lack of praying doesn't prevent him from doing what he wants to do. He is quite capable of doing whatever he wishes, and his plans are sovereign.

So why even pray? This is the incredible part. God *wants* us to pray to him and *allows* us to be part of his work. As part of our gratitude to God for all he's done for us, God wants us to commune with him, to thank him and to take our requests to him. He loves us; he wants that communication to flow freely, like a beloved child speaking to a generous father.

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<sup>70</sup> The Devotional Bible for Dads, Robert Wolgemuth, Zondervan Publishing House, 1999, p. 147.

<sup>71</sup> The Devotional Bible for Dads, Robert Wolgemuth, Zondervan Publishing House, 1999, p. 955.

No, God doesn't need us to pray so that he can accomplish his will. *We* need to pray so we can thank him for all he's done for us, so we can learn his plans for our future and so our hearts align with him. Daniel's prayer in this short passage perfectly demonstrates this truth.

#### **5.10.4 Will God punish me when I sin—even if I don't know I'm sinning?<sup>72</sup>**

The Bible passage of 2 Chronicles 34:14-33 helps us answer this question. God is a merciful God, and he sees when our hearts are right, even if we make a mistake. But if we sin because we haven't learned what God says in his Word, God will still hold us accountable.

As hard as it may be to believe, the Israelites at one time completely forgot about the Book of the Law God had given Moses. For all practical purposes, this book was lost. The Jews didn't teach their children the laws, and before long the Israelites weren't following the rules at all! Yet, despite their ignorance, God was angry (v. 21). In God's eyes, broken rules are broken rules.

But when Josiah became king, he turned back to God. Soon after that, one of the priests found the Book of the Law that had been lost for so long (vv. 14-15). When King Josiah read the book, he wept because he knew his people had been sinning against God all the time that this book had been lost. After Josiah read from the Book of the Law (v. 30), he asked the people to "pledge themselves to it" (v. 32), and the people followed the Lord for as long as Josiah was king.

From this story, we learn that God has mercy on us, but we'd better make sure we learn his rules, all the same. Only in obeying God's Word will we experience God's best for ourselves.

#### **5.10.5 Does God ever get sad?<sup>73</sup>**

The Bible passage of Ephesians 4:30-5:1 helps us answer this question. God *does* get sad. He is sad when we do things that are wrong. Ephesians 4:30 says we should not "grieve" the Holy Spirit. And the original Greek word for "grieve" means to distress, to be sad, to cause grief, to be in heaviness, to make sorry.

When we are filled with bitterness, rage, anger, gossip and hatred, we make God sad. We make His heart heavy. So the Bible tells us to be "imitators of God" (5:1).

Just as we can make God sad, we can also make him happy. Imagine that. When we choose to do the right things, to love and speak encouraging words to others, to tell the truth, to honor our parents and to forgive others, we please God.

Our choices are important to God. Good ones please Him. Bad ones make Him sad. So, it is important that we make the right choices!

#### **5.10.6 Should I tell the truth even if it hurts someone's feelings?<sup>74</sup>**

<sup>72</sup> The Devotional Bible for Dads, Robert Wolgemuth, Zondervan Publishing House, 1999, p. 497.

<sup>73</sup> The Devotional Bible for Dads, Robert Wolgemuth, Zondervan Publishing House, 1999, p. 1311.

<sup>74</sup> The Devotional Bible for Dads, Robert Wolgemuth, Zondervan Publishing House, 1999, p. 1310.

The Bible passage of Ephesians 4:25 addresses this issue. While telling the truth is important, being tactful and kind is also important. So, it is not okay to constantly blurt out hurtful opinions in the name of truth. On the other hand, we must not temper our beliefs just to avoid hurt feelings.

Paul instructed the Ephesians to “put off falsehood and speak truthfully to [their] neighbor[s].” This is especially true in the church. Because we are members of the same body, we are to treat others as if they were a part of ourselves. We must lovingly confront wrong behavior because it damages the church, the body of Jesus Christ. Imagine breaking your arm but trying to convince your brain that your arm was not broken. It sounds absurd, doesn’t it? You would *want* your brain to know so you could get that arm into a cast as quickly as possible!

It is not fun to tell a friend that his or her “arm is broken,” but we need to tell that friend the truth so he or she can avoid greater pain later. Wouldn’t you want someone to do the same for you?

