



PARENTING *is* HEART WORK

TRAINING MANUAL

WITH EIGHT 45-MINUTE AUDIO SESSIONS

Dr. Scott Turansky *and*
Joanne Miller, RN, BSN



Let's Get Started

Welcome to an adventure. This book is designed for one parent, a couple, or a group of friends to work through together. But no matter who is with you, take it slow. The idea is to develop new patterns in family life and to practice those new patterns for a while before adding more. Each chapter describes a new area for growth in your family. So take one chapter at a time and incorporate changes before moving on.

This book comes with eight 45-minute audio sessions, one for each chapter. You can download the sessions online with this URL: biblicalparenting.org/heartwork/audio.asp

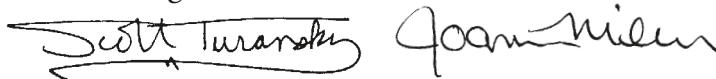
We suggest you listen to each audio before reading and working through the corresponding chapter. You may want to listen to it again after reading the chapter or as you implement the new routine or strategy in your family.

As you move through each chapter, you'll find Scripture passages to read and places to "Pause and Reflect" to evaluate your family. Take the time to do these sections. They will provide valuable insights as you seek to make changes. Don't be in a hurry to get through the book and miss out on the heart change possible.

Some of the material you may already know. It won't be new to you, but you'll want to ask yourself, "*How can I take this principle to the next level in my relationship with my child?*" That question may launch you into some important inner dialogue that will bring great fruit in your family relationships.

Most of all, work through this study prayerfully. Remember, God is interested in the hearts in your family so ask him for wisdom as you work through the various sections. He'll not only give you parenting wisdom, he'll help you see important dimensions of your own heart as well.

Blessings,

The image shows two handwritten signatures in black ink. The first signature is 'Scott Turansky' and the second is 'Joanne Miller'. Both are written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dr. Scott Turansky and Joanne Miller, RN, BSN



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The names of people who have come to the National Center for Biblical Parenting for counseling have been changed. Some illustrations combine individual stories in order to protect confidentiality. Stories of the authors' children have been used by permission.

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To obtain a complete resource list or have Dr. Scott Turansky and Joanne Miller present their material live, you may contact the National Center for Biblical Parenting 76 Hopatcong Drive, Lawrenceville, NJ 08648-4136, (609) 771-8002, or visit the website at: biblicalparenting.org.

You may also want to take online parenting courses at Biblical Parenting University. Learn more at biblicalparentinguniversity.com.

You may email us at parent@biblicalparenting.org.

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Read along in the book *Parenting is Heart Work*

At the beginning of each chapter you will see suggestions of what sections to read from the *Parenting is Heart Work* book. Although this reading is optional, you will find it helpful for obtaining additional insight as you work through this manual.

About the Authors



Dr. Scott Turansky and Joanne Miller, RN, BSN are the founders of the National Center for Biblical Parenting. Their heart-based approach to parenting is revolutionizing families. Turansky and Miller are also the creators of Biblical Parenting University, providing parents with easy access to parent training through online courses.

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1

Teaching Kids to Listen and Follow Instructions

*Every time you give an instruction,
you have the opportunity to build character.*

Read along in the book *Parenting is Heart Work*

The Introduction to *Parenting is Heart Work* provides motivation to look past behavior to the heart. It's easy to focus only on behavior because that's what's visible. But the heart is more complicated. Teaching children to follow instructions has some definite heart implications. Chapter 4 shows how working on behavior the right way can actually contribute to heart change. Behavior is a symptom. In fact, sometimes working on behavior becomes a way to get to the heart. The two are linked closely together. In order to gain the most from an Instruction Routine it's necessary to keep an eye on the heart. Character qualities like cooperation and responsibility grow out of a good Instruction Routine.

Sometimes we begin a seminar with the question, “What are some things about working with your kids that make you angry?” Among the many answers, we receive the following:

- My kids don’t do what I ask.
- They do a job part way.
- They don’t listen.
- I have to nag to get anything done.

Lack of cooperation is a common problem many families face. As we’ve counseled with parents and their children over the years, we’ve discovered that the process of giving and following instructions can get derailed in several key areas. These areas have become the important points of growth for parents and children from which we’ve developed a five-step routine for giving instructions. This chapter summarizes this routine and will help you change the way your family relates.

Do these things and you will see great improvement in cooperation. This Instruction Routine will give you specific skills to work on in family life. If your children aren’t cooperating, this is where you need to start.

This plan works for all kinds of children. It’s excellent for children with ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder), ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder), ODD (Oppositional Defiant Disorder), children who have auditory or visual processing problems, as well as children who are emotionally explosive or defiant. Because of its balance of clarity, affirmation, firmness, and teamwork, this Instruction Routine has broad application and works with kids from 2 to 18 years of age. Before we jump in, though, take some time to evaluate your family.



Pause and Reflect

Keeping one child in mind at time, consider these definitions:

Cooperation – a willingness to work together to accomplish a task.

Cooperation – responding to parental instruction with a good attitude.

Cooperation – giving up your agenda for the needs of others.

On a scale of 1-5, how would you rate your child's *cooperation* in family life?

		Cooperation Level					
_____	(poor)	1	2	3	4	5	(excellent)
Child's name							
_____	(poor)	1	2	3	4	5	(excellent)
Child's name							
_____	(poor)	1	2	3	4	5	(excellent)
Child's name							
_____	(poor)	1	2	3	4	5	(excellent)
Child's name							

To increase cooperation, both you and your child must make changes. In fact, a good Instruction Routine contains five steps for the parent that correspond to five steps for the child. Each step is explained in the subsequent pages. At the end of this chapter we've given you a convenient chart summarizing the steps.

You may choose to start this process slowly, adding a step here and there, based on the problems you identify in your interaction. Some families choose to change everything at once, even posting the Instruction Routine on the refrigerator as a guide. Whatever you choose, the time you spend adjusting the way you give instructions and the way your children respond to them will dramatically improve your relationship, make family life work more efficiently, and teach children valuable lessons for their future.

Please don't assume, however, that the process will be easy. Some parents have a hard time making the changes needed, and children may resist. Don't let that deter you. New healthy patterns take time to develop. Persevere and you will see changes take place over time. It's worth the work.

After all, Hebrews 12:11 says, “No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”

The Value of Instructions

Before we give you the practical steps, we want you to understand why an Instruction Routine is so important.

Understanding the reasons why will motivate you to move forward even when you feel tired or unmotivated.

Keep in mind that you aren't teaching your children to follow instructions simply to get the clothes picked up or the trash taken out. You are building character in your children through the everyday tasks of life.

Read each of the following verses. Why are instructions important?

1 Samuel 15:11 — “I am grieved that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions.’ Samuel was troubled, and he cried out to the Lord all that night.”

How will teaching children to follow instructions in family life help them as they get older?

Proverbs 19:16 — “He who obeys instructions guards his life, but he who is contemptuous of his ways will die.”

How is following instructions important outside of the family?

Proverbs 4:1-7 — “Listen, my sons, to a father’s instruction; pay attention and gain understanding. I give you sound learning, so do not forsake my teaching. When I was a boy in my father’s house, still tender, and an only child of my mother, he taught me and said, ‘Lay hold of my words with all your heart; keep my commands and you will live. Get wisdom, get understanding; do not forget my words or swerve from them. Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you. Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom.’ ”

In what ways does following instructions teach children more than just getting things done?



Pause and Reflect

Why is it important for my child to learn to follow instructions now?

An Instruction Routine Builds Cooperation

All the steps of this routine are very important, so don't skip any of them. Of course, you're probably already doing some of these things. Look for ways to add the steps that are new to you.

Each step has a part for the parent and a part for the child. First work on your part and then teach your child to do his/her part as well.

Step 1

For the Parent: Get Close to Your Child

Getting close is the beginning of a good Instruction Routine. No longer will you shout instructions from across the parking lot or yell throughout the house. Now you'll get close to your child because physical closeness raises the felt value of instructions.

With young children you may want to hold their hands. Be sure to look into your child's eyes. Although it may take time for your children to learn this new routine, your persistence will develop an expectation that even in the day-to-day interactions of family life we treat each other with enough value to get close together before dialogue.

After all, when the boss yells an instruction across the office, it's not perceived as valuable as if the boss takes a little extra time to come into the employee's cubicle and talks face to face. Adding this one step to the instruction process often achieves greater cooperation from children.

Getting close also involves breaking the child's concentration from what he or she is doing. Now the child is connecting with you and ready to hear what you have to say. When you get physically close, and have your child look at you directly, you are setting the stage for cooperation. You may want to begin by saying, "*Tara, I need to talk to you.*" Or, "*Danny, listen to me for a minute.*"

One mom said, "*I like to stoop down on my child's level. I sit in a chair or squat*

down so my son and I can look straight at each other. I like the statement this makes about our relationship.”

Another parent said, *“I’ll go up to my teenager and put my hand on his shoulder as a way of making contact with him before I give him an instruction.”*

These parents recognize the importance of this step in the instruction process and, as a result, receive more cooperation from their kids.

Step 1

For the Child: Learn to Come When Called

Sometimes in Step 1 the parent moves close to the child, but many times the child must come to the parent. You won’t get too far in the instruction process if you call your child and he runs the other way. Children need to learn to come when called. It’s part of a good Instruction Routine. In fact, coming when called is actually a “preschool survival skill.” But the skill of coming when called isn’t just for young children. Even older children need to learn to come when called.

With young children, it’s often helpful to teach new skills in fun ways. You might even make it a game.

“Billy, I’d like you to stand by that chair and when I call your name, I want you to come over here and say, ‘What Mom?’ Are you ready? Okay, ‘Billy.’ ” When Billy comes running over you want to give him a big hug and say, *“That was great. You’re learning how to obey. You are growing up. Let’s play that game again.”* This time when he stands by the chair, have a little more fun, *“Karen, Sue, Jack, Joe, what was your name? Oh yeah, Billy.”* Billy will then giggle and come running. Use a lot of encouragement and praise to teach Billy to come first within a few feet and then ask *“What Mom?”*

Continue to practice this skill in fun ways, but then increase the difficulty by calling him when he is busy playing. When he forgets, remind him of the rule and practice again. Over time Billy will learn to come when called.

Some parents have a certain tone of voice when calling a child that indicates

they are about to give an instruction. The way they say “Billy” is different when giving an instruction than when calling for a snack. When teaching children to come when called it is best to remove those indicators and always call the child the same way. Whether it’s for a hug, or a snack, or an instruction, the responsiveness of the child needs to be the same.

Older children also need to learn to come when called, but you can’t practice the skill with teenagers the same way you do with preschoolers. Have a discussion that explains the changes you want to make. You might say, “Molly, I’ve noticed that we do a lot of yelling across the house. You’re getting older now and I want us to show that we value each other by getting close before we dialogue, so sometimes I’m going to come to you and other times I’ll call you and expect that you will come to me.” Begin the new routine by explaining it and then sticking to it. Refuse to dialogue with your children until you are close together.

The goal of Step 1 is to use physical closeness to raise the felt value of instructions. Some children demonstrate little or no value for instructions. They wander off, forget to do the task, or just ignore Mom or Dad. Just adding this one step to your Instruction Routine can do a lot to increase cooperation between you and your child.

The work you do now will prepare your children to listen to God’s instructions in their lives. When God speaks to your children, you want them to respond to him. Following instructions starts by learning how to obey parents in the day-to-day work of family life.



Pause and Reflect

How is my family doing in Step 1?

Parent: Get Close to Your Child

Child: Learn to Come When Called

How am I doing with this step?

Very well OK Needs work

How is my child doing with this step?

Very well OK Needs work

Thoughts:

Note: This Instruction Routine has several parts. You may want to stop here and practice this one step before going on. Whatever you do, don't get overwhelmed by the number of steps. Just take them one at a time. Each step develops a new skill for children and increases the likelihood of cooperation.

Step 2

For the Parent: Consider the Timing

Before you give instructions, take a moment and ask yourself, *“Is now the best time to give this instruction?”* After consideration, you may see that your daughter is upset about something. Maybe giving an instruction at this moment would be insensitive. Your daughter needs some care and empathy before you give her something to do. Parents can value their children and their relationships by evaluating the timing before they speak.

One dad said, *“I realized that I typically yell instructions whenever I see a problem. For example, I came into the kitchen and saw the trash overflowing. It’s Jimmy’s job to take it out so I just yelled, ‘Jimmy!’ Had I considered the timing, I would have discovered that Jimmy was working on his math homework. I’ve been trying to get him to do that homework for a while. I should have waited and given the instruction after he was done.”*

A mom said, *“Sometimes I wake my teenage son up in the morning by gently rubbing his back. As I’m sitting there on the side of his bed I look around the room and make a mental to-do list of all the things that he needs to clean up. It seems more caring though to wait until a more appropriate time to start giving instructions.”*

Many parents receive resistance from their children because they don’t consider the timing of their instructions. A little sensitivity here can foster greater cooperation and head off a larger problem later on.

PRINCIPLE:
Cooperation is fostered when instructions are given in the context of relationship.

Considering the timing helps set the stage for the instruction and communicates, “You’re more important to me than this job that needs to be done.”

It’s important, for example, how you greet your daughter when she comes in from school in the afternoon. *“You forgot to make your bed this morning. You need to go do it now,”* is insensitive. Greetings are important. You may, instead, allow your daughter to get settled, ask about her day, and then talk about the unmade bed. It’s another way of fostering relationship in the midst of the process of giving instructions because:

Bossiness is giving instructions without relationship

Giving instructions without considering the timing can damage your relationship with your child. Take time to see what’s going on before you launch into your agenda.

Considering the timing doesn’t mean parents always postpone the instruction, but it does mean that they take note of the situation and decide if this is the best time to interrupt the child.

Step 2

For the Child: Always be Ready to Receive an Instruction

Please don't think that Step 2 means that you always allow the child to determine when you give instructions. This is not the case. Some children give the impression that there is never a good time to give an instruction.

Children must be ready to receive instructions at all times. This idea is foreign to the minds of many children. They don't recognize the value of instructions. It's interesting that twelve times in the book of Proverbs Solomon talks about the importance of listening to instructions.

In 1 Samuel 3, young Samuel lived in the home of Eli the priest. One night when Samuel was sleeping he was awakened by a voice that said, "*Samuel, Samuel.*" Immediately, Samuel went into the place where Eli was sleeping and he said, "*Here I am.*" Samuel didn't yell from the other room, "*Whadaya want?*" He knew how to come when called.

Eli told Samuel to go back and lie down. Two more times Samuel heard the voice and both times he ran in to Eli and said, "*Here I am.*" Eli said, "*Samuel, the next time you hear the voice, say 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'*" So Samuel went back and lay down again.

This time when the voice spoke, Samuel answered as he was instructed and God talked to him. Parents, you have an important responsibility in the instruction process. You aren't just giving instructions so that your kids help out around the house. You're training your children to receive instructions from the Lord.

Children learn something in the instruction process that's very important. They learn how to give up their own agenda and how to think about others instead of themselves. As you consider the timing, for example, you may discover that your child is involved in a computer game. You know that whenever you give instructions

Teach your children to receive instructions so that they'll learn to obey God.

while he's on the computer, you get resistance. This may be just the practice he needs. Whether you grant his appeal to get to the next level first depends on his ability to follow instructions. If he usually follows directions right away, you may choose to allow him to finish his game. If, however, he rarely gives up his own agenda, this may be an excellent place to teach a new skill.

In fact, you might say, *"The privilege of playing on the computer is earned by your ability to leave it with a good attitude. If you're not ready for interruptions, then you must not be ready for computer games."*

Imagine that you're an employer and you go to a worker with a task to do. He looks up at you and says, *"I'm busy right now. Come back later."* That employee isn't going to get very far in the work world. Building responsiveness starts right here. Children must be ready to receive an instruction at all times. It's part of their job.



Pause and Reflect

How is my family doing in Step 2?

Parent: Consider the Timing

Child: Always be Ready to Receive an Instruction

How am I doing with this step?

Very well OK Needs work

How is my child doing with this step?

Very well OK Needs work

Thoughts:

Step 3

For the Parent: Give the Instruction

Isn't it interesting that here we are at Step 3 before we've even given the instruction? Many parents think that giving instructions simply means that they utter commands to their children. The Instruction Routine is a bit more involved than that. The first two steps pave the way for a healthy sense of cooperation with your kids.

But even the *way* you state the instruction is important. In this step make sure your children understand the difference between a suggestion and an instruction.

For example, if you say, "*Mary, you may need your coat today,*" is that an instruction or a suggestion? It's not very clear. Sometimes parents give instructions in the form of suggestions or opinions, complicating the signals children receive. "*It's getting late. You should probably go to bed,*" isn't an instruction. It's a suggestion.

"*I think you should do your homework now,*" sounds more like an opinion than a directive.

One day a pastor from a local church called us for help with a family. "*We're not sure what to do. The four-year-old runs around the church and the parents don't take responsibility for him. They need some parenting advice.*" We agreed to meet with this family and see what we could do to help them.

When the family arrived, we met with the parents alone and explained

PRINCIPLE:
Word cues
help clarify
instructions for
children.

this five-step Instruction Routine. Then we brought the child in and we modeled it for them. We played the Come When You're Called Game and we gave instructions. The little boy responded well to us. The parents watched and understood. They were ready to put this new routine into practice at home.

The next week they returned and we asked, *"How did it go?"*

"It doesn't work," Mom replied.

We asked the parents to show us what they did with their little boy. *"Chris, can you bring that trash can over here?"* Mom began.

We stopped the process right there. *"It doesn't sound like you're giving instructions to me. I know you're trying to show honor to your son and that's a good thing, but you're confusing the instruction process."* We taught these parents to give instructions clearly and they began to see some significant changes in their son's responsiveness.

When you give instructions use a calm, matter-of-fact tone of voice. Give your child clear cues that this is an instruction. In some families the cue is loudness or intensity. When parents get angry, kids get moving. But anger wears on the relationships in a family and people get hurt.

You give cues in the instruction that tell your kids when you mean business.

Replace anger with more constructive cues. With young children we encourage parents to start with the child's name, end with the word "now," and put the words "you need to" somewhere in the sentence. *"Jack, you need to get your shoes on now."* Cues help children know when you mean business instead of when you're simply making a suggestion.

Step 3

For the Child: The Child Answers

After you give an instruction to a child, it's important for the child to acknowledge it. We encourage parents to teach their children to say, "*Okay, Mom,*" or "*Okay, Dad.*" This response tells you three things.

First, it tells you that your child heard what you said. How many times have you given an instruction and when you come back later you find your child playing. "*What are you doing? I told you to clean up these toys!*" you say with frustration.

And your child looks up and responds, "*I didn't hear you.*"

A response back eliminates that common excuse because the child is acknowledging the instruction.

The second thing the response says is that the child intends to follow through. It's like a verbal contract and your child has agreed to it.

Thirdly, the response gives you an indication of your child's attitude. If the child says, "*Okaaaaay Mooooom!*" then you know you have another problem. It's a heart issue that you need to address. An attitude is a window into your child's heart. Children need to learn how to receive instructions with a good attitude. It's here in the instruction process you get an indicator of the heart response.

Giving an answer is a skill that children need to learn. This response is helpful in family life and it's also good preparation for the future.

Employers like it when employees respond to instructions before they go and do the work. If the employee just walks off, the employer doesn't know what to think. "*Did she hear me? Is she going to do it? Is she mad at me?*" An answer just confirms the process and communicates that we're all on track. It's an honoring way to interact.

You're teaching your children now how to respond so that they'll make excellent employees someday. Or if they are managers themselves, they'll know what to expect and how to train employees for efficiency and cooperation. Answering back is part of a good Instruction Routine and helps children develop responsibility.



Pause and Reflect

How is my family doing in Step 3?

Parent: Give the Instruction

Child: The Child Answers

How am I doing with this step?

Very well OK Needs work

How is my child doing with this step?

Very well OK Needs work

Thoughts:

Step 4

For the Parent: Wait Expectantly

After you give the instruction it's your job to wait while the child does what you've asked. Of course, part of the definition of "parent" includes the reality that you're multi-tasking throughout the day. You don't have the luxury of standing around and waiting for a child to complete a task. But it's your job to communicate to your child that you haven't forgotten and you expect the task to get done.

In this step you're placing a weight of responsibility on the shoulders of

your child. Responsibility means that you can accomplish a task without reminders. It means that you have the job on your mental to-do list until you do it. You feel a little uncomfortable until you complete the task.

If your friend asked you to mail a package, you'd feel an obligation to get it done. You would feel the pressure of responsibility to complete the job.

Some children have a natural sense in this area, but many children have no idea what responsibility is all about. They don't feel uncomfortable with an incomplete job.

You may give an assignment to your daughter that she forgets before leaving the room. Or your son is distracted on the way to get his shoes, playing with a toy or watching the TV that's on in the living room. Your job in this step is to communicate to your son or daughter that you're waiting, and that he or she is not free until the job is completed. *"It's been two minutes and I don't hear the shower."* Or, *"Remember, Son, I'm waiting here for you to bring me that laundry."*

Sometimes "waiting" means that you actually stand in the hall and watch the task get done. You may have to offer little reminders. By communicating that you're waiting you give your child the gift of responsibility. Your children learn that when Mom and Dad give assignments they expect them to get done before anything else happens.

PRINCIPLE:
Responsibility
is the
uncomfortable
feeling of
unfinished
business.

Step 4

For the Child: Do the Job as if on a Mission

While you wait, the child completes the task. He needs to do what he was told to do. We have a word that describes the child who learns to complete assignments: responsible. It's an important quality for maturity. Some children demonstrate responsibility early in life while others lack it well into their teens.

Work hard to teach responsibility to children. You may even post some of

Define character in practical terms that your child can understand.

these definitions around the house so that children get an idea of what responsibility looks like:

Responsibility is completing a job without being reminded.

Responsibility reports back when the job is done.

Responsibility is the ability to stick to a job without having someone prodding you.

Responsibility abides by family values even when no one is watching.

Responsibility considers the intent of the request and does a thorough job.



Pause and Reflect

On a scale of 1-5, how would you rate your child's responsibility level?

Responsibility Level

(poor) 1 2 3 4 5 (excellent)

How is my family doing in Step 4?

Parent: Wait Expectantly

Child: Do the Job as if on a Mission

How am I doing with this step?

Very well OK Needs work

How is my child doing with this step?

Very well OK Needs work

Thoughts:

Note: In Step 5 the child’s part comes before the parent’s part.

Step 5 For the Child: Report Back

Reporting back is an adult skill that children can learn when they are young.

After your child does the job, the next thing is to report back and tell you that it’s done.

Some children don’t report back. In fact, they don’t even do the job. Then they feel guilty that the job isn’t done. They don’t want to see Dad because they know that there’s unfinished business. By forcing a child through to the end, you contribute to the freedom of a clear conscience.

Employers like it when employees report back. Managers often have their own to-do lists and wonder if the assigned jobs actually got done. A good employee will report that the job was finished just to complete the cycle and bring a sense of resolution in the mind of the manager as well.

Reporting back teaches children about accountability. It says that we’re working as a team here and this assignment is important to both of us. It demonstrates value for the parent who gave the job. You might even say, “*The job isn’t done until you report back.*”

Reporting back communicates to a parent, *“I know this job is important and I want you to know that I got it done.”* When children learn to report back they are demonstrating another dimension of responsibility.

Step 5

For the Parent: Inspect and Release

When the child reports back, the parent’s job is to inspect and release. Inspecting gives you the opportunity to do some teaching about thoroughness.

You may give your son the chore of cleaning up the kitchen. When you come back later, you find him playing on the computer. If you ask him why he’s playing he might say, *“I’m done in the kitchen.”* Your response should be, *“No, your job isn’t done until you report back. Let’s go check it.”*

When you inspect you may discover that your definition of “clean the kitchen” is a little different than his. This gives you the opportunity to clarify what you expect—that he wipe off the counters and clean out the sink. That’s part of the job.

After you inspect and the child completes the job, then it’s time to release.

This release is a gift you give to your child. It offers the same feeling you have on Friday afternoon when work is done for the week, *“Yippee! I’m free. I don’t have to worry about anything. I can enjoy my weekend.”*

PRINCIPLE:
Children learn
what you expect
by what you
inspect.

Your children need the same freedom several times a day. A clear conscience is a beautiful thing. One of the ways to obtain it is to complete the jobs given to you and then be released.

The weight of responsibility you placed on your child’s shoulders in Step 4, you take off in this step.

In some families the reward for reporting back is another job. *“Good, you finished that one. Here’s another one.”* That’s disappointing for any child. No wonder children don’t want to report back. It’s true that sometimes you must give a series of instructions to get the house clean or the homework done, but

make that clear in advance so that the child isn't surprised by another job.

The release is the reward for being responsible. It's the positive ending to the instruction process that can motivate a child to persevere. As children learn this routine, they learn to look forward to the sense of freedom that comes with being responsible.

PRINCIPLE:
A release gives children a freedom in their hearts.

Jesus wanted to teach his disciples about responsibility so in Matthew 25 he told the story of the landowner who gave talents to three stewards. Then he went away for a while, promising to come back.

Parents do a similar thing when they give an assignment to clean the room or finish homework, promising to return to check on the work.

When the landowner returned he found that two of the three stewards did a good job. Jesus uses the word "faithful" to describe them. That's the same thing we're talking about with the word "responsible."

Notice the landowner's response. *"Well done, good and faithful servant!"* We don't recommend that you use those words with your kids, but the idea is the same. *"Congratulations. You've done a good job."* Children need to hear that release and praise from their parents on a regular basis.



Pause and Reflect

How is my family doing in Step 5?

Child: Report Back

Parent: Inspect and Release

How am I doing with this step?

Very well OK Needs work

How is my child doing with this step?

Very well OK Needs work

Thoughts:

Putting it All Together

A good Instruction Routine means that both parents and children are making adjustments and doing the right thing. Remember, affirming your children goes a long way to increase their desire to cooperate more. You have five opportunities in this Instruction Routine to offer praise to a child who responds well. Don't wait until the child completes the whole routine perfectly to offer your praise. Give it out generously to encourage kids to continue to improve along the way.

Summary: **Instruction Routine**

- 1 Parent:** Get Close to Your Child
Child: Learn to Come When Called
- 2 Parent:** Consider the Timing
Child: Always be Ready to Receive an Instruction
- 3 Parent:** Give the Instruction
Child: The Child Answers
- 4 Parent:** Wait Expectantly
Child: Do the Job as if on a Mission
- 5 Child:** Report Back
Parent: Inspect and Release



Pause and Reflect

What aspects of a good Instruction Routine is my child already doing well?

Where is the best place for me to start to make some changes?

Here are some practical things I can do to bring about change in my child in this area.



Pause and Reflect

Personal Prayer

Preview: In the Next Chapter

Children believe some of the strangest things and those beliefs come out in behavior. In the next chapter you'll learn how to change what children believe in their hearts. Several practical ideas will equip you to help your children make lasting changes.

Reaching Deep into a Child's Heart

Some kids believe strange things such as, "If my brother is annoying, I have the right to punch him."

Read along in the book *Parenting is Heart Work*

Chapter 9 introduces the biblical concept of talking to oneself in the heart, referencing several Bible stories and scripture passages that give greater understanding. Some children are internal processors and it can be difficult to know what's going on in their hearts. Other kids are external processors. They say everything that's going on inside and they act out to solve their problems. Both kinds of children are wrestling with heart issues. Chapter 11 elaborates on meditation and how to help children develop healthy thought patterns. Meditation is usually considered a spiritual discipline, and certainly it is. But people also meditate on anger, fear, worry, and all kinds of unproductive things. Four suggestions are given in this chapter to help children change how they meditate.

If you were to take a tour of your child's heart, you would find several items of interest. You'd see things like emotions, values, convictions, thoughts, fantasies, and desires. In short, the heart is the place where a child's beliefs turn into commitments.

The heart is the central processing unit of a person. Jesus said, "*Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.*" (Matthew 12:34) If you can help children change their hearts, then you'll see lasting change in their lives.

Unfortunately, many children believe things that aren't true or they have erroneous thoughts about life. Their conclusions are based on too little information or they are naïve. They have an inner dialogue going on but the discussion is rather short or the same things are repeated over and over again and then actions follow rather quickly.

The heart is the central processing unit of a person.

The heart is the place where children talk to themselves. Over 25 times the Bible uses the word "heart" to refer to this inner dialogue. In fact, the King James Version actually translates these passages, "he said in his heart." Esau, after being tricked by his brother was angry and "he said in his heart, *I'm going to kill my brother Jacob.*" (Genesis 27:41) Psalm 14:1 reads, "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.'" When God told Abraham that he was going to have a son in his old age, Abraham laughed and said in his heart "*shall a child be born unto him that is 100 years old?*" (Genesis 17:17). Mary "pondered all these things in her heart," as she watched Jesus grow up.

In each of these cases the inner dialogue people have with themselves takes place in the heart. Heart work is the churning that happens as a person wrestles toward a conclusion or resolution.

It's here that you can do significant work in your child's life. If you could influence the things your children believe about life, or the principles that govern their actions, you'd be much more successful at molding who they are and deal with some of the difficult ways they relate.

A Behavior-Based vs. A Heart-Based Approach to Parenting

Let's distinguish between two different parenting approaches.

Behavior Modification • Uses rewards and punishments to alter a child's actions or reactions (usually appealing to the child's selfishness to motivate that child in a particular direction).

Examples of Behavior Modification

"You can go out and play after you clean your room."

"You can watch a video if you finish your homework."

"If you don't come now you'll have to go to bed early tonight."

Children usually respond to this kind of approach because there's something in it for them, either something they want or something they fear. Behavior modification works in the short run. It gets kids to do what you want, but it isn't the best way to solidify long-term change.

Heart-Based Parenting • Challenges the beliefs, desires, and conclusions in a child in order to mold that child's inner character, goals, and attitudes about life.

The heart is the lens through which children see the world.

Children who respond to behavior modification learn to please people when there's something they get out of it. This *"You can have what you want if you do what I say"* mentality appeals to a child's selfishness. A heart-based approach is much deeper. It addresses how children process life. The heart is the lens through which children see the world. If the lens is clouded with selfishness, it's no wonder kids act out or only consider what's in it for them.

Samuel had a very significant turning point in his life when he was choosing a new king for Israel. God sent him to Bethlehem with instructions to find the family of Jesse. It was from this family that the new king would come. As

There's a different way to look at your kids and it has to do with the heart.

Samuel looked at the sons he was convinced that it must be Eliab. He was tall and handsome. He even reminded Samuel of Saul, the former king.

But God wanted to teach Samuel an important lesson. It's the same lesson that we all need to hear. God said, *"Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."* (1 Samuel 16:7) What a different way to approach life! The light bulb must have gone on in Samuel's head. *"Wow, if I only would have known this before. Maybe I could have helped Saul be a better king."* The ramifications were great. It was a new way of looking at people.

Parents need that same new realization that Samuel experienced. There's a different way to look at your kids and it has to do with the heart. It's not easy. It takes more time and work, but a heart-based approach to parenting changes children on a deeper level. It's worth it.

One mom said, *"But it's the behavior that's causing so many problems. This all sounds great but we have to get the homework done and the bedroom cleaned up."* This mom is right. You can't ignore behavior. In fact, it's often the behavior that indicates to parents what's going on in a child's heart. Yes, you have to correct children for behavior but there's much more to discipline. When you have an eye on the heart, it even means you change the way you address behavior issues in your kids.



Pause and Reflect

Here are a few ways I have typically used behavior modification with my child:

What's a situation when I've touched my child's heart during discipline? I could see that I'd gotten through on a deeper level.

Figuring It Out

Children often process their emotions and issues in unproductive ways. They end up saying things in their hearts that lead them down the wrong paths. It's no wonder they act out. Here are some examples of things children believe, sometimes not even realizing it.

Anger

My anger is justified because my brother is annoying.

My anger works to get me what I want.

Other people make me angry. My anger isn't my fault.

If I'm miserable, other people are going to pay.

Procrastination

If I leave it alone, someone else will do the job.

I'll have more time and energy later to do this.

I just don't feel like doing it, so I'll wait until I feel like it.

I'm tired. I've had a hard day. I deserve a break.

Many of the long-term issues your children experience come as the result of errors in their belief system.

Clothing Styles

I have to have those jeans to be cool.

I can't show my face in public if I don't have my nails done.

Keeping up with the latest styles is worth it, whatever the expense.

Parents just don't understand the subject of styles.

Not all problems children face are the result of thinking errors. Sometimes kids just develop bad habits. Changing these patterns may be as simple as setting up some continual reminders. Then come the rest of the problems. Many of the long-term issues your children experience come as the result of errors in their belief system.

Consider this example:

One mom brought her son, Jordan, age seven, to our office for counseling because he was always negative about life. Everything was bad. When people tried to give him an idea he would always find the bad side of it. He had something negative to say about just about everything that happened. This pattern didn't only involve his words. Jordan had been labeled with ODD (Oppositional Defiant Disorder) because whenever you asked him to do something he would resist. The problem not only occurred with his parents but he even acted this way with his friends.

We began working with Jordan using a heart-based approach. We gave the parents instructions about how to treat Jordan and suggestions about ways to engage him in different kinds of dialogue so that they could address the things he was saying in his heart. I (Scott) talked with him about Eeyore in the story of Winnie the Pooh. I told him some other stories about people who were always negative and also about people who were encouraging. One activity I did with Jordan was to engage him in dialogue and give him seven flash cards, each with a statement. Then I began giving him advice about keeping his room clean and talking respectfully to his mom. In the past he always had an excuse or a negative

comment. He'd say, *"I already tried that and it doesn't work."* In this case he could only respond with one of the seven cards. They read, *"Oh, thank you."* *"I'll try that."* *"I like that idea."* *"That's interesting."* *"Okay."* *"I'll have to think about that idea some more."* and *"Yes."*

Jordan enjoyed the game. He laughed because the positive responses seemed so unnatural to him. I enjoyed watching him because you could see the wheels turning in his head. He was working with me to say new things, not only with his mouth, but also in his heart. The game was just one of the tools we used to provoke him to rethink and eventually change the patterns he had created in his heart.



Pause and Reflect

Imagine that you have a ten-year-old son who resists every instruction you give. He usually does what you ask but he reacts with a bad attitude. What might be some of the thinking errors going on in his heart?

The Library in the Heart

Children have a library in their hearts filled with books of things they think about and consider. When Madeline is angry with her mom she can sit and stew for a long time.

She goes to the anger section of the library in her heart and she churns. You can tell she's there because you hear her talking to herself. *"It's so unfair. I always get*

**The heart
is the place
where we
meditate.**

in trouble. No one ever listens to me. I hate this family...” and so on. Interestingly enough, it doesn’t take much to send Madeline back to that part of the library. Whenever she feels mistreated or she believes she’s gotten the negative end of a decision she goes back to the same books. It’s like she’s reading a script, the same script, over and over again.

The children who worry, or are fearful, or who boast, or are mean, or get easily angered all have one thing in common—a set of scripts they play over and over again in their hearts.

The biblical term for this kind of circular processing in the heart is meditation. Most people think about meditation in positive terms such as meditating on God’s Word, but many children meditate on things that are negative and thus head down the wrong path. The way a child meditates and the content of that meditation often determine the perspective that the child has toward life.

In Psalm 19:14 the psalmist says, *“May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord.”* Notice that the heart is the place where we meditate. Look for ways to influence what your children meditate on.



Pause and Reflect

What are some things that my child tends to meditate on?

- I want to have fun
- I’m treated unfairly
- I’m not worth much
- I hate my life
- I’m afraid
- I’m not very smart
- I need to be entertained
- I want to be with my friends

- I want more money and things
 - My brother is strange
 - My parents should buy me what I want
 - I should have as many toys as my friends
 - Other _____
-
-

Internal vs. External Processing

Be careful that you don't fall into the trap that says only children who act out are the ones who have problems in their heart. It's often the children who act out that get most of a parent's attention, but even the compliant child needs help processing life in his heart.

Even the compliant child needs help processing life in his heart.

Some children process life internally and others do it externally. All children need help though, and parents need to learn to see beyond behavior to what's going on in the heart.

Consider the story of the prodigal son. It's clear that the younger brother had a problem in his heart. He wanted to take his father's inheritance money. Then he left home and wasted it all. He was rebellious and his problem was obvious. He had to learn the hard way, but over time, he repented and returned home a more humble person. He changed some of the things he believed in his heart. His father was eager for him to return and welcomed him back with a party.

Up until this point in the story you think that the focus is only on the younger brother, but Jesus reveals an interesting, unexpected twist. The older brother seemed to be doing fine, but when the party started, some of his heart issues were revealed. He was jealous, angry, and resentful. He had his own heart issues that needed to be addressed.

Sometimes, the things that our children wrestle with are not so obvious. The quiet or compliant child also needs help processing life. Be careful that you don't only focus on children that are acting out and demanding attention. You may have to do that sometimes, because the ones who are having trouble need more attention at a given time. But don't neglect the hearts of the children who seem to be doing well. Sometimes their hearts are wrestling with things on the inside that you don't get to see.



Pause and Reflect

Is my child an internal or external processor?

What are the advantages and disadvantages for our family?

Can you actually change the hearts of your kids?

The bad news is the answer is “No.” That’s what makes heart-based parenting such a challenge. You can force a change in behavior but you can’t force a change of heart. God is the one who changes a child’s heart. So, that means you need to be praying for your kids often.

The ultimate solution for a person’s heart is salvation through Jesus Christ.

The ultimate solution for a person’s heart is salvation through Jesus Christ. God desires to come into a person’s heart and create new life. It’s a transforming work. Only because of God’s grace can anyone see significant changes take place in the heart.

Does that mean that you just give up and say, “*Oh God, it’s up to you to work on their hearts*”? No! The good news is that God uses a lot of tools to accomplish the deeper work in your children’s lives. One of those tools is parents. Consider these verses and notice the work of parents on the hearts of their kids.

My son, keep your father’s commands and do not forsake your mother’s teaching. Bind them upon your heart forever; fasten them around your neck.

—Proverbs 6:20-21

My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart, for they will prolong your life many years and bring you prosperity.

—Proverbs 3:1-2

God designed parents for children and children for parents. It’s no accident that you have your kids in your family. God wants to do a work in your children through you, so you have the responsibility to be looking for ways that you can touch their hearts. Look for ways to adjust the paradigm that directs their lives and the operating principles that govern their behavior.



Pause and Reflect

One heart quality that I'm asking God to bring about in my child is... (Examples may be things like gentleness, confidence, cooperation, or self control.)

Notice that there are thoughts in the heart, not just in the mind.

Along with prayer, remember that the scriptures are also a powerful tool that touches the heart.

The psalmist says *"I have hidden your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you."* —**Psalm 119:11**

Hebrews 4:12 describes the word of God as sharper than any double-edged sword... penetrating the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. —**Hebrews 4:12**

Notice that there are thoughts in the heart, not just in the mind. Use the scriptures as you work with your children. Tell Bible stories to your preschoolers. Raise ethical issues with your teenagers. Dialogue about honesty and lying and about those stories in the Bible where it appears that someone might have been saying something that was not true. Talk about these issues because your children are developing a value system and you want the scriptures to be right at the core of their hearts.

As you pray for your children and use the scriptures in training, consider these suggestions to help your children change what they believe in their hearts.

Practical Tools for Heart Change

1 • Focus on the Heart

Typically a parent will say, *“Anthony, stop hitting your brother. Now say you’re sorry and play nicely.”* That approach focuses on behavior and doesn’t address the heart. Instead you might say, *“Anthony, you’re being mean to your brother. It sounds like you’ve got a problem in your heart. Take a Break and come back and see me when you’re ready to talk about the way you’re treating Steven.”*

Look for opportunities to talk about the heart with your children. You might even ask a direct question like, *“What are you saying in your heart?”* or *“We need to talk about honesty and why it’s so important.”* Dialogue can reveal things that are going on inside and give you opportunities to reflect or help make changes.

Sean, a fifteen-year-old boy, came to our office to work on his anger. His parents brought him in so when we were alone with Sean, we asked, *“Did your parents drag you here, or is this something you want for yourself?”*

“Oh no, I want this,” he said, *“I really need to work on anger. It’s a problem for me.”*

“Great, we’ll go a long way here if you really want to work on this. Let us give you some ideas.”

Sean came back the next week and we asked, *“How did it go?”*

“Well, I had a lot better week. I had a terrible day on Monday, but I did well for the rest of the week.”

“What was it that helped you do better this week?”

“Well, I really liked what you said about playing the little game in my

God likely placed this annoying brother in his family so Sean could learn to deal with his anger.

head about being more tolerant.”

We had explained to Sean that there is a tolerance meter inside every one of us. This young man happens to live with an annoying brother. (God likely placed this annoying brother in his family so Sean could learn to deal with his anger.) We told him, *“God wants you to increase the level on your tolerance meter. When you have the level set so low, then a small annoyance triggers alarm and you start losing control. What we want to help you do is to increase your tolerance. If you can increase the level on your alarm system in your life, you’ll be more effective. So play a game in the course of the day and say to yourself, ‘Let’s see if I can be in this environment where I’m being annoyed by my obnoxious brother and not get so upset.’ ”*

Now Sean was saying, *“It worked!”*

What we did with Sean, and what you can do as a parent, is adjust the way your children think in their hearts about anger. This young man had believed that his anger was justified because his brother was annoying, and he believed that he couldn’t control himself in those situations. We needed to change the things Sean said in his heart and help him believe something completely different.

This is just one of many ideas we shared with Sean over several weeks, but it’s an example of how he’s changing the way he talks to himself in his heart.



Pause and Reflect

I commonly have a problem with my child in this area:

What might my child believe that contributes to the conflict?

2 • Track Thinking Errors

We find that parents often benefit from writing down the thinking errors. Sometimes these are actual words that come out of a child's mouth. Other times you have to do detective work, asking the question, "What does my child believe that allows this kind of behavior?"

By using this kind of systematic approach parents are able to counter their tendency to react on the spot. Taking mental notes for a while allows parents to get a bigger picture of what errors they're working with. What does your son say when he's angry? What does he mumble under his breath as he's stomping to his room? What does he say when he thinks no one is listening?

One dad says, "I read my newspaper in the playroom where my kids are. I used to just send them in there to play, but now I realize that I benefit from hearing what they are saying. I have one boy who is rather selfish and he says all kinds of selfish things over and over again. Now I'm hearing what he believes in his heart, and I'm able to plan a strategy to address those thinking errors at different times."

It's not always best to challenge a child on the spot. It's often better to look for patterns. If a child is demanding in the morning about what he's going to eat for breakfast, he's likely to be demanding about what he's going to wear,

**Demandingness
is a heart
problem.**

demanding about where he's going to sit in the van, and demanding about what's going to happen later on in the day. Demandingness is a heart problem.

This approach is especially helpful for children who are dealing with deeply rooted problems that seem to show up over and over again. Sometimes parents say, "I've tried everything. It doesn't work." We suggest a heart-based approach and give them an assignment to start journaling without responding to the situation. It's amazing what ideas jump off the paper as you look back over your notes.

Krista is 12 years old. She's quite responsible at school but she's revealing a number of fears. Mom began journaling and noticed that her daughter asked a lot of questions. "What happens if I have a test that I didn't know about?" "What happens if I fail?"

"What happens if I'm not prepared for that test?" "What's going to happen to my grade?" "What's going to happen to my privileges at school if I don't do well in this class?" As Mom evaluated Krista's dialogue she realized that her daughter was talking herself into being anxious. She was taking responsibility too far and becoming overly fearful of daily possibilities. Once Mom understood what was going on, she was able to help her daughter by talking about fear and about peace.

Mom helped Krista work on her own heart by recognizing the negative patterns and learning to replace them with more constructive responses.



Pause and Reflect

What are some beliefs about chores or work that create problems for my child in family life? Remember, beliefs are indicated by behavior.

3 • Be Intentional

Plan how you're going to respond. When you have a reactive discipline style you often miss heart opportunities. It's usually better to pull back, plan a little, and then respond. Children like to push their parents' buttons. Be careful. If you want to help your child change on a heart level, planning is important.

Being intentional means that you wait for teachable moments in order to maximize your comments. Some children don't afford many teachable moments and require that you create them.

Plan how you're going to respond. When you have a reactive discipline style you often miss heart opportunities.

For example, Randy says, *"When it comes to work, I just do the minimum so I can go and have fun."* Dad recognizes this statement as an operating principle in Randy's life. Furthermore, Dad knows that it will contribute to failure; it's just an indication of laziness and a poor attitude toward work. Just hearing the comment sets Dad on edge and ready to react with intensity, but he realizes that this is a teaching opportunity

and decides to postpone his comments until he thinks about them a bit, planning for maximum impact.

Dad asks himself, *“How is that attitude different than mine? How do I hang in there when I don’t feel like working? What things do I say to myself? What are the operating principles in my heart that keep me going when I don’t feel like completing a job?”* Just asking these questions prepares Dad with some mature ways to process this kind of thinking.

Teaching the heart is 20% information and 80% theater. That means the way you package and present the information provides greater impact. When you’re teaching your child you **can** just try to cram in information, but the presentation can mean the difference between responsiveness and resistance.

One mom told us this story. She asked her 14-year-old son to mow the lawn. He looked up at her and said, *“I don’t understand why you’re asking me to mow the lawn. You stay home and don’t do anything all day. I go to school. You should mow it.”*

Well, those were fighting words for her, but Mom walked right out of the room and was quiet. Her son was trying to figure out what she was going to do with this, because she could have blown up quickly with that kind of comment.

Mom came back a few minutes later with grief evidenced on her face and said to her son, *“You know, it hurts my heart when you make those kinds of statements. It seems as though you don’t even recognize the things I do around here.”* Then she walked back out again. She didn’t continue to dialogue, she just walked away.

That response of sorrow, instead of anger, touched her son’s heart and he came back to her a few minutes later and said, *“I’m sorry, Mom. That wasn’t the right thing to say,”* and he went out to mow the lawn.

Mom *chose* her response instead of just reacting. Touching someone's heart deals with motivation; it addresses what is believed. Be intentional and consider the best approach before you make your presentation. Look for the best time and the best words so that the truth will explode with impact. Too often parents try the explosion method, but it's their anger that's exploding. This approach makes little impact on the heart and often creates more resistance than anything else.

Look for the best time and the best words so that the truth will explode with impact.



Pause and Reflect

Do I tend to react or plan my parenting responses?

How can I adjust in order to make a more lasting impact?

Don't allow your impatience to create a bigger problem.

4 • Be Patient

Adjusting the things that are going on inside a child's heart takes time. You may be able to change behavior on the spot, but a change of heart doesn't come as easily. You're often working on deeply imbedded operating principles that are rather stubborn at times. Hang in there and look for movement in the right direction.

Parental expectations can become the enemy of growth. You probably have lists of things you'd like to teach your children, things that have to do with cleanliness, perseverance, thoroughness, or self-control. And you've been trying to teach these things for a long time. It takes patience to teach a child how to overcome an anger problem or to become more responsible. Don't allow your impatience to create a bigger problem.

Patience doesn't mean that we talk without action, however. Sometimes, children need a crisis in order to motivate them to change. God did this with Saul of Tarsus, who became the apostle Paul. He was going one direction, full speed ahead, and God said I want to turn you around 180 degrees, but first I have to change what you believe in your heart. So God used a crisis in his life to bring him to a place where he was able to readjust the paradigm and get to know Jesus.

It was a crisis in Jonah's life, living in a fish for a couple of days, that made him uncomfortable enough to repent and adjust what he believed about obeying God and then, be willing to go to Nineveh. Sometimes you must create a crisis in a child's life, by disciplining and saying, *"We're not going to live this way anymore. I'm sorry. We need to move forward and that means we're going to stop what we're doing here. We're not going to let you continue."*

Patiently work toward the long-term goal of heart change. Be creative and look for many ways to touch your child's heart. Part of the challenge is that children know information in their heads long before they believe it in their hearts. It takes time to motivate children on that deeper level and to help them integrate what they know into their life choices.



Pause and Reflect

Am I impatient? Am I motivated to help my child change?

How can I balance patience with determination to hang in there with my kids?

5 • Affirm Positive Change

When children start moving in the right direction, be sure to let them know. When your child begins to do the right thing you might say something like, *“You were having a lot more trouble getting along with your sister last month than you are this week. It appears that you’ve made some significant changes. I’m pleased with the progress. What are you saying differently to yourself?”* Or, *“What are you thinking that is changing the way you act?”* As you listen to the answers, affirm the internal changes. Sometimes small heart changes can have a large effect on behavior. When you see positive movement, let your child know.

When you see positive movement, let your child know.

Too many times parents see small steps of change and they use those moments to share more lessons to be learned. These parents then become critical

and children feel like they can't measure up. The solution is to help children make small steps in the right direction. Sometimes parents look at how far a child has to go instead of how far he's come. Don't make that mistake. Give yourself the freedom to affirm approximately right behavior. Don't wait until your children have it all right before you start affirming them. Motivate them along as soon as they start moving in the right direction and pour on that praise and encouragement to keep them moving.

Another way you can affirm positive changes in children is to help them integrate what they believe in one area of their lives into other areas as well.

For example, Marcy, age nine, was bothered by the fact that she was adopted. Marcy was also homeschooled and enjoyed homeschooling very much. Mom saw that Marcy enjoyed talking about homeschooling even with strangers, but when the subject of adoption came up in any conversation, she was embarrassed. She just didn't know how to respond and apparently believed that adoption was some kind of second-rate status.

Mom chose to use Marcy's positive beliefs about homeschooling to strengthen Marcy's beliefs about adoption. She said the following, *"Marcy, yesterday when we were in the grocery store and the man said, 'Oh, aren't you in school today?' you proudly said, 'No, I'm homeschooled!' You seem confident and even proud of the fact that you're homeschooled.*

"But when someone asks you a question about adoption you wilt. I love adoption because when we understand adoption in a human family, we understand about God adopting us into his family. It's the best way to have kids!"

As Mom continued to share about the benefits of adoption and compared it to homeschooling, she watched her daughter develop a greater confidence. Mom successfully tied one unique thing about Marcy to another and helped her develop some positive beliefs and ways to share them with others.