### **5.10.7 Is saying “I’m sorry” the same as repenting?<sup>75</sup>**

The Bible passage of 2 Corinthians 7:8-11 helps us answer this question. Repenting is very different than just saying we’re sorry. When we say we’re sorry, we admit we were wrong and that we feel bad about what we did. When we repent, we not only admit we are wrong, but we also fix what we have broken. We stop, turn around and start walking in the other direction.

Now, which is better, feeling guilty or repenting? The apostle Paul in 2 Cor. 7:8-11 says repentance leads to salvation and leaves no regret. But he doesn’t stop there. He goes on to say that worldly sorrow brings *death*. We’re not dealing with two degrees of good, here. We’re dealing with two paths: repentance leading to salvation, and worldly sorrow—just saying “I’m sorry” with no intention of changing our behavior—leading to death.

Can you think of an offense you have committed? Confess it, fix it and then reverse it.

### **5.10.8 Is being proud good or bad?<sup>76</sup>**

The Bible in Obadiah 3-4 helps us to answer this question. Pride can be a good thing, and pride can also be a bad thing.

When someone “takes pride” in his work, it is generally considered a good thing. We value those who have a high standard and who do quality work. We also hear people say “be proud of who you are” or “be proud of your name.” Again, these are good things. These statements tell us that we shouldn’t feel embarrassed about the way we look or think or about our work or family.

But sinful pride doesn’t only enjoy having something, it enjoys having *more* of it than the next person. This kind of pride makes us happy that we have more money or a better job or better toys than someone else. It’s in the *comparison* that we become proud.

<sup>75</sup> The Devotional Bible for Dads, Robert Wolgemuth, Zondervan Publishing House, 1999, p. 1292.

<sup>76</sup> The Devotional Bible for Dads, Robert Wolgemuth, Zondervan Publishing House, 1999, p. 986.

Sinful pride is very dangerous. For to know God is to understand that we have no reason to boast. It was this kind of pride that turned an angel into Satan himself (Luke 10:18, Revelation 12:3-9). Everything we have has been given to us by our heavenly Father.

So, take pleasure in a job well done or in pleasing someone important to you. Take pleasure in your son's or daughter's or father's or mother's achievements. But beware of thinking yourself better than those around you (see Philippians 2:3).

#### **5.10.9 If prayer really works, why don't doctors prescribe it?<sup>77</sup>**

While you won't find it at a pharmacy, some doctors may already be prescribing prayer! In 1992, a group of researchers established the National Institute of Healthcare Research (NIHR) to study what they call "the forgotten factor"-the effects of faith and prayer on health. Their findings are no surprise to Christians.

Numerous studies show that churchgoers have lower rates of anxiety-related illnesses and depression. One study showed that if elderly patients had an active prayer life or found solace in their faith, they were *fourteen* times more likely to survive surgery.

One cardiologist at the San Francisco General Medical Center conducted a study on intercessory prayer. He assigned half of his serious heart patients to Christians outside the hospital that agreed to pray for them over a ten-month period.

At the end of that time, the patients receiving prayer needed less medicine and mechanical assistance than the others did. "These data suggest that intercessory prayer to the Judeo-Christian God has a beneficial therapeutic effect in patients admitted to a CCU [cardiac care unit]" (Byrd, 829)

So today's doctors and researchers are not finding out what James 5:15 has told us all along: Prayer works.

Byrd, Randolph C. Southern Medical Journal. July, 1988; 81(7): 826-829.

#### **5.10.10 If I'm supposed to love everybody, why shouldn't I be friends with everybody?<sup>78</sup>**

The Bible passage of Proverbs 13:20 answers this question. Jesus tells us to love everyone, even our enemies (Luke 6:27,35). But Proverbs 13:20 says that if we are to grow wise, we must walk with wise people. If we choose "fools" as companions, we'll suffer harm.

A "companion" is much more than an acquaintance; he or she is one who becomes a close friend, a "traveling buddy," even a mate. If we choose companions who don't love God or don't act according to his Word, we're told in no uncertain terms that we're walking straight into trouble.

<sup>77</sup> The Devotional Bible for Dads, Robert Wolgemuth, Zondervan Publishing House, 1999, p. 1382.

<sup>78</sup> The Devotional Bible for Dads, Robert Wolgemuth, Zondervan Publishing House, 1999, p. 692.

As dads, our job is to protect our children from harm. Therefore, our job is to teach them to choose friends wisely. And this lesson is every bit as important for us as it is for our kids. Our companions are either making us wiser or leading us right into harm's way.