Yet another way to affirm change in your child is to envision a positive future. Identify things your child is doing well, even if it's just small indicators, and envision what the result of that kind of character or quality may look like when the child grows up. For example, *“Jonathan, you’re a hard worker. I can tell that you put yourself into your work. That’s going to be so helpful for you as you grow up, because a lot of people slack off and don’t do a good job. With that kind of character you’re the one who’s going to get good jobs and get promoted and people will like to have you working for them.”* By envisioning a positive future, children are encouraged to live today with more confidence.

By envisioning a positive future, children are encouraged to live today with more confidence.



Pause and Reflect

What positive change can I affirm in my child today?

Putting it All Together

Changing what children believe in their hearts is not an easy task. It takes time, planning, and work. But one of the greatest things you offer your children is helping them understand how to integrate what they believe into life. If they believe wrong or unhelpful things, look for ways to teach them important truths about life. The daily work of interacting with your children often provides insight into their hearts and opportunities to influence their beliefs and attitudes.

Summary: **Reaching Deep into a Child's Heart**

- Behavior modification is inadequate.
- Heart-based parenting challenges the beliefs, desires, and conclusions in a child in order to mold that child's inner character, goals, and attitudes about life.
- Children are internal or external processors.
- God changes a person's heart. So spend time praying for your kids.
- God uses parents to mold the hearts of kids.
- Suggestions for touching a child's heart:
 - 1 • Focus on the Heart
 - 2 • Track Thinking Errors
 - 3 • Be Intentional
 - 4 • Be Patient
 - 5 • Affirm Positive Change



Pause and Reflect

What strategies am I already using to change what my child believes?

What are some additional ways I can help my child make changes in beliefs and thinking errors?

Personal Prayer

Preview: In the Next Chapter

One of the challenges for most parents comes when they must correct their children. How can you correct kids in ways that touch the heart? Because correction is often met with resistance, children need strong-willed parents who won't get sucked into a battle but will stand their ground. At the same time, the way parents correct can mean the difference between touching the heart and just contributing to another layer of rebellion. Whether children are three or eighteen, they need the practical tools offered in the next chapter.



3

Correction Ideas that Touch the Heart

Time Out is a sentence given to a child for a crime committed and you are like the policeman keeping him there.

A Break is a refreshing new approach.

Read along in the book *Parenting is Heart Work*

Correction is foundational to any parenting strategy. In fact, God values correction as he works with his children. Over and over again, God corrected people in the scriptures. He wanted heart change and he called it repentance. Chapter 14 takes apart the biblical concept of repentance and defines it in practical terms. It then offers hands-on tools for helping children change their hearts, not just their behavior. Chapter 15 discusses how a Break can be an excellent parenting tool to touch the heart. In particular, the Break transfers the responsibility for change to the child, a welcome concept in most homes.

Children need correction. It's part of the job of parenting. But unfortunately, correction is rarely appreciated by kids. They often resist, explode with anger, or react with a bad attitude. Parents sometimes respond with their own anger, further complicating what is already a difficult process.

Before you can adequately help your child change, you need to develop a positive attitude toward correction yourself. Correction is something children will experience all their lives. It never ends and it's a vehicle for gaining wisdom. Proverbs 6:23 says *"the corrections of discipline are the way to life."* Parents must accept that correction is part of the job description of a parent, an opportunity to teach wisdom, not just something to be tolerated. It's an essential tool for training.

Of course, if children can learn to accept correction when they're young, they will learn faster, and mature more quickly.

Correction is like a detour. It's an interruption to the flow of life. Parents don't like these detours because they have to be the tour guides. You're trying to get some bills paid and your child starts whining about being bored. You sit on the couch for a few minutes of peace and quiet and your kids start fighting and require your attention. Parents have their own agendas and the detours can be frustrating at times.

In these moments parents are tempted to use anger and yelling as their primary tool for disciplining their children. In this chapter you'll learn another way to correct. Not only will you gain some techniques, but you'll also learn how to challenge a child on a heart level. But first you need to deal with your own expectations. Correction is part of the job of parenting. It's not optional. Once you accept it, you'll feel less frustrated and become more effective.



Pause and Reflect

How do I view correction in my own life?

How do I feel about correcting my children?

A Good Correction Routine Addresses the Heart, Not Just Behavior

A good detour requires a plan and so does correction. As you consider various strategies for correction, it's important to address your child's heart. Sometimes we get so focused on the things our children do that we miss the heart altogether.

But God is not only interested in your child's behavior. He is also concerned with the heart. Jesus criticized the Pharisees, saying that they looked good on the outside but their hearts were still not changed. He said, *"First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean."* (Matthew 23:26)

Focusing on behavior change is not enough. Many parents work hard to help their children look good on the outside. Inadvertently, these parents teach their children "image management," the ability to appear good, clean, and nice.

But when children do the right things for the wrong reasons, their hearts become hard. They learn to harbor pride and anger and selfishness inside. The long-term results are disastrous.

Sometimes when children resist, parents resort to

A good correction routine addresses the heart, not just behavior.

bribes and threats to motivate their kids in the right direction. Be careful, because these behavior modification techniques appeal to the selfishness of a child, rarely producing long-term change.

Instead, parents need to do the hard work of correction. Don't be afraid of your child's emotions. Kids sometimes use emotional dramatics to manipulate parents. Hang in there. Heart-based parenting is hard work but it's worth it in the end.

Approach 1: **Use Words**

When your child needs correction, start with words. If the child changes, then words are all you need. One dad says to his teenagers, *"Can we just use words here? Let's not go to the next step."* You might say to your eight-year-old who didn't come when called, *"I'm trying words first, but if that doesn't work, we'll have to go to the next step."*

We start with words because that's how God disciplines us. He starts with his Word.

In 2 Timothy 3:16 we read that the scriptures are *"useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness."* God's Word corrects us if we listen. If not, then God also goes to the next step with us.

Responding to words of correction is an adult skill. Adults use words to correct each other regularly and change takes place. In fact, that's the preferred form of correction for someone who is mature. Children often need more than words, but don't miss this important step. Even when you have to go to the next step, or use a consequence with your kids, talk with them. Encourage them to respond to words next time instead of waiting for further correction.

**There's a time
to stop talking
and start acting.**

The goal of discipline is a change of heart. If children can make the necessary adjustments in response to words, then you can stop there.

When a child needs correction you may start by restating the instruction or by giving a warning. Don't confuse warnings with threats.

Threat • an emotional response usually spoken out of anger or desperation with an exaggerated or ambiguous consequence, rarely leading to a follow through.

Examples of Threats

“If you don’t clean up these toys right now, I’m going to throw them all away!”

“If you don’t come with me now, I’m going to leave you here!”

Warning • restates the rule or instruction and previews what will happen if they don’t obey. It’s not emotional, but it’s matter-of-fact.

Examples of Warnings

“Jimmy, if you don’t get your shoes on now, you’re going to lose the privilege of going to your friend’s house.”

“Mary, if you’re unkind to your sister, you’ll have to work here in the kitchen with me.”

Only give one warning and don’t get trapped into using words over and over again when you really should move to the next step. Too much dialogue in the correction process can become unproductive. There’s a time to stop talking and start acting. As you correct your children, find a careful balance that allows you to teach them that words are the first tool for correction but if words don’t work then you’ll go to something else that will.



Pause and Reflect

How am I doing at Using Words in the correction process?

How well does my child do at responding to words of correction?

Further thoughts:

Many times children respond to words, but sometimes they don't, so you have to be ready for a next step.

Approach 2: **Use a Break vs Time Out**

A Break is a good next step for several reasons:

- A Break is a versatile tool you can use both at home and in public.
- A Break focuses on heart change, not just behavior.
- A Break has biblical roots and exemplifies a strategy God uses in his family, the Church.
- A Break moves the responsibility for change to the child.

As you use a Break with your children, you will see them make attitude adjustments, not just behavior changes. You'll find yourself getting to the root of disobedience and you'll help your children make mature decisions. Most importantly, right before your eyes, you will see your children begin to choose to do what's right.

A Break focuses on heart change, not just behavior.

Here's how it works. When a child is disobedient, upset, or wild, tell him that he needs a Break. With children as young as two or three years of age, have them sit in an assigned place, such as a chair, a carpet square, a hallway, or the bottom step.

For teens you may decide that the place is not important but that life stops for the child until you talk together and reach some form of resolution. The instruction given is simple and clear. *"You need to take a Break and change your heart. Come back and see me when you're ready to talk about this."* The child learns that the objective in a Break is a changed heart.

The Child is Sent on a Mission to Change the Heart

If you ask your son to take the garbage cans out to the street and he responds with a bad attitude, then it's time to take a Break. Attitude is a window into a child's heart. Grumbling in children can easily grow into dissatisfaction and resentment. Children use a bad attitude to communicate their unhappiness to others. Not only is it an unhealthy response to disappointment or displeasure, but it also can be a form of manipulation, an attempt to punish parents.

"Carl, I don't like the attitude I'm seeing. You need to go take a Break. Sit on the steps until you're ready to come and talk to me about the problem."

Sometimes parents have children sit down for a set amount of time. This approach misses the point. When parents set a timer, then their children are serving a sentence for a crime committed and it's the parent's job to act as policeman to keep them there until the time is up. The heart isn't even addressed.

When children do the wrong thing or respond inappropriately, send them on a mission to change the heart. You'll see some significant change.

Break vs Time Out

The Break transfers the responsibility for change to the child.

A Break is very different than Time Out. In Time Out children must serve a sentence for a crime they've committed and the parents' role is to keep the child in that place until the time is up. The Break is much different because the responsibility for change is moved to the child.

	Time Out	Break
Goal	punishment	repentance
Focus	behavior	heart
Length of Time	determined by parent	determined by child
Role in Discipline	a consequence	part of the training process
Responsible Party	parent has responsibility for the child's reentry	child has responsibility for making changes and returning
Attitude of the Parent	emphasizes distance between parent and child	emphasizes the parent's desire for the child to return

In response to one of our email parenting tips, one mom wrote,

“I appreciated today’s tip very much. It’s an additional reinforcement for me today. About a month ago, one of your tips had a similar message ‘Take a Break vs. Time Out.’

“My son is ten. I was then using the time out method. It seemed like he had determined to get over the ten minutes thing, real fast, with a bad attitude. However, once I started using the Break method, my son responded differently. I felt that we were beginning to connect on a deeper level regarding the problem at hand. Ricky seemed to get an opportunity to think more about the offense and also to decide if there was a better way to deal with it, while sitting at the bottom step of our stairway.

“After a few weeks of consistency with this method, my son is getting used to learning to manage some of his emotions better. I would even go so far as to say that there is some internalization of the process of managing his choices of behavior and of course self-control. Sometimes when he is about to say something that is unkind to me...an old pattern...he will catch himself and say, ‘Mom I stopped myself, I was going to say something that was not nice, but I changed my mind!’

“And I know it has a lot to do with the Break idea.”

Thank you, Cynthia

You may be thinking, “My children don’t know how to change their hearts.” Children may not understand how it happens but with practice they are able to change their hearts. You may have to teach them more about this significant aspect of discipline. A change of heart is what God calls “repentance” and involves these steps:

A change of heart is what God calls “repentance.”

Biblical Steps to Repentance

- 1** Stop fighting, calm down, and be willing to talk about the problem. (Jeremiah 8:6 describes an unrepentant person as a horse charging into battle.)
- 2** Acknowledge I did something wrong. (I Kings 8:47 describes the repentant person as saying, “*We have sinned. We have done wrong.*”)
- 3** Recognize that there’s a better way.
- 4** Commit to doing right. (In Jeremiah 34:15 God said to the people, “*Recently you repented and did what is right in my sight.*”)

These are all steps that a child can do. Ideally we would also like to see two other steps take place:

- 5** Feel sorrow for doing wrong. (2 Corinthians 7:10 says, “*Godly sorrow brings repentance.*”)
- 6** Have a desire to do what’s right. (In Romans 7:15 Paul wrote, “*What I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.*” Even in the internal struggles of the heart there is a desire to do the right thing.)

Now, that may sound like a lot, but children grow into this process slowly and we can help them through the steps. If your daughter has been disrespectful, first she needs to stop and settle down and be willing to work on the problem. Then secondly, she needs to acknowledge that she was wrong. Thirdly, she needs to accept that there’s a better way to respond. And lastly, she needs to commit to trying to do better next time.

We can’t expect children to work through all of these aspects of repentance alone. In fact, complete repentance requires maturity and the grace of God deeply at work in a person’s heart.

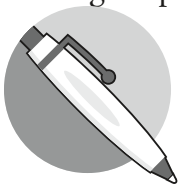
Most of the time parents only require step one before a child can come out of the Break. Just settle down, stop fighting, and be willing to work on the problem. When the child returns to the parent, then a debriefing can help the child work through the other steps.

We love to ask teenagers who attend our seminars, *“Are you learning anything? Is this helpful?”* One 17-year-old said recently, *“I like this Break idea. We could use this in our home. We tend to do a lot of yelling and this could help us remain calm.”*

One of the benefits of a Break is that it slows down the process and helps keep intensity down during conflict times.

“But,” you might ask, *“isn’t God the one who changes a person’s heart?”* Yes, it’s true that God’s grace working in a person’s life produces a change of heart. But the Bible also places emphasis on a person’s own responsibility to change the heart. Over and over again we see God requiring repentance on the part of individuals. Parents can teach children about this valuable spiritual skill every day as they do the work of correction with their kids. One of the most important aspects of a Break is that the child is sent on a mission to change the heart.

Even children as young as three or four years old, although not able to understand all the terminology, can understand having a soft heart or removing meanness from the heart. Using a Break with children when they’re young equips them to respond rightly to mistakes and problems as they grow older. When they’re disappointed and start yelling or crying, they need to learn to take a Break and settle down. The heart is the battleground. Teaching children to get alone and address their hearts, lays the foundation for developing character and making deep and lasting changes.



Pause and Reflect

Does my child handle correction well?

Yes No

Do I see a change of heart after correction?

Yes No

Which part of repentance is needed more?

Is the intensity level during correction high, causing increased conflict and tension?

Yes No

How might a Break help my family lessen the intensity during conflict times?

The Child Helps Determine the Length of Time Spent in the Break

One of the distinctives of a Break is that the child takes the initiative to return. When you send a child to change the heart you don't know how long that will take. Allowing the child to initiate back is important because too short of a time may not give adequate opportunity for the Lord to work in a child's heart. Too much time may discourage the child.

It's amazing how quickly some children are able to change their hearts. They can be so stubborn and disagreeable one minute and then be all smiles and

cooperative the next! You have them take a Break and they're ready to return in 30 seconds, sometimes even before you're ready to have them come back.

Other children can be pretty stubborn sometimes and need an hour or more in the Break before they're ready to come to the parent for a debriefing.

The child helps determine the length of time spent in the Break.

Allowing children to help determine the length of time spent in a Break transfers the responsibility for change from the parent to the child. This is a significant aspect of good correction. The child must do some heart work and then take initiative to come out of the Break.

Sometimes a child will try to return from the Break without changing the heart. You can tell because of the angry look or huffy voice. In that case, the child must return to the Break for more heart change to take place.

One dad told the story of seven-year-old, Sarah, who was yelling at her brother. Dad called her upstairs to talk about the problem and she began yelling at him. He told her that her response was inappropriate and to take a Break for a bit and settle down. About a minute later she came back but was obviously not changed. Her head was tilted down, her posture was slumping, and her bottom lip was sticking out. Dad didn't even have to talk with her. He just told her what he saw, *"Sarah, I can tell you're not ready yet. The way you're standing and the expression on your face all tell me that you still have a problem in your heart. I want you to go back to your Break until you're ready to come out with a changed heart."*

This time she stayed away for about 20 minutes and when she returned she was obviously different. In fact, Dad took her head in his hands and looked deep into her eyes and said, *"I can see your heart in there. It looks pretty nice right now. It looks like you're ready to talk about this."* Sarah giggled and then they continued to talk about the problem. Dad explained to her that she could not yell at her dad. Yelling is disrespectful even if she is angry. They also talked about the right responses she could have when she gets angry with her brother. Dad used a Break that day to help Sarah change her heart.

The length of time spent in the Break isn't the important thing. Frequently all that's needed is a reminder and the child is ready to change the heart and try again. It's like saying, *"Oh yeah, I know I shouldn't have done that."* In this case, the Break would be short, taking only a few seconds. Other times, because of stubbornness, a change of heart may take longer, 20 minutes or an hour or more. Either way, the child is encouraged to initiate when the Break is over. The goal is heart change. The child needs to at least settle down and be ready to work on the problem.

The Motivation to Come Out of the Break is That the Child is Missing Out on the Benefits of Family Life

Five-year-old Susie pushes her friend at the park. Mom may say, *"Susie, pushing is wrong. It's unkind. I'd like you to sit under this tree and take a Break. Change your heart and come back and see me when you're ready."*

You can't enjoy the privileges of this family unless you're willing to abide by the principles that make this family work.

What's Susie's motivation to come out of the Break? She's missing out on park time.

The same thing happens when you put your child in a Break. His motivation to return is that he's missing out on life.

All families have privileges associated with living in that family such as playing with toys or friends, watching TV or playing outside, talking on the phone or using the computer. Some children view these things as rights, not

as privileges.

The Break helps children see that life's privileges are lost when your heart is not right and you do the wrong things. The principle is this:

You can't enjoy the privileges of this family unless you're willing to abide by the principles that make this family work.

Children need this valuable lesson. It forces them to readjust their hearts.

Children, as do many adults, can go around believing things in their hearts that aren't true. They develop a paradigm of how life works. When a parent takes a stand and corrects a child with a Break, that child must reconsider the paradigm. Some children can be quite stubborn and a change of heart takes time. A Break is an excellent tool to force children to consider their hearts.

A Break is separation from involvement in family life, not separation from unconditional love.

The Break concept comes from the Scriptures. It's actually modeled after the way God expects his children to be disciplined in his Church. Matthew 18, 1 Corinthians 5, and 2 Corinthians 2 all give teaching about handling someone in the church who is unrepentant. If people don't respond to correction with words, then they are excommunicated or put out of the assembly so that they can't enjoy the benefits of fellowship for a time until they're repentant. Then they're welcomed back into the fellowship.

A Break is separation from involvement in family life, not separation from unconditional love. That's a very important distinction. You shouldn't withdraw your love or acceptance from your children. You simply don't allow them to participate in family life until they address their heart problem. They may have to sit alone or on a bench while others are having fun playing at the park.

This isn't just a plan for young children. Older children also need to learn to take a Break and address their hearts. Teens have an ability to yell at you one minute and then ask for money the next. You might say, *"I feel uncomfortable with you asking me to take you to the mall after the way you talked to me when you told me to leave your room an hour ago. We need to deal with that problem first."* Your teenager may not have to sit in the hall, but all privileges are suspended until you address the problem together.

The Break isn't designed to be a punishment. It's part of a good discipline process. As children learn to take a Break in family life, they'll learn the self-discipline to get out of a situation when they're tempted to do the wrong thing or say something that's inappropriate. The Break is an adult skill. When children grow up learning how to change their hearts, they can be much more productive and successful as adults.



Pause and Reflect

Think back on a recent correction time you had with your child. How would a Break have helped make the correction work better?

But You Don't Know My Kids

We've worked with thousands of families. Many parents, at first, question whether this plan will work. They can imagine the fits and temper tantrums, the defiance, and long battles. It is true that the Break takes some time to develop. Children often resist it. In fact, the Break is probably one of the most difficult of all the routines you'll learn from this material. But it's worth the work needed. Here are some ideas to make it a helpful routine in your family.

My Young Child Won't Go to a Break.

Over time children become accustomed to the Break but initially you can expect some resistance. I (Joanne) remember working with a three-year-old we'll call Markie. I was watching children for a Bible Study and Markie at one point needed to be corrected. I told Markie that he needed to take a Break. I told him to sit quietly in a particular spot and then come talk to me after he settled down and was ready to talk calmly.

Over time the resistance decreases and children develop the ability to calm themselves down.

Markie unfortunately had no intention of sitting still and quiet. I had to help him. I sat down on the floor with Markie on my lap. I put my arms around him and just

held him firmly until he settled down. I calmly said to him, *“I’ll relax my hold when you stop fighting.”* I continued to hold him and repeat these words in a soothing tone until he settled down and stopped fighting me. When Markie relaxed, I relaxed my hold on him, and we were able to talk together.

Working with children this way actually helps them gain self-control and learn to settle down. Over time the resistance decreases and children develop the ability to calm themselves down.

As with Markie, your young child may require that you sit in the Break or continue to put your child back into the Break place several times. This routine may be difficult to get started, but you’re teaching your child a valuable skill.

My Child Goes to a Break But Has a Tantrum While There.

Sometimes a child sent to a Break throws himself down, starts yelling and screaming, and says mean things. Be careful in these moments that you don’t enter into the tantrum. When parents try to talk the child out of this response the anger often escalates.

If the child has a temper tantrum or is defiant but goes anywhere near the Break place, just leave him alone and wait until he settles down. Remember that the next thing that must happen is that the child returns to you for a debriefing. You’ll be able to deal with the problem more effectively then.

After the child settles down, have a discussion about the initial problem, then send the child back to the Break to practice a better response. You might say, *“Okay, I think we’ve worked through the problem here but before I can let you go back to play, we need to talk about how you responded when I told you to take a Break. You yelled and screamed.*

That wasn’t right. So, I’m going to send you to a Break right now and I’d like you to show me that you can take a Break the right way.”

A willingness to accept correction is essential to success in life.

Some children will respond with another tantrum. Don’t be deterred. Remember that you’re working on the heart. A willingness to accept correction is essential to success in life. The work you do to teach a child to respond to a Break has long-term benefits. Hang in there to teach your child this new routine and then you’ll be able to use it often with success.

My Child Follows Me Around the House and Refuses to Go to the Break.

You may say to a child, *“I want you to take a Break”* and she says, *“NO, I don’t want to take a break! I want to talk about it now!”* You start walking away and she follows you around the house. The goal of this kind of behavior is to badger you and bait you to get involved in a fight. Don’t do it!

You want to say, *“Look, you’re in a Break right now and life is not going to continue for you until you do what I said and go sit down. I’m not going to fight with you.”* With an older child you might say, *“Your badgering isn’t going to work. You’re not going over to your friend’s house. You’re not going to be watching TV. You’re not going to have any of those privileges until you’re sitting down in the Break place. Once you settle down, then you can come back and we’ll talk.”*

My child stays in a Break for a long time.

Sometimes children brood in a Break or they even try to punish parents by refusing to come back. In most cases you’ll wait them out until they’re ready. But if you think a child is stuck and needs some coaching, then you might want to make some comments like, *“Remember, you can come out when you’re ready.”* Or, *“When you get done in the Break and talk with me, then you can go back out and play.”*

You’re changing the pattern, but new habits take time to develop.

Some children need help coming out of the Break and your encouragement may be just what’s needed to help them. If you’re just starting the Break your child may be hesitant to come out because she thinks that she’s going to get a lecture, or have to listen to your anger. Now you’re changing the pattern, but new habits take time to develop.

Encouraging your child out of the Break may be necessary as you’re developing the Break as a new routine.

My child comes back too early or doesn’t have a change of heart.

Some children want to return before they’re ready. In that case you’ll have to send them back to the Break again. You might say, *“I can see that your heart isn’t changed and that you haven’t settled down. You need to go back to the Break and settle down, before we can talk about the problem.”*

The child who continues to come back without a changed heart might be trying to manipulate you and avoid this new routine. In this case you could use a timer, but don't just have the child serve a sentence of time. Rather say, *“Because you keep coming back and you're not ready, I'm going to have you sit in the Break for ten minutes. You have to stay there at least until the timer goes off. Then you need to measure your heart and if you're ready, come and see me. But if you're not ready then don't come back until you've settled down and are really ready to talk about it.”*



Pause and Reflect

As I picture the Break in my family, how do I imagine my child will respond?

How can I prepare myself for any resistance I experience so that I can develop the Break as a routine in my family?

But my children are teenagers. Can I still have them take a Break?

Teens sometimes try to ignore their problems and pretend that everything is fine. You need to communicate that life can't continue on until they work out a particular problem. *"You can't go out, or talk on the phone, or be on the computer until you deal with this."* Teens often don't connect how their inappropriate behaviors affect others. They think they can just continue on after mistreating someone. By stopping the process you can teach them a valuable lesson.

You may choose to have your teen take a Break in the hall or on the porch, but often the Break simply means that life stops until he or she is willing to talk with you. Privileges are suspended.

Teens sometimes need to be forced into dialogue about offenses. That's not easy but it teaches them that conflict leads to resolution. We all know adults who avoid talking about problems or who just go along after offenses assuming that it's somebody else's problem. We're teaching teens a pattern now that they'll use for the rest of their lives. We want to equip them with relational success principles. It all starts with learning to take a Break and addressing their own hearts.

Learning to take a Break is an adult skill. Moms and dads also benefit from getting alone and quiet to examine their hearts and plan a different course of action. When parents teach their children to take a Break, they are equipping their kids with a valuable skill that will last a lifetime.

Putting it All Together

A complete change of heart takes a lifetime, but small, day-to-day changes contribute to this greater work. Small steps of right thinking and attitude adjustments lead to life-long patterns. It would be unreasonable to expect a lazy child to instantly change to a diligent one or an explosive child to immediately become self-controlled. When taking a Break children are expected to change the heart by either settling down for further instruction or by acknowledging the wrong and having a willingness to learn what to do right next time.

The Break isn't a tool you'll teach at bedtime or as you're trying to get out the door in the morning. In those moments you might just express disapproval and go on, but other times you'll be able to do more significant correction that touches the heart. The Break is this kind of tool.

If you're just starting to use a Break in your family, sit down with your child and explain the new plan. You might say, *"You're getting older now and it's time to start a new kind of discipline in our family. In fact, part of this I think you're going to like because it gives you greater control over how long the discipline lasts. We're going to use a Break when there's a problem and I want you to know what that looks like."* Describe what you're going to do and what you expect out of this new discipline approach.

In fact, with younger children you may even say, *"We're going to practice it right now so you know what it looks like. Let's imagine that we're having a problem. What kind of a problem do you think we could have? Let's pretend that you hit your brother. Let's say I walk into the room and see what's happening and I'll tell you to take a Break right over there by the couch. Go ahead and pretend you're taking a Break. I want you to decide when you're coming out."*

Have your child sit in a Break place and come back to you. *"Good! Good practice! We're going to do that later on."* Don't wait too long to practice again, either in a simulated situation or in a real discipline time.

The Break takes work to develop in family life but it pays huge dividends. It's the kind of tool you can use in a number of places, but the real benefit is that the child accepts responsibility for changing the heart.

When we teach children how to change their hearts, we give them a tremendous gift. It's a valuable skill that will benefit them for years to come.

Summary: **Correction Ideas that Touch the Heart**

- 1 • A good Correction Routine starts with words.
- 2 • If words don't work use a Break.
 - A Break moves the responsibility for change to the child.
 - A Break focuses on heart change not just behavior.
- 3 • Repentance starts by settling down and being ready to work on the problem.
- 4 • Starting to use a Break in family life is not easy but it's worth it in the end.



Pause and Reflect

The Break will be helpful in my family because...

One improvement I can make in my Correction Routine is...

Personal Prayer

Preview: In the Next Chapter

If words don't work you use a Break. But what if a Break doesn't work, then what? That's the topic of the next chapter. You'll learn seven categories of consequences you can draw from. You may just use one or a combination to motivate your child to change. We call it a Toolbox of Consequences and every family needs one. You'll not only learn what the tools are but you'll learn how to apply them in ways that change the heart.



4

A Toolbox of Consequences

The goal of discipline is a changed heart, not justice.

Strategy, then, becomes paramount.

Read along in the book *Parenting is Heart Work*

Sometimes when people talk about the heart they assume that God only changes hearts directly, but Chapter 10 explores the value of parental teaching in helping children adjust what they believe. Lecturing is different than teaching and expressing your viewpoint is different than touching a child on a heart level. Chapter 13 discusses the value of correction and how and why correction works in anyone's life. Unfortunately children often devalue correction or see it as an enemy. It takes work to correct children, and of course the way it's done can greatly influence its effectiveness.

One of the ways that parents train children is through the use of consequences. Choosing the best one for a particular offense though, can be a challenge. In fact, many parents tend to narrow their repertoire of consequences to a few, or they have a favorite one that they use over and over again. Taking away a privilege, going to bed early, or grounding a child are just a few parent favorites. Unfortunately, some parents even use anger as their primary consequence, punishing a child with harshness and distance.

It's like the one-tooled handyman. Every time something breaks, he has only one tool, a hammer. If a pipe leaks, he hits it with a hammer; if the air conditioner doesn't work, he hits it with a hammer. If the window is broken, he tries to fix it with a hammer. Of course that's absurd, yet many parents take that kind of approach to parenting. They have one tool, whatever their favorite might be, and that's what they tend to use in every discipline situation.

Furthermore, when the only tool you have is a hammer, every problem looks like a nail. Children are more complex than that. Their problems require a strategy in order for consistent growth to take place.

Unfortunately many parents resort to "reactive discipline." They see a problem and they react to it—usually with a lot of intensity but very little planning or strategizing. But if moms and dads are going to mold the hearts of their children, they need to do some planning and they need to choose the right tools.

Parents need a toolbox of consequences to help them work on the various challenges they face with their kids. But consequences are just a part of what we call "discipline." So before we get into specifics about individual tools, let's step back and ask some important questions about discipline in general.

Planning Your Discipline

Take a moment and read Hebrews 12:5-11. Write down some observations about discipline from this passage.

Keep these facts in mind as you evaluate consequences

- 1 Consequences are part of a bigger plan. Discipline means “to teach.” Children are in the God-given task of growing up. Consequences are only a part of the teaching process.
- 2 The goal is not justice, but training. Some parents have a “*chart mentality*” when it comes to discipline. “*You did this, so you deserve that.*” This kind of approach rarely touches a child’s heart.
- 3 Discipline requires patience and firmness over time. Children rarely change quickly. Most issues require that you develop a plan and work that plan with your children for quite a while before they develop the character necessary to continue on their own.
- 4 When you think “*consequences*” you have to think “*strategy.*” Plan consequences for maximum impact. Don’t give them impulsively. Don’t fall into the trap of reactive discipline.

When you think “consequences” you have to think “strategy.”



Pause and Reflect

Which of the above four principles do I need to work on or at least think more about?



Looking at a Map

When you think about your child's heart, imagine a map. You see a weakness in an area—you can identify what the problem is and where you'd like your child to be. You want to move from one place on that map to another. How are you going to do it? Consequences become a tool to help children see where they're going; they provide direction to know how to get there. Often they provide the motivation for a child to change.

Consequences are like roadblocks, signs, and detours on the road of life. Sometimes a consequence just gets the child's attention. It says to a child, "*Hey.*

Consequences then become a part of a bigger picture instead of a reaction of the moment.

We're going to work on this." Or, "*Be on the lookout for this problem because we'll be focusing on it for a while.*"

A map mentality to discipline allows parents to have a more strategic approach to parenting. Consequences then become a part of a bigger picture instead of a reaction of the moment.

A Toolbox of Consequences

We've identified several categories of consequences. You'll likely want to return to this chapter over and over again to help spark your creativity as you work with your child. **Remember that the goal is a changed heart.** Look for consequences that affect the heart in order to adjust the way children live, the things they believe, and their operating principles for life.

1 • Natural Consequences

Natural Consequences are the normal results of the choices your children make. They allow kids to receive correction from life. With Natural Consequences you don't have to be the bad guy because you're not giving the consequence, life is. In this way, Natural Consequences are your friend if you know how to respond when they happen.

Examples of Natural Consequences

Example #1

Karen plays rough with the cat and gets scratched.

Example #2

Bill leaves his soccer shoes out on the porch and they get wet in the rain.

Example #3

Rick forgets to take his coat to the park and he's cold.

Example #4

Jill is silly on the skateboard and falls off and skins her elbow.

Parents make an important choice when they see Natural Consequences happening with their children. They either align themselves with the child or they align themselves with the consequence. If you take the side of the consequence then you say things like, "I told you that *was going to happen.*" Or, "*See, if you'd just listen to me this wouldn't have happened.*"

The key to Natural Consequences is to express empathy.

The key to gaining the most out of Natural Consequences is to align yourself with your child by expressing empathy. "*Ouch! I'll bet that hurt. Come here and let me see.*" Genuine empathy places you on your child's side as a counselor or coach.

Be careful not to launch into a lecture when Natural Consequences hit home. Sometimes you might make a comment to help the child connect the consequence to a life lesson, but be careful that it doesn't appear to be a documentary. If you do, you'll likely lose the benefit and the child may resist receiving the lesson.



Pause and Reflect

Should I allow Natural Consequences to run their course or should I step in and rescue my child?

A Dilemma—What Would I Do?

Twelve-year-old Jason forgets his homework assignment at home. Mom finds the assignment on the table just as she's about to go out the door. She asks herself, *"Should I let him learn by experience or should I help him out?"*

What would I do?

The answer has to do with the map we mentioned earlier. What does Jason need to learn? On the one hand, if you're trying to teach him not to be careless about his homework, you might take advantage of the forgotten assignment to allow the consequence to bring a painful reminder.

On the other hand, families are a place where we take care of each other and help each other out. Each member in need can rely on others to take up the slack. If that's the principle you want to emphasize, then you take the forgotten homework to school with a smile.

Natural Consequences are helpful but they aren't the only tool. You must decide if and when to allow the lessons of life to teach and when to step in.

Natural Consequences are used in the Bible. Look up the following two passages and write down the lesson learned and the Natural Consequence that helped teach it.

Matthew 14:25-31

Lesson learned:

Natural Consequence that helped teach it:

Matthew 26:69-75

Lesson learned:

Natural Consequence that helped teach it:



Pause and Reflect

What's an example of something I've learned from Natural Consequences?

2 • Logical Consequences

Although Natural Consequences can be a great teacher, they must be abandoned when people or property are in danger or when they just will take too long to be effective. In those cases you might use Logical Consequences instead to communicate a similar message about life.

Examples of Logical Consequences

Example #1

Rick, age 5, and Tom, age 8, are digging holes in the front yard with a shovel, damaging the lawn. Dad steps in and stops them from digging and, as a consequence, requires that they stop playing and rake the leaves into piles. It's a Logical Consequence because destroying the yard is replaced with the task of improving it.

Example #2

Mindy, age 14, left her favorite coat at the gym again. Mom retrieves the coat but tells Mindy that she can't wear it for a week and must wear her old one instead. It's a Logical Consequence because actually losing the coat would mean not wearing it ever again.

Example #3

Tony, age 9, steals a pack of candy from the store. Mom takes Tony to the police station to have him talk to a policeman about the theft. It's a Logical Consequence because people who steal eventually get caught. Mom's just speeding up the process.

Example #4

Monte, age 4, continually slams his door when he's angry. Dad decides that he'll remove the door from Monte's room for a while. It's a Logical Consequence because eventually slamming a door means that you'd lose it because it would break.

Remember that the success of Logical Consequences rests partly on the ability of the parent to empathize with the child. *"Oh, I'm sorry that you did that, now you're going to have to be disciplined."*

In John 13:4-10, Jesus got up to wash the disciples' feet. Peter didn't want to participate, telling Jesus no. Jesus responded with a Logical Consequence that said, *"Then you can't be part of me."* Peter, realizing the significance of the washing, changed his mind and invited Jesus to wash his whole body. Peter got the message and changed his heart. Jesus used the warning of a Logical Consequence to teach Peter the important lesson.

The key to Logical Consequences is planning and thinking ahead.

Logical Consequences require some forethought. You can't jump right in, or react impulsively. It takes time to develop a good idea. The goal is to look for a consequence that teaches a lesson similar to the Natural Consequence in the situation.



Pause and Reflect

How have I used, or could I use Logical Consequences in my family?

3 • Restricting Freedom

Sometimes children must lose some of their privileges in order to recognize the importance of changing. Children don't always see their benefits as privileges. They assume they're rights. Sometimes parents must teach children that the things they have or the freedoms they experience are not rights but privileges that they could easily lose.

Examples of Restricting Freedom

Example #1

Kari, age 16, talks on the phone for long periods of time disregarding parental warnings, so Mom takes her phone away. Kari no longer has free access to the phone but must get permission from Mom to use it.

Example #2

Wendy, age 7, is disrespectful to Mom so Mom tells Wendy that she can't go to her friend's house to play today.

Example #3

Tim, age 10, procrastinated about his homework so Dad told him that he wouldn't be able to watch the baseball game on TV until he finished the assignment.

Example #4

Debbie, age 3, runs away from her mother at the store so Mom requires Debbie to ride in the stroller.

Sometimes parents see signs of immaturity and irresponsibility that indicate that a child has too much freedom and isn't able to manage it properly. It's in these situations that children need limitations on that freedom.

Restricting freedom is one of the consequences recommended for children who are dishonest. Trustworthiness earns a child more freedom.

Some parents struggle with restricting freedom because they want their children to enjoy the privileges that are often associated with a particular age or stage of life. But when children aren't yet mature enough to handle those privileges, and parents give them anyway, the kids flounder in irresponsibility.

Learning to drive, sleeping over at a friend's house, or playing on the computer are all privileges that require a certain level of maturity, not just being a particular age. Parents need to evaluate if a child is really mature enough to handle these things, not simply rely on what other children of the same age are doing.

The child who doesn't have the character yet, needs fewer privileges because privilege and responsibility go together.

Jesus taught his disciples about responsibility in Matthew 25:14-29 by telling them the parable of the landowner who left talents in the hands of stewards while he was gone. When he returned to check on their work he discovered that two were responsible and one was not. To the faithful stewards he said, *"Because you've been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things."* To the lazy servant he said, *"Even the little you have will be taken from you."* That's the very principle parents teach their children when they remove or give privileges. Responsibility is a prerequisite for the privileges children enjoy.

It's helpful to teach children how they can earn privileges back. Sometimes privileges are lost for long periods of time, but most of the time parents can take the

The key to Restricting Freedom is to tell children how they can earn privileges back.

Privilege and responsibility go together.

privilege away until the child demonstrates some maturity in order to get it back. Cory may lose the privilege of playing computer games because he isn't getting a good report from school. Mom may choose to reinstate the computer games when she gets a positive report from his teacher.

Allowing children to earn back privileges gives them hope and it increases the number of times you can teach and correct. Sometimes parents think that a big consequence will increase learning, but often it's the smaller giving and taking of privileges that helps children change and develop new patterns.



Pause and Reflect

An example of Restricting Freedom in my family is...

4 • More Parental Control

Because some children lack the self-control necessary to be successful in life, they need More Parental Control.

Examples of More Parental Control

Example #1

Pete, age 5, is touching things at the museum so Dad requires Pete to hold Dad's hand for awhile.

Example #2

Martha, age 12, is failing at school because she isn't turning in her homework.

Mom gets more involved, requiring her daughter to show Mom her completed assignments each afternoon. Mom checks Martha's work and increases direct communication with the teacher.

Example #3

Al, age 8, can't practice the piano for more than five minutes without distraction. So Mom sits with Al for 30 minutes each afternoon during his practice sessions.

Some parents make the mistake of using Natural Consequences when children are failing. They say, "*Fine, just let him fail. Maybe then he'll learn.*" Unfortunately, only the exceptionally motivated child is able to break the cycle and begin to succeed after failing. Most kids need more help, otherwise they develop an identity as a failure.

You know you need More Parental Control when your child is failing.

Parents often don't like the consequence of More Parental Control because it means more time and energy on their part. Sure it would be easier to just sit back and watch kids grow, but the reality is that they often need close supervision and instruction.

This is difficult when children become teenagers! Just when you thought you could have a little less parental involvement and a little more free time, you're called upon to get more involved again.

Teenagers yearn for freedom and independence but the dangers and risks multiply exponentially at this stage of life. Often teens need closer monitoring and greater accountability than they did just a few years earlier. More Parental Control means pursuing teenagers and staying closely involved in their lives. That's hard given the many commitments and challenges parents face.

If you want your children to be successful, sometimes you have to get more involved in their lives, not less involved. It's hard, time consuming, and takes a lot more energy but this is often the consequence that children need to get back on track.

Using the consequence of More Parental Control means that children must report in more often and parents monitor more closely, bringing more

accountability. Parents even get involved in doing the task sometimes. With More Parental Control children learn that they can do the job and that they do have what it takes to succeed.

More Parental Control is like a jello-mold for kids. While their character is weak, parents provide the structures of life. As children grow more in their self-control, parents are able to remove their own control, leaving children to stand on their own. Some parents make the mistake of allowing their teens far more control of their lives than is helpful. It's at this stage that More Parental Control is often necessary to get these kids back on track. More Parental Control is a useful consequence when children need help to be successful. Parents can then slowly remove the control, allowing the child's self-control to gradually take over.



Pause and Reflect

I could give More Parental Control when...

5 • Spanking

There are two extremes when it comes to views about spanking. On the one hand, some people seem to believe that spanking is the silver bullet of parenting and if you don't spank your kids then you aren't being a godly parent. Then, on the other hand, some say that if you spank your kids they'll be emotionally crippled and develop violent tendencies. Neither of these extremes are helpful. Rather, a balance is in order, recognizing that spanking may be a tool in your parenting toolbox, but it can't be the only tool.

Those who idolize spanking often look to the Bible where the “rod” is used to describe discipline of children. (It’s interesting that these same people rarely talk about the three references to using the rod to discipline adults.) A more careful study of the book of Proverbs, however, reveals over 90 times other forms of discipline are recommended. Words like “*warning*,” “*correction*,” “*rebuke*,” “*instruction*,” and “*teaching*” all describe ways to work with children that don’t necessarily involve spanking.

The key to using Spanking is to avoid anger and evaluate its effectiveness.

An obvious conclusion then, from the scriptures, is that spanking can be a tool in the toolbox, one tool among many, but it can’t be your only one.

By the way, there are some studies that seem to indicate that spanking results in emotionally damaged children. Unfortunately these studies do not isolate anger as an independent factor or separate it from the spanking. It is our belief that it’s not the spanking that creates emotional damage in children but that discipline in anger hurts them.

Here are four principles to govern your decision about whether or Not to use spanking with your children:

- 1** If you have a problem with anger, you should not use spanking as a tool. There are many other consequences that you can use that are effective.
- 2** Remember that the goal of discipline is to teach. The measure of usefulness of any tool has to do with whether it’s effective at changing your child’s heart. If spanking doesn’t work, use a different tool.
- 3** Consider the map mentality. Consequences are useful for motivating children to change, not for obtaining justice.
- 4** Spanking is only appropriate with young children, recognizing that as children grow older they can respond to consequences that have a more clear life lesson.



Pause and Reflect

Is spanking an appropriate tool for me to use?

Why or why not?

6 • Other Leaders and Authorities

One of the realities of growing up is that children come under the leadership and authority of other adults including grandparents, babysitters, coaches, teachers, policemen, counselors, and youth leaders. Each of these authorities plays a role in the training of your children. They usually discipline your children differently than you do. Some parents react to the differences and get in the way of lessons their children need to learn.



Pause and Reflect

Should I correct the angry coach or let my child experience his anger?

A Dilemma—What Would I Do?

Your ten-year-old son has a baseball coach that yells. At one point in the dugout the coach is yelling at your son. Should you protect your son and correct the coach or should you allow your son to experience the coach's anger?

The answer to this question depends on what you're trying to teach your son. There may be times when you publicly take a stand for righteousness and confront someone in front of others. However, confronting another authority in your child's life while he or she is watching can weaken the impact of any lesson that child needs to learn from that person. Approaching the coach in private may accomplish the necessary correction and, at the same time, free you up to teach your child some valuable lessons.

The key to using Other Leaders and Authorities is to allow them to lead and then you help your child process the interaction.

When children are treated harshly by a coach they are being mistreated. Knowing when to protect and when to allow your child to remain in the situation requires wisdom and a sensitivity to what the experience may be doing to your child's heart.

At least one of the choices is to allow your child to remain in the situation, and you teach valuable lessons about how to respond well to authority. Furthermore, if

your child is wrong and the correction is harsh but valid, maybe the child will learn some important lessons. Children should ask the question, “*What can I learn from this situation?*” Again, you’ll want to monitor the impact of the harshness and if the lesson learned costs too much hurt, it may not be worth it.

There’s nothing wrong with correcting another authority and helping other adults grow. Sometimes grandparents need training or a teacher would benefit from knowing a better approach to working with your child. These comments are best shared in private, however, so as not to undermine the authority of these leaders.

Your children learn lessons from other adults who teach and correct differently than you do. Sometimes a teacher is more strict than you, or expects something different. Helping your children understand other authorities can go a long way to teach them about humility and learning from others.

After all, parents have to be the disciplinarians so often. Take advantage of another adult putting some pressure on. You then can come alongside your child as a counselor or coach.

Often other authorities in your child’s life will say the very same things you say, but for some reason your child responds more quickly to this other person. Look for ways to get your children involved in activities that require others to teach and discipline them. One of the benefits of a child having a job is that another adult is now talking about cleaning up after yourself, putting your things away, arriving on time, and working hard.

A church is an excellent source of youth activities and leadership. It’s usually unwise to keep your kids home from youth group or Sunday School as a consequence. If your kids are acting out at home then make sure they go to youth group and Sunday School. Maybe God will use those leaders as instruments of growth for your kids.

In fact, we would suggest that you make youth group and Sunday School mandatory. Don’t listen to excuses like “*I don’t want to go,*” or, “*It’s boring.*” Rather, explain to children that in our family we go to these church activities whether you like it or not. In the long run, kids benefit greatly from the influence of other leaders at church.



Pause and Reflect

What other leaders and authorities have had an impact on my child?

How can I encourage more of this kind of teaching?

7 • Positive Side of the Toolbox — Practice Doing the Right Thing

The first six tools that we've discussed involve some sort of pain or loss. These tools often motivate children to change, but sometimes parents say, *"I've tried everything and nothing works with my child. He won't change."* At these points we typically move into the positive side of the toolbox.

The consequences on this side involve teaching and practicing the right response. Some children need to be forced to do the right thing over and over again. In fact, the consequence for a negative pattern of behavior may be to practice doing the right thing.

Example #1

Richie, age 7, is mean to his younger sister. He appears to enjoy being mean and no consequences seem to have an effect. Mom decides to have Richie think of and do two kind things for his sister. Mom repeats this consequence a couple times a day.

Example #2

Kim, age 4, runs away from her mom in the grocery store. As a consequence, Mom practices a “Come When You’re Called Rule” several times an hour throughout the day.

The key to using the Positive Side of the Toolbox is to ask yourself “What do I want my child to do instead?”

Example #3

Scott, age 14, has a bad attitude when given an instruction. Dad tells Scott that he has five jobs for Saturday morning clean-up and Scott will have to do at least two but up to five based on how well he can respond to the instructions.

Many children who have bad attitudes or who are resistant to instruction or correction need to learn how to work harder. When kids learn to work hard, they develop perseverance, confidence, and the ability to take on an assignment with determination to succeed. If your children seem to have a hard time with their level of work, maybe it’s time to increase the pressure. In the end this could have a very positive effect.

Romans 5:3-4 says that *“suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.”*

Many children lack hope. They become easily discouraged and give up. The solution is to develop character which comes from perseverance which comes from suffering. Increasing the work load for our children can be that *“suffering”* that they need to develop the strength to carry them through life’s challenges.

The Positive Side of the Toolbox involves training. It requires that you think more broadly about consequences so that your thinking incorporates more than just negative ways to change behavior. Those deterrents are helpful in motivating children to change, but many children need the continual practice of doing the right thing.

Putting it All Together

A consequence is often a way of getting your child's attention. It's a wake-up call that says, "*You can't continue to live this way.*" Some children stubbornly hold onto faulty operating principles in their hearts. They continue to react with anger, deception, bad attitudes, or resistance. Consequences chip away at hard hearts, bumping against foolish thinking with doses of reality.

People change for two reasons. Either life becomes uncomfortable or they gain a vision for something better. Parents can work hard to build vision in their kids, but often it's the uncomfortableness of consequences that begins the process of heart change.

Consequences create a crisis of sorts in a child's heart. Like Jonah or Paul, God uses life-changing events to adjust what we believe and how we operate. The small consequences of day-to-day discipline make significant inroads over time. You may feel as if you're not seeing the change you'd like to see, but hang in there. Jesus uses the analogy of four different kinds of soil to describe the hearts of people. Anyone who has worked a garden knows the tremendous labor required before fruit results. Patience and hard work pay off over time as we do the heart work of parenting.

Summary: **A Toolbox of Consequences**

- 1 Natural Consequences
- 2 Logical Consequences
- 3 Restricting Freedom
- 4 More Parental Control
- 5 Spanking
- 6 Other Leaders and Authorities
- 7 The Positive Side of the Toolbox—Practice Doing the Right Thing



Pause and Reflect

What parts of the Toolbox of Consequences am I already using well?

Do I rely too heavily on one tool?

What can I add to my present repertoire?

Personal Prayer

Preview: In the Next Chapter

Sometimes parents believe that after they've given a consequence then they've completed their job in discipline. Unfortunately, many children aren't able to successfully process the consequence or work through their offense alone.

They need more help. The next chapter will give you some practical ways to end every discipline time so that children and parents get the most out of it. In fact, we believe the next chapter is so important we recommend that parents use it every time they correct or redirect their children. When you study it you'll understand why.



5

Ending Discipline Times with Impact

*Ending correction times by focusing on what to do differently
next time empowers kids to change.*

Read along in the book *Parenting is Heart Work*

Chapters 1 and 2 define the heart in practical ways. Understanding how the word “heart” is used in the scriptures, enables one to target discipline toward the heart. Chapter 16 gives specific strategies for using a Positive Conclusion and discusses why it works as a heart tool. Confession and humility are key ingredients necessary for addressing offenses or mistakes completely. Not only does the Positive Conclusion help address the subject of repentance in children, but it also forms the basis for a mature apology. Instead of just having kids say “sorry” to one another, children learn how to apologize in a way that addresses the offense and moves on.

Correction is one of the tools for changing the heart, but many parents have a hard time getting the most out of the discipline process. Sometimes barriers come because of the parent's frustration, but many times children resist and try to deflect any teaching that might take place.



Pause and Reflect

Which of these statements characterizes your correction times?