The Bible doesn't contradict itself at all on this issue. Love your neighbor. Love your enemy. But choose your friends with care.

### **5.10.11 Why do we have to follow so many rules?<sup>79</sup>**

In the Bible passage of Joshua 1:-7-9, we learn the answer to this question. The Israelites sometimes wondered why they had to follow God's rules. But the book of Joshua makes it clear: God gave them rules to follow "that you may be successful wherever you go" (v. 7)

To a child, some rules may seem pointless. Why chew with your mouth closed? Why say "Yes, Sir" or "No, Ma'am"? But good manners prove useful later in life. Even in Moses' day, parents had rules like these. Egyptian fathers taught their sons "wisdom texts." For example, "If you dine with a great man, 'take what he may give, when it is set before thy nose...speak only when he addresses thee. Laugh after he laughs, and it will be very pleasing to his heart'".

God also gave his people in the Bible rules to protect them—for example, God commanded them not to eat unclean food. He didn't want his children to get sick. For the same reason, parents still make children wash their hands before eating.

Rules govern our society, and learning to follow the rules as a child makes it much easier to be successful as an adult. For thousands of years, parents have understood this. In the same way, God understands that we must learn to follow his rules. And so he gives us lots of behavioral guidelines for a reason: "that [we] may be successful wherever [we] go."

### **5.10.12 Why do good people suffer?<sup>80</sup>**

In the Bible book of Job 1, Job was a righteous man who ultimately ended up being made to suffer. As a matter of fact, Job is the most famous example of a Biblical character who suffered. But why Job? Of all people, why did this blameless man (v.1) suffer so much? The reason, though it may be hard to see, is simple: In allowing Job to suffer, God proved that Job's love for him was pure. Satan argued that Job only loved God because God blessed him so richly. So God allowed Satan to take almost everything Job had: his riches, his family, and his health. Yet Job proved faithful; he never cursed God or blamed him for what had happened (v. 22).

Several verses in the New Testament shed light on this perplexing question. Hebrews 12:10-11 tells us that sometimes God uses pain to discipline us and turn us away from doing wrong things. James 1:2-4 says that sometimes God uses pain to help us grow up. These trials test our faith and help us develop perseverance "that [we] may be mature and complete, not lacking in anything." So, as strange as it may seem, many times we have to suffer before we can experience complete and full lives. Finally, the apostle Paul moves us beyond the question of why and gives us an example of trust in God through

<sup>79</sup> The Devotional Bible for Dads, Robert Wolgemuth, Zondervan Publishing House, 1999, p. 238.

<sup>80</sup> The Devotional Bible for Dads, Robert Wolgemuth, Zondervan Publishing House, 1999, p. 541.

the pain and trials of life: “I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation...I can do everything through him who gives me strength” (Philippians 4:12-14).

Still today we see many examples of “good” people who suffer. And although God knows what’s in his people’s hearts, these types of trials allow them to discover—and to demonstrate to those watching—that God is worthy of their love regardless of their outward circumstances.

### **5.10.13 Why do I sometimes feel like God’s not there?<sup>81</sup>**

In Psalm 22:1-2, we read about the cries of King David, who felt abandoned by God. At different times we’ve all felt, as David did at the beginning of this psalm, like God just wasn’t there. WE knew he said he would never leave us, but it still felt like he was on vacation. Why? Why does God sometimes seem to forsake us?

In his famous book, *The Screwtape Letters*, C.S. Lewis offers great insight on this question. The narrator in this book is a senior demon who is counseling a junior demon on how to pull a Christian away from God’s service. In this passage, the Christian is feeling that God has forsaken him, and old Screwtape has this to say:

[God] wants [His children] to learn to walk and must therefore take away His hand; and if only the will to walk is really there He is pleased even with their stumbles. Do not be deceived...our cause is never more in danger than when a human, no longer desiring, but still intending, to do our Enemy’s [God’s] will, looks round upon a universe from which every trace of Him seems to have vanished, and asks why he has been forsaken, and still obeys (p. 39).

Remember, God’s goal is not to force us to love him. He wants us to love him by *choice*. He’s helping us grow up, and little by little, he’s teaching us to walk with him. Just as a little child needs to “go it alone” before he or she can learn to walk, so also God needs to take away his hand so that we will learn to walk in his way no matter what the circumstances.