- My child blames others and won't take personal responsibility for his/her part of the problem.
- My child continues to do the wrong thing and I can't seem to get through.
- My child seems devastated by correction.
- After I correct my child there's unresolved tension in our relationship.

This chapter will show you how to use a Positive Conclusion to end every discipline time constructively. In many families discipline times don't end well and children don't gain the most from the correction experience.



Pause and Reflect

How do discipline times usually end in my family now?

- A lot of emotion followed by withdrawal.
- Attempts to talk things out that are rarely fruitful.
- We all tend to avoid conflict and withdraw.
- A lingering tension seems always present.
- We tend to resolve conflict well in our family.

Other

Using a Positive Conclusion

After giving a consequence, some parents feel like they've done their duty, fulfilled their responsibility, and the discipline episode is over. Unfortunately, there's often tension left in the relationship. The child may walk away angry or feeling mistreated. True repentance may not have taken place. This leaves room for resentment and even bitterness to linger. The child may plan revenge. *"I'll show you. I just won't talk to you. Then you'll be sorry."*

Day after day, year after year, lingering tensions grow into layers and layers, eventually building walls between parent and child. Continual instruction, limit setting, and correction wear away at the relationship between parent and child, making closeness elusive in many families. Children have a hard time processing the disappointment they experience, often blaming their parents for their unhappiness.

On the other hand, sometimes children are ready to regain closeness after a discipline time but the parent's anger keeps the child at a distance. The child couldn't get close if he wanted to because Mom is still angry about an offense. Parents sometimes use anger to further punish a child, increasing distance in the relationship. Parents may realize that the chasm is growing between them and their kids, but they don't know how to make it better. Moms and dads may think that forgiving too quickly gives the impression that the offense was minor. One correction time leads into another and parents feel as if they are continually correcting and have little time for closeness with their kids.

Each discipline episode needs to be wrapped up and finished off. The real benefit of the discipline takes place in a Positive Conclusion.

The reality is that each discipline episode needs to be wrapped up and finished

off. Parents may think that the consequence is the discipline, but a consequence merely gets a child's attention. The real benefit of the discipline takes place in a Positive Conclusion.

The Positive Conclusion helps children process things in their hearts. After years of correction, consequences, rebukes, warnings, and attempts at teaching, where do our children's hearts end up? Sometimes not too far from where they started. They have the same negative attitude, rebellious spirit, or resistance to authority. The plan set forth in this workbook is a vehicle for teaching children right ways to think. It will help them make the significant changes you want to see in their hearts. Interestingly enough, children want to see those changes too. This tool will help them do it.

By implementing a Positive Conclusion you teach your children how to deal with the offenses, but you'll also give them a way to think about life. This routine was carefully designed to address many of the thinking errors that children have. You will help your children deal with mistakes on more than just a surface level. With the Positive Conclusion you help children make lasting changes in their hearts.

What is a Positive Conclusion?

A Positive Conclusion is a discussion you have with your child after the consequence to clarify the offense, make a plan for next time, and offer encouragement to do the right thing.

A Positive Conclusion offers hope to children. Sometimes kids get into habits of doing the wrong thing and they become magnets for correction. The temptation toward discouragement runs high in those moments and children

A Positive Conclusion is often seen in the Bible after discipline times.

sometimes give up, developing an identity of one who just can't do the right thing, so why try?

You can help your kids envision a positive future. The Scriptures show us that God and Jesus often ended discipline times in this hopeful way. Take a moment and consider just three examples of a Positive Conclusion in the

Bible. As you look at each of these situations, imagine the guilt experienced by the offender, the consequence experienced, and the resulting positive comments or approach of the Master.

Read Genesis 3:14-15, 21

What two things did God do to communicate relationship and hope to Adam and Eve after their sin in the garden?

Read 2 Samuel 12:24-25

After his sin with Bathsheba, David's consequence was that the baby died. How did God communicate his affirmation of David after the consequence was over?

Read John 21:15-17

After the resurrection how did Jesus communicate forgiveness to Peter who had denied him three times?

Considering these three stories, what is the message that God wants his children to hear once they have repented?

Start a Positive Conclusion when children are young. Use the same ideas with kids that are older as well.

Putting the Positive Conclusion into Practice

The Positive Conclusion is a valuable tool to begin with children as young as three or four years old. The ideas, though, are appropriate for teenagers too because every mistake or conflict should result in a Positive Conclusion. In fact, you'll see that this approach is more than a childish way of facing an offense. It's a healthy way for adults to think about their mistakes or failures as well.

The Positive Conclusion is a routine that repeats the same process over and over again each time you have to discipline your child. With young children you'll probably go through this routine several times a day, but that's okay and even good. Young children benefit from repetition and this routine develops habits in their minds and hearts about offenses, knowing how to respond when they've done the wrong thing.

Before you start a Positive Conclusion, make sure *your* heart is ready. Sometimes parents are so frustrated that their own issues detract from any positive benefit of a discussion. Your harshness will weaken any opportunity to build relationship or make lasting change. Proceed in a manner that expresses love, forgiveness, and acceptance. If you're still angry, work through your own issues before you begin, or at least put them aside and respond with grace. It's amazing how often the Positive Conclusion helps a parent work through some of the lingering feelings as well.

The Positive Conclusion can mean the difference between punishment and discipline.

Punishment focuses on past misdeeds.

Discipline focuses on future good deeds.

Punishment looks for justice in order to balance the scales.

Discipline teaches a correct response and helps the child learn wisdom.

Punishment is negative.

Discipline is positive.

Punishment is motivated out of anger.

Discipline is motivated out of love.

The Positive Conclusion turns any offense into a constructive learning experience.

The Positive Conclusion turns any offense into a constructive learning experience.

The Positive Conclusion contains three questions and a statement.

Question 1

What Did You Do Wrong?

The purpose of the first question, “What did *you do wrong?*” is to teach the child to take personal responsibility for his or her part of the problem. If others were involved, as they often are, a child should not excuse an offense by blaming someone else. The sins of others don’t justify wrong actions.

Imagine Bill and Karen playing in the other room. Suddenly you hear their interaction.

“Mom, he hit me!”

“She grabbed my book!”

“I had it first!”

“No you didn’t! I had it first.”

Typically Mom goes into the room trying to demonstrate the wisdom of Solomon. Mom believes she must decide who gets the book. The kids of course plead their cases through arguing, and they use their best dramatics, putting on a show to try to convince Mom of their worthiness.

Mom runs through her typical list of questions, asking herself *“Who did I give it to last time?”* *“Who is the mature one here?”* *“Who do I think needs to be disciplined?”* And out of her depth of intellectual reason she decides to give the book to Karen who immediately turns to her brother with that look that says *“I won!”*

What has this mom accomplished in her little moment of wisdom? The fact is that when two children are fighting you have two selfish children. Both are wrong. Instead of trying to figure it all out, have them each take a Break. Then one at a time, when they’re ready, talk in private to each child and ask the question, *“What did you do wrong?”*

“Karen, what did you do wrong?”

“He hit me.”

“We’ll talk about what he did in a moment. Right now let’s talk about you. What did you do wrong?”

“I grabbed the book.”

“Okay.” And Mom continues to go through the Positive Conclusion with Karen.

Next she has her private meeting with Bill.

“Bill, what did you do wrong?”

“Well, she grabbed my book.”

“Bill, I want to know what you did wrong.”

“I hit her.”

“That’s right. That was not the right response.”

Almost always, both children are wrong. You don’t need to know who started the problem, because they both responded to the conflict in a selfish way.

Children often have a hard time accepting responsibility. They don’t like to admit their faults. They’d rather blame others or just try to overlook the problem.

Confession is a spiritual issue, and it’s learned in the Positive Conclusion.

One Dad was disciplining his daughter for lying. When he asked her, *“What did you do wrong?”* she said, *“You know Daddy, you say it.”* She knew what she had done wrong, but wouldn’t say, *“I lied.”* Admitting the problem out loud takes courage and humility, and it’s an important first step toward change.

When you ask the question, *“What did you do wrong?”* your child may resist and say, *“I don’t know,”* or *“I didn’t do anything wrong.”*

Sometimes children don’t know what it was that they did wrong. You may have heard a tone of voice or seen an action that you know was leading to trouble. You may have to remind the child or share what you saw, but don’t rob children of the benefit of confessing by stating the offense and then just having them agree. Ask the question again and have the child admit the offense and take responsibility for it.

Sometimes a child will respond with, *“I didn’t do anything wrong”* or *“I don’t know”* when you know they actually do know. In this situation the child is defying the process and trying to skirt the issue. Simply have the child sit in a chair for a while until he or she is ready to come and deal with the problem. It’s surprising how quickly children can remember what they did wrong when they have no other choice.

Some children get in the habit of blaming others for their problems. These kids believe that they have a right to be angry with others, that the world owes them something and better start paying up. These children are rarely satisfied and continually blame their problems on others. It's always someone else's fault that they aren't happy.

Joe misses the school bus, but that's the bus driver's fault—he came too early! Joe forgets his lunch, but that's his mom's fault—she didn't put it out in the right place. Joe gets a “D” on his math test, but the teacher didn't tell him what to study. Joe's books fall out of his backpack, but that old zipper never did work right anyway. Joe's misery is always someone else's fault.

The Positive Conclusion helps children take personal responsibility for their problems.

The Positive Conclusion helps children take personal responsibility for their problems. This helps prevent them from developing a victim mentality. When children admit their part of the problem, then they realize that they have the ability to change.

We teach children to admit that they've done something wrong because confession is important. God asks us to confess our sins to him. In fact, confession seems to be a prerequisite to experiencing his forgiveness. 1 John 1:9 says, *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”*

Confessing sins to one another is also part of the healing process. James 5:16 says, *“Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.”*

The Positive Conclusion helps children take responsibility for their actions and teaches them the valuable skill of confession.



Pause and Reflect

How is my child doing at accepting responsibility for doing something wrong?

In what ways do I encourage or discourage confession?

Question 2

Why Was That Wrong?

This question helps to address heart issues directly. Sometimes children believe that their actions are unrelated and that their offenses are incidental. They need to see how individual wrong behaviors tie into bigger issues in their lives. You can point out the sinful attitudes like pride, selfishness, anger, or disrespect. Help the child learn that behavior is only a symptom of something deeper. Parents and children see the behavior, but God looks at the heart.

**Discipline means
“to teach.”**

It’s not always easy to get into a child’s heart, but one of the windows into a child’s heart is correction. When kids do the wrong thing or make a mistake, the way you handle it is very important. Yelling, arguing, sarcasm, and harshness are just a few of the approaches that close a child’s heart. Instead, the Positive Conclusion can provide an opportunity to reach deep into a child’s life.

This second question gives parents an opportunity to teach. Bill thinks he’s justified in hitting his sister because she took his book. “*After all, she was wrong and deserved it,*” he says. Mom used that opportunity to teach Bill that even if his sister is wrong, he is not justified in hitting. It’s unkind. You can’t trade unkind actions. It’s not right.

Karen, on the other hand, decides that Bill is not sharing and so she uses force to take the book. Karen is reminded during the Positive Conclusion that taking the book by force is the wrong way to solve the problem. Karen needs to understand that her actions are not kind and that even if she is offended by her brother, she should not take matters into her own hands that way.

When you ask your child “*why was that wrong?*” you have the opportunity to talk about the values behind your rules.

You may be thinking, “*My child won’t answer these questions.*” You may be right. Your child may not know why it was wrong. But these questions give you an opportunity to gently help your child understand the problem and to see why a particular response was wrong. It was unkind or disrespectful. Explanations are helpful. The Positive Conclusion gives you the chance to come together and discuss the problem.

With young children it’s often helpful to make this a multiple-choice question. You might establish three rules in family life:

Be Kind

Show Respect

Obey

These three rules cover just about any offense a young child can commit in family life. Then when you ask the question, “*Why was that wrong?*” the child has a choice between three answers.

The Positive Conclusion helps children know the reasons behind the rules. Something went wrong for the offense to occur. The child may have made a willful rebellious decision, but sometimes kids forget what they were supposed to do, or they may have not realized in time the consequences of their actions. By going back over the situation, you can teach children where they got off track.

These small reminders may seem tedious at times, but they form the basis for the way children think. Years from now these same children will find themselves in tempting situations and will have already worked out the right responses. That doesn’t mean that they will always choose right, but they are more likely to because parents helped clarify the issues early on.



Pause and Reflect

Do my children understand the values behind our rules?

Yes No Sometimes

What common rule in family life would I like to further explain to my child so he understands the values behind it?

By communicating the right response to you verbally, your child will begin to see the difference and learn to change.

Question 3

What Are You Going to Do Differently Next Time?

This question helps children understand and communicate what right action they should take the next time they're in a similar situation. Again, children may not know what they should have done differently—you can teach them. With practice, they will know what to do. By communicating the right response to you verbally, your child will begin to see the difference and learn to change.

Some days parents feel like they're disciplining for the same thing over and over again. When you use these three questions and a statement, your child is stating the same right response back to you over and over again. If Karen is often frustrated with Bill and has a habit of responding by grabbing, the right response is to talk about the problem or to get help.

If Mom and Dad continue to discipline Karen for her wrong responses and she continues to verbalize that the right response is to talk about it, eventually she will catch herself sooner and talk to Bill about the problem. This takes time and repeated discipline sessions, but children learn by repetition and frequent, gentle reminders.

Many times parents come to this third question and discover that their children don't know what to do right next time. In fact, parents are sometimes stumped by this question. When Mom is on the phone and Bill is teasing Karen and won't stop, what should Karen do? If Marty is upset when Dad asks him to take out the trash, how should he respond instead of grumbling? The third question helps parents and children stop and consider what action might be more appropriate. Dialogue at this point is often helpful.

The Positive Conclusion gives the opportunity to explore other alternatives.

It does little good to discipline children for wrong behavior without teaching them how to respond properly next time. The Positive Conclusion gives the opportunity to explore other alternatives. If the Positive Conclusion is a routine in your family then it forces you to think through a process to help children to handle their challenges.

Furthermore, going through these three questions helps children learn to anticipate and imagine the right response next time. Sometimes children have habits of behavior and they need to develop new patterns of thinking in order to change the way they respond. Other children have deeply rooted heart issues that may take years to change. The Positive Conclusion is one of the valuable tools you'll use every day that can make tremendous inroads into the difficult struggles children face.

Imagine a five-year-old that tends to over-react to little irritations. She explodes without warning. Someone disturbs her and the whirlwind begins. You see that she's getting upset and send her to her room because that seems like a reasonable thing to do. She stomps all the way there like a herd of angry, stampeding elephants!

After this young girl has settled down, then you talk about the problem together. During the Positive Conclusion you're able to develop a plan for her to handle her emotions in a healthier way.

You say, *"Susie, what did you do wrong?"*

"I yelled."

"Yes, that's right, and you also stomped and hit. Why was that wrong?"

"I got angry."

"Well, it's not always wrong to get angry, but yelling, stomping, and hitting are wrong. They are unkind ways to handle your anger. What should you do differently next time?"

"Talk about it or get help."

"Yes, that's right."

Children who are overwhelmed by their emotions, or kids who are impulsive, benefit greatly from a Positive Conclusion. It slows down the process and, through constant repetition, enables them to imagine doing the right thing and eventually respond the right way.



Pause and Reflect

How am I doing at helping my child explore alternatives to his poor choices?

Question 4

A Statement: “OK, Go Ahead and Try Again.”

Correction should always end with affirmation.

Once you’ve gone through these three questions, then always end with an affirmation. The statement we suggest is, “*OK, go ahead and try again.*” This statement says, “*I believe in you. Yes, you’re going to make mistakes and there are consequences, but we can debrief and learn together.*” We want to give children the confidence to try again. This statement acknowledges that growth is a process.

This final statement is modeled after the way Jesus ended the conversation with the woman caught in adultery. He said, “*Go and sin no more.*” (John 8:11 KJV) That’s the kind of ending we want to our discipline. It’s a statement that affirms children and encourages them to put this event behind them and go on and do the right thing.

Part of a clear conscience is the recognition that offenses or mistakes have been dealt with. When people do the wrong thing, they feel guilty and their conscience feels uncomfortable. The solution is a Positive Conclusion because

it doesn't excuse the mistakes. It admits them. Furthermore, it ends with a statement that allows the child to move ahead.

When you have a Positive Conclusion with your child, then you're giving that child a gift by contributing to a clear conscience. Your child develops a healthy way of thinking about the mistakes he or she has made. Some suggest that the solution to guilt is to blame others, excuse the offense, or explain away the feeling of guilt. That's not how God handles sin. He expects confession and in return offers forgiveness.

Through the Positive Conclusion children learn that failure isn't fatal. They can confess, experience forgiveness, and then try again.



Pause and Reflect

How am I doing at affirming my child at the end of the discipline time?

Does my child feel equipped and empowered to try again and do better next time?

Yes No Sometimes

Thoughts:

The Positive Conclusion with Teens

As children grow older, you still want to use the Positive Conclusion, but you may not stick to the three questions and a statement. The important thing is that you discuss problems with your teens. You want to develop a sense of cooperation and teamwork. *“Let’s work together on this problem of anger,”* or, *“I want to help you develop a good plan for how you can budget your money.”* Positive Conclusions provide the opportunity for dialogue and growth.

Teens need dialogue.

As you begin working through the three questions and a statement with your teenager, you’ll likely launch into a conversation about values, reasons, or other issues. These discussions are extremely valuable. Don’t digress to an authoritarian approach that tries to eliminate the dialogue. It is true that some kids use arguing, excusing, or blaming to deflect the issues and you’ll want to work the conversation back to the real problem. But don’t hesitate to take the long way around if that’s what your child needs. Teens need dialogue. It helps them work through the various issues they’re dealing with.

Learning to listen is so important. It’s not always easy, but as parents of teens you need to be willing to take the extra time to process life. Conflict becomes an opportunity for teaching and growth. You earn the right to teach by listening. Teens need to talk. They need to explore new ideas and values to see if they want to accept yours. If you feel threatened by your child’s new ideas you can damage the relationship and miss out on a teaching opportunity.

One Saturday morning I (Scott) reminded Josh, age twelve at the time, to clean his room, a normal request for Saturday mornings in the Turansky home. Josh decided to try out a new idea or value that went something like this: *“It’s my room. The mess isn’t hurting anyone but me.*

Therefore, you shouldn't be getting involved in my problem and telling me how to live my life since it doesn't really affect you."

Maybe you've heard that kind of reasoning before. It's a common idea. The problem with that line of thinking is that parents and children have a job to do. We aren't just housemates sharing the same living quarters. Parents have the responsibility to pass on character and values to their children, and neatness is one character quality we teach in the Turansky family.

Unfortunately, at the time I felt threatened by Josh's challenge and was appalled by his statement so I came on strong. I looked at him and I said, *"That's the same thing some adults say to justify wrong behavior, but society ends up paying for what those people do in secret!"* I won in the argument department, but I lost in the relationship department.

I went to Josh later and apologized for my intensity and for robbing him of the opportunity to test out his idea. We were used to having Positive Conclusions so coming back together to talk about the problem was expected.

Of course, Josh's attitude with me was wrong. He still had to clean his room, but I knew that my approach was not helpful. I was offended and used anger to solve my problem, creating distance in our relationship. It's hard to correct a child for doing the wrong thing when our own emotions get in the way. A Positive Conclusion helps slow down the process, clear the air, and clarify the issues for both parent and child.

The Positive Conclusion does a tremendous amount for keeping the lines of communication open and for making discipline a constructive experience. Keep in mind that a Positive Conclusion means that if you have been wrong in your response, then this is the time to talk about that too. Apology is not a sign of weakness. Rather, it becomes a learning tool, modeling humility.

The Positive Conclusion does a tremendous amount for keeping the lines of communication open and for making discipline a constructive experience.

Don't be afraid to admit that you were wrong.

One of the common complaints from parents of teens is that teens don't talk. It's not surprising that a common complaint from teens is that their parents don't listen. Parents prone to criticize their teens discourage them from talking. If your teen comes home and says, *"I hate Mr. Jones, my math teacher,"* how do you respond? If you see this as the opportunity to bring out lecture number 73—*"Now it's important to have a good attitude"* or lecture number 12—*"You can learn something from everyone,"* then you haven't listened.

One of the tasks of parenting teens is to open doors of communication for understanding to take place. That doesn't mean you will always agree and, as a parent, you may have to make the final decision. But disagreeing is part of life. Understanding is one of the goals. Understanding happens through listening.

Discipline situations can quickly become conflict situations when children become teens. When you have a Positive Conclusion you have the opportunity for conversation. This helps facilitate understanding. Positive Conclusions with your teenager are important because they cut down on that continual feeling of tension that exists in many families.



Pause and Reflect

How am I doing at listening to my child?

Just Going Through the Motions

Sometimes parents get frustrated with their children because they say the right words but their hearts are obviously not changed. This is disheartening for parents, since they know that their children aren't learning all they need to learn from the experience, leaving them vulnerable to fail again.

Pray that God will change their hearts while you continue to go through the routine.

A change of heart is the goal, and parents need to continually look for creative ways to help kids make those deeper changes. Sometimes the approach, timing, or lack of positive relationship with children sets them up to resist during a Positive Conclusion. Other times children just have hard hearts.

In those moments pray that God will change their hearts while you continue to go through the routine. Regular repetition of the right actions creates a structure for your children, and then you must trust that God will breathe life into your work. Of course you'd prefer that a change of heart would come first and lead to right actions, but sometimes the reverse is true even for adults. Often people do the right things and then heart change follows. So for your kids you may need to help them do what's right and wait to see inner change down the road. That's why you take your children to church whether they want to go or not. You have them apologize to a sibling even if they don't feel like it. These kinds of actions may not come from the heart now, but pray that God will use them to do a deeper work in their lives.

Sometimes children who demonstrate continual resistance and lack a heart change need further consequences. If you find that your approach to discipline isn't working over time then talk to your child about it. You may say, *"I'm trying to discipline you here but it looks to me like you're not responding. If you can't respond to my present discipline then I'll have to change or add a consequence here. We can't continue to live like this. It isn't good for you and will create some larger problems down the road."*

Change Takes Place Over Time

Not all conflict can be resolved immediately. Often you'll need to stop the conversation because it's getting overheated, take a break, and come back to it later. That's okay as long as you really do come back to it. You don't want tensions to grow and build, layer upon layer. It's best to deal with problems as they come up and make sure they're resolved as much as possible before you move on, but if the intensity increases, know when to back off and take an intermission.

The Positive Conclusion encourages a sense of openness with children. Unfortunately, many kids go around bearing the weight of unresolved conflict or the disappointment of their parents. A common pattern in families is that the child does something wrong and the parent yells in anger. The child either cowers out of fear or fights back out of anger. Then life continues on without resolution. The parent not only punishes with consequences, but continues to punish by creating distance between the child and the parent. The child gets the message, *"I'm bad. I've made my parents angry."*

When you use a Positive Conclusion, you reestablish the relationship with your child.

On the other hand, when you use a Positive Conclusion, you reestablish the relationship with your child. You can then look at the problem as the problem instead of the relationship or the child as the problem. This way the child gets the message, *"I made a mistake, but I'm growing and learning."* This approach turns discipline times into positive learning experiences.

Heart-based discipline takes time, energy, and thoughtfulness. An acorn takes years and years to grow into a large oak tree. A squash only takes a few months. You are in the business of creating sturdy oak. Sometimes parents get frustrated because their expectations don't look long term. They want change, and they want it now! But working on the heart takes patience.

The Positive Conclusion helps children who are responsive gain greater understanding. Even children who aren't responsive to discipline at the moment still hear what you say, and over time, the continual repetition can help get the message from their heads down into their hearts.



Pause and Reflect

How am I doing with my own expectations when it comes to helping my child change?

Putting it All Together

After the Positive Conclusion restitution, reconciliation, an apology, or consequence may be necessary. In those cases the inter-action and discussion prepares the child for what's yet to come.

A Positive Conclusion is so important for discipline. We believe that it should be used every time you have to correct or redirect your child. It's not only helpful for dealing with the current problems, but it teaches kids and adults a way of processing mistakes and offenses. Many adults would benefit from the three questions and a statement. Often adults beat themselves up when they make a mistake. *"I'm stupid."* Or, *"I'll never get it right."* Or, *"My problems are other people's fault."* These kinds of statements are counterproductive.

What adults and kids all need is to ask themselves the three questions and a statement, *"What did I do wrong?"* *"Why was that wrong?"* *"What am I going to do differently next time?"* and *"OK, I'll go ahead and try again."* This approach is a much more healthy way to respond to mistakes. The time to start this routine is now. If children can learn to process problems in this way, they'll be much more effective as they grow older.

Many parents parent from a distance. They don't have the closeness needed to work together with their children. You don't have to parent from a distance.

The Positive Conclusion is one way to build the relationship and the closeness you want with your child.

Summary: **Positive Conclusion**

A Positive Conclusion draws a parent and child back together at the end of a discipline time. It provides children with an opportunity to debrief about the problem and have a plan for next time. Continual use of a Positive Conclusion teaches children and adults a healthy way of thinking about offenses and mistakes. It provides a framework for confession, heart change, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

Positive Conclusion

Question 1: What Did You Do Wrong?

Question 2: Why Was That Wrong?

Question 3: What Are You Going to Do Differently Next Time?

Statement: Go Ahead and Try Again.



Pause and Reflect

What part of the Positive Conclusion am I already doing well?

What do I want to do differently when I have to correct my child?

Personal Prayer

Preview: In the Next Chapter

You will learn how to help children accept no as an answer. Unfortunately, many children resort to manipulation and pressure techniques to get you to change your mind. How can you handle children who are so determined to get what they want that they damage relationships to get there? It's a heart issue and your training in this area will result in lifelong lessons.



6

Teaching Children to Accept No as an Answer

*Knowing how to handle disappointment is a life long skill.
It's best to learn it now while still young.*

Read along in the book *Parenting is Heart Work*

Chapter 3 explores the will of a child. Some kids have strong wills and others lack motivation. All children fall somewhere on that continuum. One of the ways the will is revealed is when children can't have what they want. In these moments children often challenge their parents and look for ways to get around a no answer. The solution is a heart-based approach. Chapter 7 discusses the heart as the place where emotions reside and offers suggestions for addressing them. Grief is explained as the process of letting go. Understanding a child's emotions is a key to touching the heart.

Children continually ask parents for things. In fact, responding to requests is part of a parent's job. Of course, most of the time you like to say "yes" to your kids because you like to make them happy, give them what they want, and free them up to enjoy life.

But sometimes you have to say "no." It may be because you see the bigger picture, know more about that situation, or are merely trying to balance several priorities.

Responding to requests is part of a parent's job.

And this is where the conflict starts. Some children have a hard time accepting no as an answer. They don't deal well with disappointment and have a hard time living within limits.

Some children have a whole repertoire of manipulative techniques they use to show disapproval, communicate their disappointment, or get revenge. Children often become mean and express themselves in inappropriate ways. Take a few minutes and reflect on your own family.



Pause and Reflect

What are some poor responses my child has to a no answer?

The Heart Problem

Children usually know what they want. “*Can I have a snack?*” “*Can you take me shopping?*” “*Can I sleep over at Tara’s tonight?*” There are an amazing number of things that delight your children and bring them happiness. But, of course children can’t always have everything they want... right? Unfortunately that truth doesn’t ring true for some kids. They react with intensity to a simple and logical, “*Not this time, Honey.*”

The child who reacts to a no answer hasn’t sufficiently learned to live within limits.

The problem is that the child who reacts to a no answer hasn’t sufficiently learned to live within limits, an essential quality needed by children as well as adults. In fact, there are a lot of adults who struggle in this area. Financial limits challenge a person who wants to buy what he can’t afford. Dietary limits challenge many who struggle to stay within healthy food guidelines. Learning to accept limits means knowing how to handle a no answer from others graciously and then eventually knowing how to personally say no to the many temptations of life. Healthy people not only know how to live within limits established by others, but they also learn to set limits for themselves in order to balance important areas in life.



Pause and Reflect

What are some of the things my child must learn to balance in life that require accepting no as an answer?

By setting firm limits for children who are demanding, you begin the difficult process of working out selfishness from the heart.

Learning to live within limits is an important skill for all of us, but it seems to be a particularly challenging area for kids. The inability to accept no as an answer demonstrates demandingness, one of the forms of selfishness children experience. The solution is to change the heart, not just adjust behavior. The heart contains the operating principles of life, and children actually believe wrong things that result in demanding actions. *“I deserve to have this.”* Or, *“I have the right to attend this event.”* Or, *“It’s not fair to put limits on me.”* When children embrace these faulty principles in their hearts, it’s no wonder they mistreat others, seek revenge, and generate conflict.

By setting firm limits for children who are demanding, you begin the difficult process of working out selfishness from the heart. Pray for your kids regularly, that God will take away the demandingness and replace it with other heart qualities such as love, patience, generosity, and gratefulness. Then work hard to create firm limits for your child that will help force the deeper change necessary.

Why a No Answer Hurts

The heart is where we cherish things. Longings, desires, and expectations reside in the heart (Psalm 37:4). When something a child values is lost, the disappointment is painful. Disappointment is a form of grief. God established grief to be the tool for releasing things we value. So when you lose a loved one, you grieve over the loss. If you grieve well then you’re able to release the loss and retain the positive memories. A memorial service or funeral aids that process of releasing the valued person but remembering the relationship.

God established grief to be the tool for releasing things we value.

The process of grief is reenacted every day in the life of a child through disappointment. Loss isn’t restricted to just death or separation. Children experience loss when they can’t have a snack or the soccer game is rained out. There’s loss when a child isn’t allowed to wear that new sweater, or can’t have a

milkshake with lunch. Loss requires grief, and kids need to learn to grieve over the disappointments of life. Every no answer represents a certain degree of loss and requires some skill at grieving.

But children can be very intense and hold onto things quite tightly. The harder you hold things you value, the greater the need to grieve and let go when you lose them. Some children become angry and even bitter when they lose just minor privileges. These children have major heart work to do in their lives. They need to learn to grieve in a healthy way, and often that skill comes with more losses and more correction. Disappointment and grief are appropriate; demandingness and meanness are not.

Grieving takes place in a person's heart.

Grieving takes place in a person's heart. The daily disappointments of life, if handled correctly, can allow children to become more flexible, grateful for what they have, and content. When disappointments are handled poorly, children develop anger, bitterness, and resentment.



Pause and Reflect

How does my child express disappointment?

How well does my child grieve?

One of the most important jobs of parenting is to help children grieve well. Parents hate to see their children sad. They don't like to put up with the tirades, or manipulative techniques. They become worn down by the bickering and the barrage of unkindness. So, many parents give in and allow their children to have what they want. They think that they're making their children happy, but the end result encourages selfishness. Selfish children are never happy for long. They always want more.

One of the most important jobs of parenting is to help children grieve well.

In contrast, other parents react with anger to their children's inability to accept no as an answer. They overpower their children with yelling, better arguments, or lectures. This parenting approach unwittingly moves the focus off the grieving process, away from the heart, and onto the relational struggle with parents. Parental anger distracts children from the necessary work of grieving.

How do you respond to your child's disappointment? Do you become angry and critique them for their childish behavior? Or do you feel so sorry for them that you give in, trying to remove the experience of loss? Neither response is productive. The best way to respond is with empathy, acknowledging their pain, but holding the line. You may say something like, *"I'm sorry but the answer is no. I know this is hard for you. I know you're disappointed, but you need to come to a place where you can accept a no answer. I'm not going to continue to dialogue about this or argue with you. This is something you need to accept."*

Acceptance is the final stage of grief or disappointment. It may not come quickly, but given enough time and experience, acceptance releases the loss and enjoys the memories. For some children, acceptance only comes through practice. Unfortunately, you are the coach and the limit-setter. It's not easy, but your children may need to hear that no answer more often for a while.

Acceptance is the final stage of grief or disappointment.

God uses the term “contentment” to describe the ability to live within limits. Contentment means being satisfied with what you have instead of complaining about what you don’t have. The scriptures have several important things to say about contentment.



Pause and Reflect

Read 1 Timothy 6:6-9. According to Paul, why is contentment an asset?

Read Philippians 4:11-12. In what circumstances did Paul learn to be content?

How is my child doing in those areas?

Not only can children learn contentment, but you as a parent are the primary instructor to teach it.

Contentment is Learned

Paul said, *“I have learned to be content.”* That’s encouraging. Not only can children learn contentment, but you as a parent are the primary instructor to teach it. Contentment isn’t something you’re born with or without. It’s not even a part of one’s personality, although some seem to be more predisposed to it than others. The reality is that contentment resides in a person’s heart. It’s the ability to live within limits and experience peace inside even when expectations aren’t met.

Marcy was eight years old. She had a hard time accepting a no answer and often got very angry when disappointment came her way. After counseling with Marcy for several weeks she had a particularly good week where both she and her mom reported that she was quite giggly and excited for several days. I (Scott) asked Marcy this question: *“If you’re not way over here on the anger side and you’re not way over here on the excited or giggly side but you’re somewhere right in the middle, what would you call that?”* I expected Marcy to say, *“Peace,”* and then I was prepared to share with her several scripture verses related to peace in her life. But that’s not what happened.

Marcy looked up at the ceiling, thinking for a moment before she responded. *“I think it would be called ‘content.’”*

That wasn't the answer I was expecting but it certainly made sense. We talked about the apostle Paul's lessons in contentment and I affirmed her answer.

Contentment doesn't have to mean "absence of emotion." In fact, one might experience anger or excitement and still be content. However, it's more common that emotions and intensity rob us of the internal contentment that God wants us to have. One of the greatest robbers of contentment is demandingness.

One of the greatest robbers of contentment is demandingness.

As you work with your children through the day-to-day disappointments of life, you can teach this very important quality. When children learn contentment, they become happier people. They learn to live within limits, and they learn how to release things more graciously. One of the ways contentment is learned in family life is when parents say no.

One of the ways contentment is learned in family life is when parents say no.



Pause and Reflect

How have I seen contentment demonstrated in my child?

“But I Like My Child’s Determination”

One dad said, *“I like it that my son presses on when he gets a no answer. It tells me that he’s ambitious and that he’ll go places in life. I like the determination and perseverance I see.”* This dad is correct in valuing ambition and determination. However, there’s a point where children cross the line and their persistence turns into demandingness. We all know adults who don’t know when to quit. They may get what they want but they become obnoxious and damage relationships in the process.

The line between ambition and demandingness is hard for most children to see. By crossing this line a child sacrifices relationship for his desire. Your job is to teach your children when they’ve crossed this line. As a parent you need to be sensitive to the cues in yourself. When children violate this social boundary, you feel angry and even abused. Communicate what you’re feeling without being harsh. Help your children learn where that line is and when they’ve gone too far.

James 4:1-2 says that many of the fights and quarrels of life come from desires within. Those desires become so strong that they dominate the heart and relationships take second place. Your daughter’s request becomes more important to her than the relationship she has with you. In fact, she’s trampling the relationship just to get what she wants. That’s what hurts and creates the angry feelings in you. This is where perseverance turns into demandingness.

Instead of reacting in anger, plan how you might respond in order to bring about maximum heart change.

Instead of reacting in anger, plan how you might respond in order to bring about maximum heart change.



Pause and Reflect

What symptoms of demandingness do I see in my child?

Which one of these ideas helps me best understand why children can't accept no as an answer?

- Children don't grieve well and every disappointment can appear to be a major loss.
- When kids react to a no answer they are valuing their issue as more important than the relationship.
- Contentment is learning to live within limits, an important quality for everyone.
- Ambition and perseverance are good. Demandingness is not.

Here are a few of my thoughts about this:

Demandingness Symptom #1: Arguing

You've heard it said, *"It takes two to argue,"* and you know it's true but you get sucked into arguing before you realize what's happened. You give a no answer to your daughter and she asks a simple question, *"Why?"*

Of course you've thought about this quite a bit. You have so many values to teach her and now she seems ready to listen because she's asked you a question. So, you take a deep breath and you launch into the answer. Just as you're patting yourself on the back for your brilliance and insight, she says, *"but..."* and raises an objection to your logic. Of course, you have the answer for this one too so you again offer your nuggets of wisdom. She disagrees and before you know it, you're deep into an argument with no end in sight.

Before you know it, you're deep into an argument with no end in sight.

If you find yourself in the arguing department you may need to address it directly with your child. *"I'm sorry. I realize that I've been trying to engage you in conversation and respond to your questions. I thought that was a good thing, but now we've ended up in a place where we shouldn't be, so I'm going to stop responding to your objections because I don't want to argue with you."*

Lydia shared her story with us. *"I could pretty much expect an argument every time I said no to Jackson. The problem was that he often would reveal some more information in the dialogue and I found myself in a dilemma. His new information or logic actually led me to believe that saying yes was a better response. I often found myself changing my mind but I knew that I was also encouraging his arguing."*

The solution for Lydia was to postpone her answer until she had more information. She wouldn't say yes or no until she had all the details. *"Is there anything else you want to tell me about this request before I give you an answer?"* This not only freed Lydia up to make a decision and stick with it, but it also helped Jackson formulate a complete proposal, anticipate objections, and present his request in a more thought-out manner.

Sometimes parents are too quick to give a no answer. In fact, if you have a child who has a problem with arguing, you dread these conversations. You see him coming with a request in his eyes and you jump with the response, “*The answer is no,*” before he even starts to ask. You do this out of sheer self-protection, but it may be best to listen for a longer period of time before you give your answer.

It’s not wrong to change your mind. In fact, when possible it’s helpful to come to conclusions about permission together with children. Dialogue helps kids see pros and cons and the reasons behind your concerns. If, however, you have a problem with a child who responds with arguing, you may need to set limits on the dialogue since it’s becoming counterproductive.

Sometimes parents are too quick to give a no answer.

There may be times when you stick to a no answer even though you might be persuaded to change to a yes. If you’re being mistreated in the dialogue, you don’t want to encourage the tactics by changing your mind. When children resort to mean or belittling comments or use anger, sarcasm, or put-downs to try to get their way, you may need to hold firm. The reason has to do with how children relate to parents.

Sometimes kids think that their disappointment warrants meanness. If they don’t get what they want, they have the right to be angry. It’s a parent’s job to teach children that the decision is only part of the issue. How we treat each other in the decision-making process is also very important.

Sometimes kids think that their disappointment warrants meanness.

Postponing the decision and drawing attention to the process are two ways to challenge children who argue to get what they want. By the way, it’s usually appropriate in family life to have an appeal process. Children should have a means by which they can come to Mom or Dad and challenge a request or limit. This appeal must take place respectfully. If children appeal graciously, sometimes parents are willing to change their minds. However, one of the prerequisites for using an appeal is the ability to accept no as an answer. Children who can’t accept a no answer may lose the privilege of bringing an

appeal for a period of time.

Remember that changing your mind isn't wrong and dialoguing about requests is often helpful...except when a child is developing a problem with demandingness and is using arguing to manipulate others. When you see your child heading down this path, you'll want to change the way you relate for a while in order to discourage the demandingness and not contribute to a growing problem.



Pause and Reflect

Does my child have a problem with arguing?

Yes No Sometimes

What kinds of things do I do that become part of the problem or the solution?

The goal of badgering is to wear down the parent.

Demandingness Symptom #2: Badgering

A badger is a small animal with a tenacious approach to life. It burrows and digs and claws and scrapes to get what it wants. Parents use the term “badger” to describe children who are tenacious about what they want. The goal of badgering is to wear down the parent with a barrage of questions and nagging so that the parent eventually gives in. And much of the time it works. Parents say, “I’ve had enough. Here, take it and go leave me alone.” Of course, then the badgering is encouraged because it works.

Kayla is five years old. *“Mom, may I have a snack?”*

“No, we’re going to have lunch in about 15 minutes. We’re not going to have a snack now.”

“But I’m hungry. Can I just have a little snack?”

“No, we’re not going to have any snack. I’m making lunch. You can help me if you want to.”

“I’ll help you if I can eat some of it.”

“No, I don’t want you to have anything to eat until we sit down to eat lunch.”

“Can I have a drink?”

“No, we’re not going to have anything until lunch.”

“Can I just have some apple juice please?”

“No, I said you can’t have anything. I want you to stop talking about food now until we have lunch.”

“But my bear is hungry, he wants a drink.”

There’s a socially appropriate line that, when crossed, begins to damage the relationship.

Remember that determination is a good character quality, but there’s a socially appropriate line that, when crossed, begins to damage the relationship. Most adults recognize where the line exists so if you ask for something and the person says no, then you usually can have one appeal or clarification. Past that, you become an irritation. You’ve crossed the line.

Children who badger don’t understand that there’s a line. When your son begins to badger, you’ll usually know it because you feel uncomfortable or even angry. Remember to use your irritation as the cue that your child has just entered the badgering department and that you need to talk about the socially appropriate line that your child has crossed. This means that you stop talking about the issue and you begin talking about the process. That is, instead of continuing to say no about a snack or a trip to the store, now you’re talking about

Some children aren't sensitive enough to pick up on the non-verbal cues so we have to teach them with words.

the way your child is treating you. *"I've already answered that question so I don't want to talk about it anymore. What you're doing now is badgering me and it's wrong."*

With younger children you might even use picture words. *"I feel like you're poking and poking me over and over again with your questions. It's like you don't care that you're hurting me. It feels as if you're like a big truck coming at me and if you don't stop asking questions I'm going to get smashed to bits!"*

The goal is to raise the awareness level so children learn that crossing the line damages relationships.

This approach to discipline is difficult for many parents because they feel like they have to be rude to get their point across. The reality is that your child isn't picking up on the subtle communication so you must exaggerate the cues to help him get it. Please don't be mean to your kids, but defining the cues will help them see what's going on. When relating with another adult, you would sense the uncomfortable feeling with shifting of the feet, looking away, or even the eyes of irritation and you'd stop, knowing that you've entered dangerous territory. Some children aren't sensitive enough to pick up on the non-verbal cues so we have to teach them with words.

You don't have to yell to exaggerate the cues. You might overreact with your body, cowering at the badgering, or you may scrunch your face and protect as if you're going to get hit. Or you may just use words to express your discomfort.

Sometimes you have to help children change the subject and get their minds or hearts off the thing that has fixated their desires.

The goal is to communicate to your child in ways that raise the awareness level and increase sensitivity.

Whatever you do, don't cave in to badgering. When you say yes to a child who badgers, you're building strong motivation to do it again. After saying no several times, some parents begin to feel guilty. *"I've had to say no so often, I should change my mind."* These parents are on a rocky road and often lack the personal determination to hang in there and teach children the hard lessons that stop demandingness.

Sometimes you have to help children change the subject and get their minds or hearts off the thing that has fixated their desires. *“I’ve said no to that. We’re not going to talk about it anymore. Let’s talk about something different.”* Or, *“I want you to stop asking questions for a little while. Let’s have a discussion about something else.”* Or, *“I feel bad that I have to keep saying no to your requests. Why don’t you think of something I can say yes to?”* This can help kids refocus their energy more constructively.



Pause and Reflect

Does my child have a problem with badgering?

Yes No Sometimes

What kind of things do I feel that tell me when my child has crossed the socially appropriate line and is now badgering?

What are some ways that I, without yelling, might teach my child to stop badgering?

Demandingness Symptom #3: Whining

“It’s definitely the voice. I can’t stand it. It sounds like fingernails on a chalkboard.” That’s what Tia’s mom told us. And it’s true, isn’t it? Children have a way of whining and complaining that’s so irritating that parents just want it to stop. Many parents give in to their kids when the whining gets to the intolerable level.

Children sometimes get stuck in patterns of self-pity when Mom or Dad has to say no.

But it’s not just the tone of voice. Sometimes it’s the actual things they say. *“I don’t have anything to do. I’m bored. There’s nothing to do around here. This place is boring.”* Even said without a high-pitched tone, this too is whining. Why? Because it’s focusing on the problem instead of the solution. *“You never let me do what I want.”* Children sometimes get stuck in patterns of self-pity when Mom or Dad has to say no. Their response then tries to draw others into their unhappiness.

Some children just want to be sad. They get stuck in one line of thinking and can’t seem to break out. These kids don’t realize that they have a choice. They’re just miserable and will be miserable no matter what you do to try to please them. Often it’s helpful to say to this child, *“Sometimes kids like to be happy and sometimes kids like to be sad. It looks like this is one of those times when you just want to be sad, so I think you should go and get alone for a while and be sad by yourself so the rest of us can continue to be happy. When you’re ready to be happy, come back and see us.”*

This approach doesn’t solve all the whining problems but it may be helpful in training children that happiness is a choice and whining is not tolerated in this home.



Pause and Reflect

Does my child have a problem with whining?

Yes No Sometimes

How can I help reduce the whining so my child is less demanding?

Moving Demandingness to Contentment

Arguing, badgering, and whining are symptoms of demandingness. You can target them directly but it's also helpful to work on contentment in general.

Contentment, in part, is learned through the hard reality that you can't have everything you want. Some children take longer to learn this lesson than others. It may take years for a child to accept parental limits and reduce demandingness. Parents must be committed to holding the limits firm over a long period of time to help children come to accept them. It would be nice if children would learn from teaching or respond to your words of wisdom and choose to be content within limits. Unfortunately, some children look at parents as roadblocks in the way of their happiness in life. For these children, pain becomes their teacher and hard lessons are learned through experience.

Contentment, in part, is learned through the hard reality that you can't have everything you want.

Jordan was eleven years old. He seemed to get quite angry every time his mom or dad said no. In counseling as we began to work with Jordan, we saw that he invested so much emotion into his requests that intense disappointment was inevitable. That realization led us to the following conversation:

“Jordan, are you saving money for anything?”

“Yes, I’m saving money for a dog. Not just any dog. A Labrador Retriever.”

“How much do you have saved up?”

“I have \$400 in the bank and I need \$500 to get the dog.”

“Wow, that’s a lot of money. Do you have any more money at home?”

“Not much. I think I have about one dollar in my drawer.”

“That’s interesting. How would you feel if someone took your dollar out of your drawer?”

“Wow. I wouldn’t like that at all. It’s my money.”

“How would you feel if you went to the bank and someone had stolen your \$400?”

“Then I’d be really mad. It took me a long time to earn that money.”

“Let’s use money to talk about accepting no as an answer. It seems that many times you bring requests to your mom or dad that are really just one dollar requests but you react as if they’re \$400 requests. You invest so much of your emotion into the request that when you get a no answer you become devastated and very angry. Part of the solution here is to not make all your requests so important.”

If he could invest less emotional energy into his requests, he wouldn’t feel so upset when the answer is no.

We were trying to help Jordan understand the concept of emotional investment. If he could invest less emotional energy into his requests, he wouldn’t feel so upset when the answer is no. We also talked about a number scale. On a scale of one to ten, with ten being very important and one being not so important, how important is this request

to you? It seemed that, as we talked, almost all of his requests were between an 8 and a 10. That led us to another conclusion. Jordan loved life. He was determined to have fun, enjoy himself, and get the things he wanted. Although those may be good qualities at times, life often didn't give him what he wanted. So Jordan spent a lot of his time unhappy.

Some children act as if all their requests are tens. Parents need to help these kids re-evaluate their wants and move some down to lower numbers. Try asking a child, *"Is this request really so important to you, or is it actually just a two or three?"* Helping children evaluate their own intensity levels can teach them some important lessons about demandingness and contentment.

As you teach your children about contentment, you might help them understand the difference between demands, desires, and wishes.

When Stephen comes down for spaghetti dinner, he sees there are no meatballs. If it were a wish, he would say, *"I wish there were meatballs in my spaghetti sauce."* If it were a desire, he'd say, *"I want meatballs in my spaghetti sauce."* But Stephen has a problem with demandingness. And so he comes down and says, *"No meatballs? I have to have meatballs if I'm going to eat spaghetti! So make me some meatballs!"*

Stephen, like many children, needs to understand the difference between a demand, a desire, and a wish. This illustration can help children back down their intensity level.

Some children would benefit from bringing their request in the idea stage. Rachel wants to have a friend over on Saturday. She starts planning on Monday about all the things they will do together and the fun they'll have. Rachel plans all week but she doesn't ask permission from Mom until Friday. When Mom reveals other plans and must say no, Rachel is very upset. This is a major loss. It would help Rachel to share her plans in the idea stage before she gets so wrapped up in them.

Some children would benefit from bringing their request in the idea stage.



Pause and Reflect

How does my child demonstrate a lack of contentment?

Which of these ideas might be helpful for my child?

- Talk about emotional investment
- Use a scale of 1-10 to evaluate requests
- Teach about demands, desires, and wishes
- Encourage children to bring requests in the planning stage
- Other ideas:

In order to accept a no answer the child has to be convinced that the answer will stand.

In order for contentment to grow, children must release the desire, accept the limitation, and move on. Unfortunately, many children have a vicious intensity when it comes to their requests. In order to accept a no answer the child has to be convinced that the answer will stand. As long as there is hope that Mom might change her mind, the drive remains alive. Although hope is a good thing and children need hope in their lives to have a positive outlook, that hope is misplaced when it won't live

within limits.

A parent who gives in to arguing, badgering, or whining keeps hope alive, further postponing acceptance and contentment. Parents must help children by refusing to engage in the manipulations, making the no answer clear and sticking to it. These actions force children into the heart work necessary—grieving and then coming to a place where they release the demandingness.

The heart problem of demandingness is not issue-specific. It reveals itself in several ways. The child who is demanding will reveal this problem in various forms of pushiness, bullying, and unkindness. These children need firmer boundaries, more no answers, and limits of steel.

Please don't think that having discussions with children is wrong or changing your mind always contributes to selfishness in children. If your children don't have a problem with demandingness, then be grateful. Children who aren't demanding often demonstrate other character weaknesses. A child who isn't demanding may give up too easily with minor roadblocks in life. In that case, you may want to teach your child how to hang in there, ask more questions, and learn to negotiate. If you have a child who is demanding then your approach must address the demandingness. If you have a child who is more passive you'll want to encourage more dialogue and persistence. In this chapter we're focusing particularly on the child who has a problem accepting no as an answer. These children need a firmer approach. If they can learn contentment while they're young, they'll be much happier as they get older.

Teaching contentment to children isn't easy.

Putting it All Together

The child who can't accept no as an answer has a heart problem that needs attention. As a parent, you have the privilege and responsibility to address this issue in your son or daughter. What children often need is strong-willed parents who will communicate firm boundaries and set limits that won't easily be moved.