### **5.10.14 Does God hate anything?<sup>82</sup>**

In Prov. 6:16-19 we learn about what God hates. God doesn’t hate any people, but the Bible says there are at least seven things that he detests. These seven things can be summed up with one little word: sin. As a perfect being, God abhors anything that rebels against his perfection, and this listing contains several types of rebellion.

- **Pride:** God hates “haughty eyes,” because he knows just how ridiculous it is when any person thinks he or she is better than another person. In God’s eyes, we are all of equal value.
- **Lying:** God is Truth, and he hates it when we tell big lies, “little” lies, or any lies.
- **Murder:** God hates “hands that shed innocent blood.” We see a lot of this today—drive-by shootings, terrorist acts, bombings. God hates such senseless destruction of human life.
- **Conspiracy:** God hates a “heart that devises wicked schemes,” or that plots and plans to do evil.

<sup>81</sup> *The Devotional Bible for Dads*, Robert Wolgemuth, Zondervan Publishing House, 1999, p. 587.

<sup>82</sup> *The Devotional Bible for Dads*, Robert Wolgemuth, Zondervan Publishing House, 1999, p. 684.

- **Willingness to do evil:** God hates “feet that are quick to rush into evil.” feet that act out the wicked plans of the heart.
- **Betrayal:** God hates it when people lie so that other individuals will be hurt.
- **Dissension:** This sin could include gossiping, cheating, stealing, lying—anything that pits one person against another and takes their focus off their identity as God’s children.

Here we have a very clear list of actions and activities that God hates or finds detestable. They all have to do with things that distance us from himself and from living peacefully with others. As we are careful to avoid doing the things on this list, we will find ourselves being drawn closer to God and to others.

#### **5.10.15 If someone hurts me, why can’t I hurt that person back?<sup>83</sup>**

In Romans 12:17-21, the Bible says that if someone hurts us, we should still treat that person with kindness. This might seem unfair at first. Why should someone be able to hurt us and get away with it? Well, that person will not really get away with it.

God will repay those who do evil. How he repays them is up to Him, but we are not supposed to take matters into our own hands. We can follow Christ’s example and trust God.

We cannot control a person’s actions, but we can treat that person with love in spite of those actions. This is what Paul meant when he said, “as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone” (v. 18). God instructs us to feed our enemy if he is hungry and to give him something to drink if he is thirsty. When we’re kind to our enemies, we overcome evil with good.

#### **5.10.16 Why do we have to forgive people who hurt us?<sup>84</sup>**

In Matt. 18:21-35, the apostle Peter wondered about this very issue, and he asked Jesus how many times we had to forgive someone. “Seventy-seven times,” Jesus replied, meaning that forgiveness must be unlimited.

Jesus taught that we must forgive others because God has forgiven us. The parable of the unmerciful servant illustrates his point. The master in this parable canceled a servant’s huge debt. When he discovered that his servant did not extend the same forgiveness to another, the master became furious. He reinstated the debt and threw his servant in jail until he could repay what he owed. Jesus warns us that, in the same way, God will not forgive us unless we in turn forgive others.

The choice is simple. We do not have to forgive others—unless we want God to forgive us.

#### **5.10.17 How do I love someone I don’t even like?<sup>85</sup>**

<sup>83</sup> The Devotional Bible for Dads, Robert Wolgemuth, Zondervan Publishing House, 1999, p. 1260

<sup>84</sup> The Devotional Bible for Dads, Robert Wolgemuth, Zondervan Publishing House, 1999, p. 1062

<sup>85</sup> The Devotional Bible for Dads, Robert Wolgemuth, Zondervan Publishing House, 1999, p. 1063

In Matt. 19:19, the Bible tells us to love our neighbors as ourselves. So, how do we love ourselves? Sometimes we don't like ourselves very much, and sometimes we even hate our own actions. However, we love ourselves by giving ourselves the benefit of the doubt when we make mistakes. We believe that we are on our way to becoming better people and always hope for our own well being. We believe that God loves us. In the same way, we do not need always to be fond of our neighbors or approve of everything they do to love them.

So how do we love people we do not like? First, we don't waste time trying to create phony feelings of affection for them. That is not the point. Instead, we give them the benefit of the doubt and wish them the best, even if they have hurt us. We treat them with respect and preserve their dignity. WE recognize that God loves them as much as he loves us. When we decide to treat others this way, we might just start to like them, after all!