But these same children also need you to demonstrate love and look for creative ways to teach them about contentment.

Keep in mind that contentment is often learned over months and years because you're working on the heart. Do what you can and also spend a lot of time praying. Pray that God will change the heart of your child, but also pray that God will reveal new things to you that will help you reach deep into your child's heart.

Summary: Teaching Children to Accept No as an Answer

Children have trouble accepting no as an answer because:

- They have a hard time living within limits
- They value the issue as more important than relationship
- They don't handle disappointment well

Three demandingness symptoms must be addressed:

- Arguing
- Badgering
- Whining

The solution is contentment

- Teach about emotional investment
- Talk about the benefits of contentment
- Hold firm to the no answer



Pause and Reflect

How am I doing at addressing demandingness in my child?



Pause and Reflect

What aspects of contentment does my child need to learn?

What can I do differently to help my child accept no as an answer?

Personal Prayer

Preview: In the Next Chapter

One of the biggest challenges parents have with their kids has to do with attitude. Children seem to be resistant to change even before you start. Attitudes can create real problems in family life. But we say that ***“Attitude is a window into a child’s heart.”*** It’s a very important place to work. In the next chapter you’ll learn how to address the attitudes of your children. You’ll discover that bad attitudes have three components and learn how to approach them for maximum impact. Most importantly, you’ll gain a few more tools for working on your child’s heart.



7

Attitude: A Window into a Child's Heart

If the attitude continues to get worse, you're headed for a crisis. It might not be today or next week, but it's coming.

Read along in the book *Parenting is Heart Work*

Chapter 5 addresses the value of emotions. Since emotions are one part of an attitude, it's helpful to understand their purpose and how to respond well emotionally. Many children choose responses based on feelings, turning disappointment, frustration, and anger into resistance, meanness, and aggression. Instead of trying to get rid of emotions, teaching the heart means learning to sort out the good side of feelings from their negative counterparts. Chapter 12 describes ways to use the scriptures in child training. Since another part of attitudes has to do with thinking errors, continually giving children scriptural guidance allows them to develop healthy paradigms and thinking patterns.

When the subject of bad attitudes comes up, parents become very interested because they're hungry for answers. It seems that a parent can hardly get anything done in family life without a bad attitude rearing its ugly head.

Bad Attitudes often come in the following three areas:

■ When you give instructions

It could be anything from asking your son to bring the dishes in from the living room to giving some direction when he's cleaning his room. He may do what you ask but the body language and moans and groans communicate a different message. Children often resist requests from Mom or Dad and they show their disapproval with a bad attitude.

Sometimes they actively display their disapproval, and other times they have a passive-aggressive response by doing a job part way, moping their way through, or using the silent treatment.

■ When you correct

Pointing out meanness, going over some math problems, or asking a child to stop tapping his foot can generate anger, mean comments, or tension-filled resistance. A bad attitude is often demonstrated toward correction. And then further correction just seems to make the problem worse.

■ When you give a no answer

Disappointment with your limits is a common trigger that sends children into their favorite bad attitude mode. They're unhappy with your decision and the result is a barrage of grumbling, complaining, and dissatisfaction with all of life.



Pause and Reflect

My child has a problem with a bad attitude in the following area(s):

- When I give instructions
- When I correct
- When I have to say no to a request
- All of the above

Here are a few areas in life where my child typically has a bad attitude.

Bad attitudes are not just a child problem. In fact, if we can help children understand their bad attitudes and learn how to change them, then we can have a significant impact on their future. But how should you respond? Most parents feel angry when they see a bad attitude in a child. This anger can further complicate the problem because parents develop a bad attitude themselves. They have a bad attitude toward bad attitudes.

The goal of this chapter is to help you understand attitudes and give you some practical ideas for changing them. When you have a strategy, then you won't have to rely on your anger to solve the problems. In the end, children will learn more and you'll feel better about your parenting.

What is an attitude?

The Bible translators had an interesting problem when they came to Philippians 2:5. The translators of the KJV translate it, “*Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.*” The translators of the NIV say, “*Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.*” Which is it, “*mind*” or “*attitude*”?

**Attitude is a
mind-set.**

The answer is both. An attitude is a frame of mind. In fact, an attitude is a prepackaged response to a trigger. By “prepackaged” we mean that a child develops a group of actions and emotions. It’s predictable. When the trigger happens, the child responds, sometimes internally and often externally for all to see.

Everyone has these prepackaged responses. For example, think for a moment about the following triggers. What kind of response do you have to these word pictures?

Dunkin’ Donuts
Roller coasters
Motorcycle gangs

Each of these triggers generates a response. If someone says, “*Let’s go out to McDonald’s,*” you’ll likely have an attitude toward that restaurant. Most people either like it or they don’t. An attitude is a shortcut that allows you to jump to a specific set of responses. You’ve already made a decision about McDonald’s so you don’t have to evaluate whether you want to eat there or not. Your attitude is an emotional response that shows what you’ve already decided.

**Attitude is a
prepackaged
response.**

Children develop prepackaged responses to many of the things that happen in family life. Homework, cleaning their bedroom, getting up in the morning, doing chores, and relating to siblings are high on the list of areas where parents see bad attitudes. Part of the solution for these bad attitudes is for you to identify the triggers for your child. A trigger is the cue that sets off the bad attitude. Sometimes it’s a request to do a job. Other times it’s a suggestion of a way to do something differently. Or, the cue may actually be a person, like a brother walking into the room. The child immediately responds with an attitude.



Pause and Reflect

What are common triggers for a bad attitude in my child?

Not all attitudes are bad. In fact, you can't get rid of attitudes. You can only change them. Everyone develops these shortcuts in life based on information and experience. If you've had good experiences with family road trips and you know that traveling is educational for kids, you likely have a positive attitude about family vacations. If on the other hand your experiences have been painfully unpleasant and you see no indication that your kids enjoy them or learn anything, then you may have developed a bad attitude toward trips with your family. Attitudes are emotional responses that develop based on things we learn from life. They are shortcuts so we don't have to re-evaluate life continually.

Children often develop these shortcuts in life based on limited experience and information. Attitudes become "bad" when they are unproductive to relationships or to the person's well-being. A resistant attitude leads to a lack of cooperation. An angry attitude provokes conflict. A prideful attitude prevents children from learning or receiving correction. In fact, you have a lot to teach your children but many things get in the way of the learning process. Busyness and the pressures of just living life are two roadblocks, but bad attitudes in your children also rank high on the list of hindrances.

Attitudes become "bad" when they are unproductive to relationships or to the person's well-being.

Attitudes are important to address because they are windows into a child's heart. Many times children do the right thing but the attitude is in the wrong place. This is an indication that some heart work is needed.

You may, at times, be able to force a quick behavior change, but attitude adjustment usually takes longer.

As you begin to work on attitudes you're likely to stir up some relational challenges between you and your child. Be careful that you don't get drawn into a fight. Keep your cool and continue to work. Heart change takes time. When you work on attitudes you are doing deep and lasting work. You may, at times, be able to force a quick behavior change, but attitude adjustment usually takes longer. Children need help to process life and assistance to see that their bad attitudes are unproductive. You can have

a significant impact on the heart of your child as you work on attitudes.

Attitudes have three parts

Behavior

What your child does

The behavioral component is what you see. It's the warning flag that says there's a problem in the heart that needs to be addressed. You may not act on the spot but at least you know you have some work to do.

Behaviors may be physical (dragging feet, slamming, slouching, hands on hips, head cocked to one side), verbal (sarcasm, mean words), tone of voice (whiny, loud), nonverbal (rolling eyes, clicking tongue, pouting, ignoring, sighing loudly), or passive-aggressive (walking away, a job left undone, deliberately uncooperative).

Behavior is the component of a bad attitude that tells you that you have a problem.

Your child likely has favorite ways to demonstrate a bad attitude. Identify what those signs are and begin to watch for them. When do they come? What was the trigger? Who was around at the time? Instead of reacting to the behaviors you see, step back and ask yourself some important questions. Likely you'll see some patterns.

These patterns will be helpful when you're ready to develop a plan.

Behavior is the flag that tells you that it's time for you to move into a mode for addressing bad attitudes.



Pause and Reflect

What are the specific behaviors my child does that demonstrate a bad attitude?

One suggestion that may help raise the awareness of the problem in family life is to share what you see with your child. Don't mock your child or even share your observations at a heated moment, but later when things are calm share your observations.

"I notice that when I say no to you, you tend to have a favorite response to show your disapproval. You sigh and roll your eyes. Would you please consider what you're doing because you probably don't even realize that you're treating me unkindly. Would you please think about that?"

Parents make a mistake when they force an immediate change of behavior without considering the other components. Attitudes are much more involved than that. They come from the heart and require a multifaceted approach. Behavior is just one piece of the puzzle. It's the warning flag.

Identifying the underlying emotion can help you work more effectively with your child.

Emotion

What your child feels

All attitudes have an emotional component. At first glance, you may think that every bad attitude comes from anger. Children are repeatedly offended by siblings and the bad attitude is a prepackaged response to the annoyance or hurt. Expectations are dashed because Mom has to give a no answer or math triggers feelings of frustration.

But not all bad attitudes result from anger. Some come from disappointment, others from pride, jealousy, guilt, fear, sadness, or feelings of inadequacy. Identifying the underlying emotion can help you work more effectively with your child.

Furthermore, the energy derived from the emotion may help you know when to address this bad attitude. Some children invite a fight with their emotional intensity, and correcting on the spot could lead to an unproductive argument. These children may need to settle down first before a discussion can take place.

Emotion is the component of a bad attitude that tells you when to address it.

You may choose to postpone a dialogue until later, after the emotions have settled. Other children, however, speak their minds more freely and are motivated to talk when they experience the emotion. In this case, addressing a bad attitude on the spot can actually be productive because helpful dialogue takes place.

Thinking Errors

What your child believes

Thinking errors are at the core of bad attitudes. In the Bible we see that what people believe can lead to bad attitudes. Sarah believed she was too old to have a child so she laughed as she listened to God tell Abraham about their impending pregnancy (Genesis 18:12). Naaman almost didn't get healed because of his prideful attitude. He believed that he should be able to go and wash in the clean rivers near his home instead of the dirty Jordan River (2 Kings 5:11,12). Jesus criticized the Pharisees for their hypocritical attitude. They believed that

externals were more important than the heart (Matthew 23:25,26).

Children often believe common fallacies that feed bad attitudes:

- I ought to be able to have what I want, when I want it.
- You shouldn't be telling me to clean my room.
- Correction is an attack and I must defend myself.
- Admitting I'm wrong means I'm a failure.
- Schoolwork is a waste of time.

Children who believe wrong things, react poorly to life. One of the jobs you have as a parent is to pass on values and beliefs to your children.

It's as if your children are your customers and you have a business selling a product. Your job is to convince your customers that your product is better than any other products out there. Children see a lot of products. They see other families that function differently or other kids that seem to have a different set of values. Your values are your product and you want to convince your children that your values are not just plastic imitations. They are the real thing. You know what it takes to be successful in life. You're trying to teach your kids that your set of values contains the keys to success. Invest time, energy, planning, dialogue, and training into teaching your children why you have the rules you have and what is important in life.

Thinking errors are the component of a bad attitude that tells you where some real teaching needs to take place.



Pause and Reflect

As I reflect on a common area where my child has a bad attitude, here are some thinking errors he/she must believe:

Proactive Solutions for Bad Attitudes

If your only approach to changing bad attitudes is correction, then you're likely to be frustrated and see little progress.

Since thinking errors and lack of emotional control lead to bad attitudes in children, it's important to have a strategy that addresses more than just behavior, but touches the underlying problems. That means that correction is not enough. If your only approach to changing bad attitudes is correction, then you're likely to be frustrated and see little progress.

Many parents take advantage of the calm moments between arguments to rest up for the next battle, when it's during those peaceful times that significant work can be done. Furthermore, it's rare that your child gives you an audience during the bad attitudes because of the resistance, defensiveness, and blame shifting that seem to coexist with attitude problems.

Parents must be proactive to address bad attitudes effectively. Look for ways to relate to and teach children important truths in the course of life, during those calm times and whenever teachable moments arise. Here are a few suggestions to use proactively to address bad attitudes with your child.

1 • Evaluate the Influences

Many people and experiences influence your children. They lay the groundwork for what your kids believe. Certainly, as a parent, you have a great influence over your child but there are a host of other influences as well. Take time to evaluate the people who might contribute negatively to the beliefs and attitudes of your child. These influences may be at school, in the neighborhood, or with other friends.

Take time to evaluate the people who might contribute negatively to the beliefs and attitudes of your child.

But don't just evaluate people influences. Also take a look at the electronic stimulation in your child's life. Video games, computer games, and even electronic toys can foster aggression in children and teens. Television and music give messages about what to believe and how to act. Some of these messages are overt, some are quite subtle, but they all contribute to the developing attitudes in your children. In 1 Corinthians 15:33 Paul reminds us, "Bad company corrupts good character."

Remember that bad attitudes have both a thinking error component and an emotional component. Some video games heighten emotional intensity. One dad said, *"I realized that my son viewed revenge as a way to deal with his younger brother's irritation. I noticed that the video game he was playing for hours a day focused on revenge to solve problems. We decided to cut back on the video game time as part of our strategy for dealing with the bad attitude we saw in our son."*

It is true that you only have limited control in this area of influences. Your daughter still must go to school even if bad influences exist there. Your son is likely to spend some time watching TV or playing computer games at your home or the neighbors. Take advantage of any opportunity you have to adjust the influences in your child's life. You can't control every avenue your child travels on but you certainly can remove the trash from your front door.

Sometimes a single parent gets frustrated because he or she knows that the child is influenced negatively when in the custody of the other parent. Do what you can to help the other parent understand the danger of bad influences, and then work hard at home to teach your children as well. You might say, *"I notice*

that whenever you come home from a weekend with your dad, you seem to have a resistant attitude towards me for a few days. I wonder what it is that's causing you to have this attitude. Would you please think about that?" These kinds of comments can get kids to consider what is actually happening in their hearts.

Look for ways to increase positive influences in your child's life too. Attending church youth group, getting involved in sports, music, theater, or other activities provide opportunities for positive influences to have an impact. One mom enrolled her son in the karate program at her church where the leader talked about self-control and self-discipline. One of the assignments was to go home and clean your bedroom and keep it clean for a week, not because of your parents but because you are self-controlled on the inside. Mom enjoyed watching another leader influence her son in a positive way.



Pause and Reflect

What are some of the positive and negative influences (people and other forms) in my child's life?

Positive

Negative

Here are some ways I can influence these lists:

2 • Increase Emotional Awareness

Emotions and logic are experienced in different parts of the brain. When children become enraged, overwhelmed, frightened, frustrated, or sad, they often lose the capacity to think clearly. Talking about emotions creates a connection between the emotional side of the brain and the logic side. When kids talk about how they feel, they obtain a greater sense of control over their emotional reactions. So talking about emotions is not just a good solution. It's therapeutic and can actually decrease emotional intensity.

When kids talk about how they feel, they obtain a greater sense of control over their emotional reactions.

Many different emotions can contribute to a bad attitude, including pride, sorrow, fear, frustration, or disappointment. But often children lack an emotional vocabulary so any intensity of emotion is translated as anger. The anger is then demonstrated as a bad attitude. Furthermore, sometimes children (as well as adults) use anger to cover up other emotions because it takes vulnerability and courage to admit sadness or fear. Anger becomes the preferred response because children have bought into the lie that angry people are strong. The reality is that angry people are unhappy people.

You probably experience a lot of the same emotions that your children do. When you talk about your feelings, then you have the opportunity to model proper responses. It's not wrong to get angry but meanness and disrespect are not acceptable. Negative feelings don't justify poor responses. You may sympathize

with your child's feelings at times but be careful that you don't contribute to bad attitudes by justifying wrong responses.

Emotions have a way of sneaking up on children and they don't realize what's happening inside.

As you begin teaching about emotions with young children you can talk about the difference between three basic emotions: sad, mad, and glad. Identify ways to tell which emotion your child is experiencing at any given time. Emotions have a way of sneaking up on children and they don't realize what's happening inside. Your discussions will give your kids helpful insight into their own emotions.

Discussions about feelings can demystify the whole concept and increase a child's emotional vocabulary. When children understand their emotions, then they don't have to so quickly resort to a bad attitude to demonstrate what's going on.

Teens are developing independence. Independence is good; disrespect is not. Just because a child feels frustrated doesn't mean that expressing that feeling is good. Expressing one's own uniqueness can be healthy unless self-expression turns into selfishness and damages relationship.

As you develop a strategy to address bad attitudes in your family, take time to consider the emotional component.

3 • Target Thinking Errors

Keep in mind that you can't force a change of heart, but you can do a lot to influence it. Look for thinking errors in your children. Identify what they are and then go to work to adjust them.

Becca was seven years old. Mom was frustrated because every time she asked Becca to do something around the house, Becca would moan and groan. Even little jobs like picking up after herself in the bathroom or taking her own plate off the table after dinner became a major battle.

Mom also noticed that her daughter often did jobs halfway, leaving toys around after cleaning up the playroom. The red flag came when Becca started second grade. Her teacher reported that Becca's papers were often sloppy and incomplete. Mom knew she had a problem.

As Mom took a look at the areas where Becca struggled, she identified the problem as laziness. Becca was very capable of better work, but lacked the motivation to work hard and do her best. Mom needed a plan. She wanted to change what Becca believed about work.

One day Becca asked her mom if she could have a hamster. This gave Mom an idea. Mom knew that taking care of an animal involved work and sacrifice so she developed a plan for Becca. Mom knew that if Becca was motivated to get a hamster then she might be willing to work harder to earn that privilege. In the process, she could learn something about the value of work.

Mom explained it to Becca this way. *“Becca, taking care of a hamster is a lot of work. I want you to show me that you can work hard first, then we can talk about the hamster.”*

Mom set up a schedule for Becca to work with her in their garden every afternoon for an hour. When Becca complained she was tired, Mom encouraged her to hang in there. Over time, motivated by the idea of a hamster, Becca learned that she could work hard and persevere. She also saw that working hard can help you get the things you want in life. Over time, Becca began to believe some new things about the benefit of work and what she actually could accomplish. That heart lesson wasn't primarily accomplished through correction or through a lecture. Mom gave Becca an experience that, over time, became a reality in her heart. Becca changed what she believed.

Thinking errors aren't always easy to identify. Sometimes you need to do a bit of detective work. Take time to journal about the times, places, and situations that trigger a bad attitude in your child. What are the common threads you see?

**Thinking errors
aren't always
easy to identify.**

You'll want to look past the behavior of the attitude to the deeper issues involved. Then comes the hard work of changing what children believe. Kids usually have a piece of the truth but it needs to be filled in a bit.

Advertisers spend billions of dollars a year trying to change the attitudes that children have toward a particular soft drink or type of clothing. As parents we too must engage in the art of persuasion with our children. Just telling a child to stop having a bad attitude will do little to bring about change, but the deeper work of challenging what they believe can go a long way.



Pause and Reflect

When do I see a bad attitude in my child?

What might be a thinking error that contributes to this attitude problem?

Corrective Solutions for Bad Attitudes

Although proactive solutions can have a significant impact on a child's attitude, many times kids learn through correction. Unfortunately parents are often so disgusted with bad attitudes that they react with harshness, further complicating the problem instead of moving forward. Challenging children who have bad attitudes can be tricky at times. Remember, your goal isn't just to overpower the child and force right behavior. You're actually trying to get your child to believe something different about life.

You're actually trying to get your child to believe something different about life.

1 • Challenge Bad Attitudes Directly

Sometimes you'll identify a bad attitude, evaluate it, make a plan, and then approach the problem later after emotions settle down. Other times, however, you may find it helpful to challenge the bad attitude on the spot. Either way, talking directly about the attitude helps children understand that it's unacceptable.

If you ask your son to take out the trash and he responds with a bad attitude, you may say, *"Stop right there. Don't take out the trash. I want you to sit down in the hall and think about your response and the way you're treating me. When you're ready to talk about this then come back and see me and we'll discuss the problem."*

This direct challenge is a firm but controlled response that tells children, *"We're not going to tolerate bad attitudes."*



Pause and Reflect

Challenging a child directly can create immediate resistance. What things can I do when challenging directly to increase receptivity to my message?

2 • Make Observations

Many children don't recognize a bad attitude in themselves. When you make observations you give them more information so they can see it. Your comments provide a mirror for your children that reflects to them what's going on.

You may even use the “*observe and run*” technique. This is different than the “*observe and argue*” approach used in many homes.

“*Hmm. It seems like you're having a bad attitude here.*” And you quickly go about your business. You're not discussing it, but you're pointing out what you see or hear. You're helping your child become more aware. “*That tone of voice doesn't sound very kind.*” In this way you're just making observations, and leaving the thought with your child to ponder.

It's not necessary for you to have a conversation for your child to get the message.

For example, you may say, “*Tyler, that wasn't very thoughtful,*” as you pass by on your way to the next room.

Now Tyler is likely to respond to you and say, “*But—*” as a reaction, but you need to keep moving. Don't be drawn into a fight. Keep in mind that with the “*observe and run*” technique you don't engage in dialogue. Too many parents believe that they have to have the last word. It's not necessary for

you to have a conversation for your child to get the message. In fact, sometimes fewer words leave a lasting impression. You know that he's heard you and will likely think about what you've said. You'll see it again later and may make the same comment again, *"That wasn't very thoughtful."* Later that day, or maybe the next, you see it again and you might say, *"You know, that wasn't very thoughtful."*

Eventually Tyler will get the message that what he's doing lacks thoughtfulness. You're raising the awareness level of thinking errors. Simple observations can go a long way.

Sometimes a consequence is needed to get a child's attention. If you think a consequence may be helpful, go ahead and use it. We're not suggesting that we talk about problems and avoid consequences. But too many parents ignore an attitude problem over and over and then eventually react strongly with a consequence. The suggestion here is to also make comments along the way in order to challenge the thinking errors in your child.

Disrespect is a problem where you might try this approach. Disrespect is so prevalent in our society that young people are even disrespectful to each other as a matter of course. It's amazing how they talk to their friends sometimes. Many children don't hear it in their own voice. Furthermore, disrespect toward parents and other authorities is seen as acceptable in so many arenas today that children often get the message that it's okay. It's here that parents can provide some much-needed information to children by making observations. *"You know, that sounds disrespectful to me."* The goal with this approach is to help children begin to question themselves and listen to how they're relating.

Sometimes a consequence is needed to get a child's attention.

The goal of making observations is to give kids more information to help influence their thinking. Many parents tolerate problems and don't tell kids what's bothering them. Children then miss out on the benefit of insight from parents and remain entrenched in bad attitudes.



Pause and Reflect

How might I use the approach of Making Observations to challenge thinking errors in my child?

3 • Choose the Right Timing

You have to ask yourself the question, *“Is this the right time to challenge my child about the attitude I’m seeing?”* If you have a child who gets intensely angry and you see an attitude that comes from anger, confronting on the spot may result in escalation of conflict. Some discipline strategies that parents use intensify the situation instead of defusing it. Having a child sit down or take a Break separates the child from the issues, allows him or her to settle down, and requires that the child return for a debriefing.

Under the banner of consistency, some parents feel the need to address everything on the spot.

Under the banner of consistency, some parents feel the need to address everything on the spot. Although this may be helpful for some children, many need space and time before attitude work can be effective. Of the three parts of a bad attitude, behavior, emotion, and thinking errors, it’s usually the emotion that guides this decision. Some children lose emotional control and then can’t have a successful dialogue about attitudes. In this case you may address the attitude later by saying something like, *“I’m noticing that when I give you an instruction, you respond with anger each time. You must believe some things about instruction that are a little different than what’s true here, or you must*

have some misperceptions. Let's talk about this because I'm concerned about the way you're responding to me when I ask you to do something."

Allowing emotions to settle often reduces resistance and provides for a more teachable spirit. Sometimes a parent's emotional response is also too intense. Coming back later to address the problem allows the parent to plan the confrontation more carefully.

However, some children use emotional intensity to keep parents at bay. They communicate a message that says, *"There's never a good time to correct me."* In these cases don't be afraid of your child's emotion or allow it to deter you. You must correct. The point made here, however, is that parents who consider the timing can make better progress than those who don't.

Choosing the right timing means asking the question:

"Is the emotional climate of the moment conducive for addressing the bad attitude I'm seeing or should I wait for a more appropriate opportunity?"

Some children use emotional intensity to keep parents at bay.

One dad said it well. *"I've tried all kinds of ways to help my children address their bad attitudes over the years. Sometimes I'm more successful than others and I know it in part has to do with timing. Sometimes I just pray about a particular problem, determine what my child needs, and then wait for an opportunity to talk about it. It's amazing how many times my prayers are answered with a teachable moment."*



Pause and Reflect

As I consider the timing when addressing a bad attitude in my child, I think it's best to keep the following things in mind:

4 • Teach a Better Way to Respond

Sometimes parents say, “*Stop having a bad attitude,*” without giving children suggestions about a better way to respond. It might be helpful for you to ask yourself, “*How do I want my child to respond when I interrupt the video with a request?*” Or, “*What is a better way to handle frustration?*”

Mean comments, disrespect, or angry words or actions need correction. As you correct, be sure to tell children what to do, not just what to stop.

It's good for a child to respond to an instruction with “*Okay Mom,*” or “*Okay Dad.*” This kind of response is helpful even if you don't agree or like the instruction. It's just the right thing to do.

A child who is corrected should say, “*I was wrong,*” or “*I'll work on that.*” These positive statements to correction may seem like a dream to some parents whose children blame others, argue, justify, or defend, but remember that you're teaching children what you want them to do. It will take time to learn appropriate responses, but telling them exactly what they should do can move them in a helpful direction.

The child who can't accept no graciously needs to say to herself, “*Maybe next time,*” instead of investing so much emotion into the request that disappointment results in devastation and anger.



Pause and Reflect

As I consider an area where my child typically responds with a bad attitude, here are some suggestions for a positive response instead:

Putting it All Together

The process of changing attitudes takes time. Your job is to persuade and convince your children that your values are good and that the process of working together in family life is important. We all need to cooperate, live within limits, and accept correction. Every successful, happy person knows how to handle frustration and do things that are unpleasant. It's part of life. Attitude can make all the difference.

Working on attitudes in children is an investment. It takes a lot of energy, planning, and wisdom to overcome resistance. Change takes place in the long term, but the day-to-day work you do now pays off. It's not easy. Parenting is not only hard work, it's heart work.

Don't become discouraged if your child just goes through the motions. Require right behavior, talk about a better heart response, and use consequences and dialogue to motivate your kids to make heart level changes. Even if you don't see the heart change, keep working. Pray that God will do the deeper work. Sometimes attitude changes take a long time. Patience and perseverance on the part of parents is key to success.

Summary: **Attitude: A Window into a Child's Heart**

Bad Attitudes are most often seen in these three areas:

- When children are given an instruction
- When children are corrected
- When children receive no as an answer

A bad attitude has three components:

- Behavior—what you see
- Emotion—what the child feels
- Thinking Errors—what the child believes

Proactive Solutions

- Evaluate the Influences
- Increase Emotional Awareness
- Target Thinking Errors

Corrective Solutions

- Challenge Bad Attitudes Directly
- Make Observations
- Choose the Right Timing
- Teach a Better Way to Respond



Pause and Reflect

Of all the bad attitudes I see in my child, I'd like to work on this one:

I would like to begin making these changes in the way I respond to bad attitudes:

Personal Prayer

Preview: In the Next Chapter

Parents are sometimes frustrated because their children appear to have hard hearts. Kids are angry, resistant, and seem determined to work against anything that fosters a sense of unity in family life. These parents are disciplining and trying to teach cooperation, but they see relationship deteriorating. They say, *“When it comes to the heart, I’m not sure where to start.”*

In the next chapter we help you know where to begin. You’ll learn specific ways to open a child’s heart and ways to decrease resistance. Many parents wish that they could have this chapter first because it sets the stage for all the others. But in reality, we need to see the issues first and then we’re willing to do the work to soften a child’s heart.



8

How to Start Connecting with the Heart

Take time to strengthen relationships because relationship softens the heart, and you can't teach a hard heart.

Read along in the book *Parenting is Heart Work*

A heart-based approach to working with children begins by looking for ways to open up a child's heart. Soft hearts are teachable hearts. Chapter 6 offers several practical ideas for softening a child's heart through emotional connectedness. Chapter 8 teaches some important communication skills and discusses how to use the Gratefulness Principle in family life. Children need to develop gratefulness in their lives. It's a heart quality and a higher form of motivation than the reward/punishment model children often seem to require.

We've all heard about the value of relationship with our kids. We even long for more closeness at times. Parents want relationships that are warm, with mutual respect and appreciation. Parents are eager to teach their children's hearts, to provide wisdom and guidance. Yet in reality children are often resistant to parental input.

If the relationship between you and your child is warm and open, take heart and be encouraged. Continue to do the things that keep that relationship close.

The business of family life takes its toll and closeness seems to evaporate.

In many families, however, children become rather closed to parental initiatives. Kids want to do it their way.

It's not easy to work with a heart that's closed and hard. It seems that just the day-to-day interaction between parents and kids works against the goal to teach the heart. After all, parents have to give instructions and correction on a regular basis. The business of family life takes its toll and closeness seems to evaporate. Children become angry, resentful, or withdrawn. They often appear to ignore parental attempts to discipline and teach. So how can parents get in and do the heart work of parenting?

In this chapter you will learn keys that will open the doors and windows of your child's heart. No matter what pain or challenges you or your children have faced, and no matter how much your relationship has been taxed, it is possible to develop closeness. It all starts in the heart.

Keep in mind, though, that these ideas will challenge you. You'll likely have to relate differently to your kids. You may be stretched beyond your comfort zone. Sometimes the things that kids need the most, are the hardest for parents to give.

Parents spend a lot of money today investing in their children, trying to give them a head start in life. In this chapter you'll read about another way to invest in your children. We've heard parents say, *"I'd do anything to regain relationship with my kids,"* and it's that kind of determination that will keep you going as you continue to do the heart work of parenting.

Gary was fourteen years old when his parents brought him to our office for counseling. Mom and Dad were concerned about Gary's anger. He did what they asked him to do but often had a bad attitude. He wasn't communicating and had pulled back from much of family life. He just wasn't part of the family. He wasn't interacting with them. He skipped out on meals and spent a lot of time alone in his room or out with friends. Dad and Mom wanted something more. *"We feel like we're losing our son."*

We spent some time talking with Gary and his parents, getting to know each of them a little bit better. At one point we asked Gary, *"On a scale of one to ten, one being a very soft heart toward your parents and a ten being a very closed heart toward your parents, where would you put yourself?"*

"Oh, that's easy, I'd be a ten."

"You'd be a ten? That's way over here on the closed side."

"Yeah, I'm not even interested in having a relationship with my parents."

As we continued to dialogue with Gary and began working with his mom and dad, we realized where things went wrong. Mom and Dad were focusing on discipline—keeping Gary's behavior in line—but they were losing their son's heart.

We suggested that they try something different. *"Let's take the focus off of discipline and put the emphasis on relationship."* We taught them what it means to connect with their son's heart. We started with greeting him in the morning, at night, and during the day, simply acknowledging him with friendship and courtesy. We looked for other ways to dialogue with him, to have fun, be silly, or enjoy each other. One day Dad playfully started pushing and bantering in the family room, leading to a fun wrestling match

No matter what pain or challenges you or your children have faced, and no matter how much your relationship has been taxed, it is possible to develop closeness.

"Let's take the focus off of discipline and put the emphasis on relationship."

on the couch. They both enjoyed the physical challenge.

Gary's parents began to connect with their son on a deeper level. It was fun to watch. Over the next few weeks they saw significant changes.

The key in this very difficult part of parenting wasn't to develop bigger consequences.

Yes, Gary's parents had a long way to go but they had done the work to connect to their son's heart. The key in this very difficult part of parenting wasn't to develop bigger consequences. It wasn't even necessarily teaching Gary some new things. It was learning how to connect with him in some very important ways. In this chapter you'll learn the suggestions we gave to Gary's parents, but before we

get to that, take a moment and evaluate your relationship with your child.



Pause and Reflect

On a scale of 1 to 10, how open is my child's heart toward me?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

On a scale of 1 to 10, how open is my heart toward my child?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

On a scale of 1-10, how hard am I working on this particular area of connecting with my child's heart?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

My Thoughts:

But My Kids Need Firmness

Sometimes parents equate emotional connectedness with leniency or a lack of discipline. This doesn't have to be the case. Firmness from parents develops character in kids. It's important for you to look for ways to motivate your children to do the right thing. Applying pressure is part of your job. You must say no to some of their requests. You have to instruct them and stay on them in order to get a task done. You have to correct them when they are doing the wrong things. All of that pressure is helpful in moving a child along in character development.

But sometimes parents get so focused on those elements of parenting that the friendship part of family life gets pushed to the side. An overemphasis on limits and rules can make family life sterile or military-like. Relationship must be at the forefront of your mind. Remember, kids can only handle as much pressure as the relationship can withstand.

**Remember,
kids can only
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relationship can
withstand.**

All children need love, attention, and a connection with the heart. Sometimes parents assume that their kids know their love and feel it, but kids need to actually experience it in tangible ways on a day-to-day basis.

Now in all fairness, parents often start out doing well connecting with their children's hearts. When kids are young, it can be easy to have fun and

enjoy relationship. Your toddler giggles as you kiss his tummy repeatedly. He tries to pull his shirt down in fun. Your preschooler curls up in your lap for a special story time in the afternoon. It isn't long, however, before the work of family life brings on the pressure. Children develop resistance to instructions and correction. Parents end up having to do more pushing and pulling than they expected. Before you know it you've spent so much time struggling with resistance that the relationship has worn thin.

Too much pressure without relationship leads to anger, resentment, and rebellion. Children need both relationship and discipline in order to grow

Children need both relationship and discipline in order to grow successfully.

successfully. As children get older it's often harder to keep up the relationship end. Teens are out of the house more, balancing various commitments and relationships, and spending less time with their parents. As the family matures, fostering relationship takes work and creativity.

Jesus was a master at connecting with people emotionally. Take a moment and look at these Bible stories from the relational point of view.

Read John 12:3-8

Judas criticized Jesus for accepting an expensive gift from Mary. What was the point of Jesus' rebuke?

Read Luke 10:38-42

Martha criticized Jesus for not recognizing all the work that needed to be done, asking him to tell Mary to help. What was the point of Jesus' rebuke?

The apostle Paul also talked to the early Christians about the same concept. He instructed them to *“Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn”* (Romans 12:15). Paul instructs Christians to be emotionally connected with others in God's family. The same truth applies in the earthly family as well. Emotional connectedness builds strong bonds in family dynamics.

**Emotional
connectedness
builds strong
bonds in family
dynamics.**

Overcoming Roadblocks to Connecting

Before we share with you ideas about connecting, let's examine some of the inherent barriers present in many families. Several roadblocks get in the way of connecting with kids. When you understand these barriers you'll be able to recognize them in family life and take corrective action.

Connecting is sometimes a challenge because of the actual personalities involved. For example, one child is highly social and talkative, wanting Mom to listen and respond to his every thought. Mom, on the other hand, is quiet by nature and craves alone time.

Another challenge has to do with the tremendous amount of things that people have to do today. Busyness robs families of time that could be given to connecting emotionally.

Often children like to be loved in ways that are different than their parents might expect.

Sometimes parents just don't know how to connect or they lack creativity. Connecting emotionally doesn't always come easily. Often children like to be loved in ways that are different than their parents might expect. It takes time and experimentation to find out what touches your child's heart. Furthermore, children change as they go through developmental stages. Connecting with your eleven-year-

old may look different today than it did a year or so ago.

Still other families contain individuals who are abrasive and difficult to get close to. Obnoxious or annoying qualities make connection a challenge for anyone but especially in the ongoing work of family life.

And then there's the problem of rejection. Kids choose other options or selfishly reject the initiative of parents. It's hard to try to connect when the chances are pretty great that you'll be rejected again.

Frankly, some children are abusive to their parents. When sarcasm and meanness come from children regularly, then many parents say, *"Forget it, I don't want to do this."* They retreat and stop initiating.

For some parents, these scenarios are all too familiar. If you've come to the place with your children where you don't even want to connect emotionally, then it's time to think about your own heart. Maybe there's some heart work that God wants to do in your life and it starts in your relationship with him. Emotional connectedness reaches deep into a person's heart. So does the spiritual work of God.

When you allow God to provide healing and strength in your heart you can even love people that are hard to love. Remember that the heart is where you develop your conclusions about how you're going to live. Emotions are one of the components that govern decisions, but another aspect of the heart has to do with convictions. As you trust the Lord to work in your heart you can move your decision to love your children from your emotions to your convictions.

Love based on convictions results in determination. Love based only on feelings results in overreaction or discouragement.

One interesting fact about feelings is that they eventually follow convictions.

So when you do loving things for someone who is difficult to love, based on your conviction to do what's right, it's amazing to watch the feelings develop. One of your jobs is to love your children by faith. It's part of the work that God is doing in your life. God then works through you as you connect with your child.

One of your jobs is to love your children by faith.

When it comes to connecting emotionally sometimes a parent will say, *"I'm doing the best I can."* We reply, *"That may not be good enough. Sometimes you need to do what's required. It may be more than you think you're capable of doing."* We don't say that to be harsh or because we lack compassion. It's just that many parents excuse themselves instead of doing what needs to be done. Parenting is hard work. It's often uncomfortable and requires that we give up our own agenda.

Even if you don't feel like connecting emotionally with your kids, do it because it's the right thing to do.



Pause and Reflect

What are some of the things that tend to hinder my desire or ability to emotionally connect with my child?

Watching the Heart Open Up

Connecting emotionally with a child requires that parents consider the specific needs and desires of that child. How does your child like to be loved? What ways of interacting seem to touch the heart? Children are all different. Most children need touch, some more than others. All children need verbal interaction, and some need a lot. Many times the common activities of life can turn into relationship-building exercises. Asking a child to help you cook a meal, having a discussion while driving, partnering with the grocery shopping, or working together to fix the car, are all potential relationship-strengthening activities.

Because each child is unique, you may find that the way your child needs to feel love is very difficult for you. Maybe you are very organized and orderly and your child benefits from spontaneous conversations and activities. Maybe you're quiet and get energized by being alone and reading, but your child needs interaction and dialogue. Many kids love to talk and feel loved when someone spends time listening. Often parents find themselves stretched out of their comfort zone in order to love their kids.

Connecting with your child's heart is a skill.

Connecting with your child's heart is a skill. It's something that comes naturally for some and must be learned by others. Sometimes it's the mom who connects well but in other situations Dad is able to connect more effectively. Furthermore, each child in a family needs varying amounts of connecting to maintain a close relationship.

Remember too that children are always changing. Just because you think you've got it down at four years old doesn't mean you'll have it down at seven. You need to grow with your kids. As they develop and learn, move with them. Continually look for ways to enhance your skills at connecting emotionally. One of the things that makes parenting so difficult is the creativity needed to interact with each of your children differently.

Parenting continually changes. You can't just set it up and walk away. You must regularly monitor the different members of your family to make sure everything is okay and that you're moving in the right direction. God makes

the family that way because it keeps us on our toes and it motivates us to pray for our kids. Ask God to open your children's hearts and give you opportunities to touch them.

Ask God to open your children's hearts and give you opportunities to touch them.

At the last supper Jesus got up from the table, took a towel and a basin of water, and began to wash the disciples' feet. He did this to teach his disciples the importance of serving one another, sacrificing one's own agenda, humbling oneself, and taking care of another person's needs. We live in another time of history, in another culture where foot washing is not necessary, but the principle transcends history and culture. Today we must still serve each other, and one of the greatest ways you can do that in a family is to figure out what your children need emotionally and serve them by giving it.



Pause and Reflect

What kinds of things tend to open the heart of my child?

Connecting emotionally with children strengthens relationships. When relationships are strong, then life runs more smoothly. Children are more responsive to instructions and correction, and they're more open to the wisdom of parents. When tension and distance dominate in a family, then children's hearts become hard and they resist. You can do a lot of talking, but your kids don't receive it. A soft and open heart develops through close relationship.

Warning: A word of caution is in order here. Once your child's heart starts to open, be careful of the urge to lecture. An open heart is a very sensitive and fragile place. Sometimes parents see the heart start to open and they use that opportunity to unload their truckloads of truth. Open hearts are vulnerable. Some parents come in with swords and start doing intense work when really what's needed is tweezers, a gentle word or observation. If the only reason you're trying to warm your child's heart is so that you can lecture, you're going to have a problem.

The heart of your child is similar to a sea anemone. It closes up very quickly, much faster than it opens.

Consider the sea anemone. It may look like a plant but it's really an animal that affixes itself to coral and rocks in a tide pool. It has tentacles that float in the water. If you go up to the sea anemone and poke it, it closes quickly to protect itself. You then have to wait 15-20 minutes before it starts to open again. Slowly it opens and starts to relax, allowing its tentacles to float freely in the water. The heart of your child is similar to a sea anemone. It closes up very quickly, much faster than it opens.

Jason was five years old and resisted Mom continually when she gave instructions or corrected him. Family life was a continual struggle for both Mom and her son. One day Jason got sick with the flu. He felt terrible, had a fever, and seemed drained of energy as he lay on the couch. Mom felt sorry for her son. She cuddled and rocked him and he seemed to soak up the attention. Mom enjoyed it too.

After a few days Jason got well and an interesting thing happened to their interaction. Jason seemed less resistant. Their working relationship in family life seemed to improve. After about a week, however, the old patterns returned. Mom got an idea, "*Jason, would you like me to rock you like I did when you were sick?*"

Jason was not only willing, but eager. Mom rocked him for twenty minutes and they both enjoyed it. He then went off to play but Mom found that he was again more responsive in their relationship together. He didn't have the resistance that was so typical. Not only that, Mom realized that her attitude toward her son was a little different too. Because of the twenty minutes of physical contact, Jason was softer and more responsive during the instruction and correction times throughout the day and Mom was softer too.

The best way to take advantage of a softening heart is to simply enjoy the relationship. By doing so, you increase trust. Only when the trust factor is high enough have you earned the right to challenge or teach.

"But if I wait until then, my kids will be 30 before I teach them anything!" Yes, it's true that we must continue to instruct and correct even while we're developing relationship. But look for ways to balance the two. Much of the rub of family life must be balanced with attempts to strengthen rapport.

Take time to consider where you stand with each of your children. Are you feeling strong in the relationship department? If that's the case then your children are likely to be on the responsive side when you're ready to instruct or teach. If you find that you're doing a lot of correcting and challenging, then it may be time to focus on the relationship side of things. You may even postpone some instructions until you've had time to experience positive relational moments, then after closeness is reestablished the instructions will be appropriate.

The best way to take advantage of a softening heart is to simply enjoy the relationship. By doing so, you increase trust.



Pause and Reflect

Is the emphasis with my child overly weighted on instructing and correcting, or on building relationship and emotional closeness? Here are some of my observations:

What does my child need more of today?

Practical Ways to Emotionally Connect with Your Kids

To keep you growing in this area, use the letters H-E-A-R-T to encourage closeness in family life. Each letter stands for a common way you can connect with your kids. When you sense that closeness is waning, go through the list and do something about it. You'll be amazed at the change that takes place.

H: Have Fun

This means pure fun—no agenda. Play games, go on special outings, wrestle, be silly, enjoy life together. Fun times build relationships and make them strong.

**It's amazing
how fun opens
hearts.**

Some families have favorite connecting activities, things that everyone can enjoy and contribute to. Playing card games, a hobby or sport, or just sitting together and watching a movie or sports game can contribute to closeness in family life. Other families are spontaneous, using surprises, spur-of-the-moment evenings out, and flexible times of fun.

Some children need these times to be one-on-one with Mom or Dad, while others benefit from friends or other family members around. You might even offer choices by asking, *“Let’s go out to lunch today. Would you like it to be just you and me or should we bring someone else along with us?”*

It’s amazing how fun opens hearts. This fun doesn’t have to take long, it may mean telling a funny story or acting silly. When people laugh together, barriers are broken and hearts soften toward one another. Be a little creative and enjoy each other. You’ll be surprised at the results.



Pause and Reflect

Some of the fun things I enjoy with my child include:

**Take advantage
of a sit-down
meal regularly.**

E: Eat Together

Sitting around a table sharing a meal with the whole family is becoming more and more rare in our society. Dads or Moms are working later. Kids have sports, music, or club programs. Enjoying a meal together is a treasure.

Some families have everyone home but choose not to sit together to eat, or they turn on the TV and watch the news. Take advantage of a sit-down meal regularly. When people eat, they like to talk. Ask children about the highlight of their day or tell an interesting story from your day. Bring jokes or discussion topics to liven up the conversation.

**Enjoy
relationships,
not just the food.
Eating together
is a social
activity.**

Enjoy relationships, not just the food. Eating together is a social activity. Most adult social activities also have food present. Turn mealtimes into the social highlight of your day.

Be careful that you don't overemphasize manners or diet. Sometimes parents get so preoccupied with these two things that mealtimes turn into regimented discipline experiences and relationship-building disintegrates.

It's been said that more meals are ruined at the table than at the stove because parents push too hard on the rules and regulations. Kids can hardly wait to get away from the table because it's more like a military camp than a social experience. If your children are quick to leave the table, plan interesting things to keep them there. That means that parents need to develop some tolerance when it comes to messy eaters or immature manners. Practice looking beyond the behavior to your child's heart.

As children get older, they have jobs, sports events, and other commitments, making family mealtimes less possible. Make the meals special for those who are home and be sure to schedule at least some whole-family mealtimes. Use holidays, weekends, or a set evening to bring the family together. Although it's harder as kids get older, those times together are even more special as people engage with each other and strengthen relationships.

In addition to eating together, special foods are another way to touch a child's heart. You may have a traditional menu for a particular holiday, or a special Sunday evening food that kids look forward to. Birthdays and special events provide opportunities to create traditions that give children a sense of belonging.



Pause and Reflect

Here are some things I can do to enhance and improve our mealtime experiences:

A: Arrange Activities

Does your family spend time together? Another way to connect emotionally is to arrange activities. These activities could be work or fun, but they're group activities where individuals get involved. It could be going to a major league baseball game together or seeing a movie, or even working together to plan an event. When you arrange activities you and your child experience something together. This may be a whole family event, but it also may be an activity for just you and one child.

Activities may include playing a game. Games are a great way to connect on an emotional level because children learn how to win, how to lose, and to play fair. Games have an ability to level the playing field as you all become equal participants.

When you arrange activities you and your child experience something together.

The best activities include a time of interaction. A movie allows two people to enjoy the same event but doesn't allow for much interaction unless you enjoy discussing the plot and special effects afterwards. These times of dialogue can increase the relational component and give you some insight into your child's perception of the world.

Even a time of serving can be a bonding experience, contributing to connection on a heart level.

Sometimes the activity together isn't necessarily fun. It might just involve working together or serving. *"Let's all go over to the church and help on clean-up day."* Even a time of serving can be a bonding experience, contributing to connection on a heart level. Children benefit from working side by side with their parents. A partnership is enjoyed here that teaches children something about their value. Kids need to be needed. As you rely on your

teenage son's strength or your daughter's creative flair, kids learn that they have something valuable to contribute in the family.



Pause and Reflect

Here are a few activities I can plan for my family:

R: Remember the Good Times

Reminisce with your child, bringing family history into the present. Kids love to remember. They like to tell stories about last Christmas, or about a birthday experience years ago. They also like to hear stories about when you were younger. You might tell them funny things they did when they were babies or watch old

home movies, allowing everyone to laugh at themselves and each other. Look at photo albums or pictures from the past. It's a fun thing to remember the good times.

Remembering the past gives children a sense of history and heritage. When families talk about things they experienced together it brings a sense of closeness and camaraderie. *"We all experienced that together."* This sense unites families and opens hearts toward one another.

As you ask children questions about their history, you'll be surprised at the answers. Kids tend to remember situations and events differently than parents do. Partly this is true because kids fill in details that they don't remember. But it's also true because children perceive life experiences differently than adults. If your child tells a story differently than you think it happened, likely you're getting insight into your child's heart. Don't feel you have to correct your children here, just listen and learn about what they value.

Happy memories touch the heart.

Happy memories touch the heart. They represent values and emotions. As you remember together, you not only get to re-experience the past, but you also learn new things about your children and what's important to them. Sharing these valuable experiences provides insight but also increases the connectedness you have with your child.



Pause and Reflect

Some of the special times we like to remember in our family include:

Tell stories that don't have a moral but that are meant to just communicate friendship.

T: Talk and Listen

When we say *talk*, we mean just share yourself. Talk about your day, or about a problem that's bothering you. Share yourself with your child. Tell stories that don't have a moral but that are meant to just communicate friendship.

Listening gives you the privilege of hearing what's going on in your kids' hearts. You'll learn what's important, the values they have, and the interesting experiences that are forming their lives. You'll hear about who they spend time with and what they think about. But remember your goal is heart connection. Be careful not to jump into a lecture when you hear things you don't like.

Listening often requires self-control for parents. It's sad when a dad or mom so dominates the conversation that they miss an opportunity to draw a child out. Some-times a little silence can prompt a child to speak. Some kids need warm-up time before they'll share what's really important to them.

Talking and listening together is a way to soften the heart of your child.

Other children are hard to keep quiet. They seem to always be talking and their dominance is a challenge for your relationship. Sometimes children's stories are hard to listen to. It takes a lot of patience to actually listen to a child get the story out. It's work but it may be just the thing your child needs for connection to take place. Talking and listening together is a way to soften the heart

of your child. It's a way to connect emotionally. You help kids feel love, not just know it in their heads.



Pause and Reflect

Here are some things I can do to draw my child out:

Why Connecting Works

The Gratefulness Principle

Everyone has a gratefulness button. When someone does something kind or out of the ordinary or exceptional, you feel grateful. The feeling of gratefulness fosters an emotional connection between you and the giver.

**Everyone
has a
gratefulness
button.**

When you give small tangible or intangible gifts to your child the gratefulness principle fosters a sense of emotional connection. For example, when you bake your son's favorite cookies and he looks at you with delight and excitement, you've done it. You've touched his gratefulness button and it softened his heart a little bit more. Or you do the laundry for your daughter so that the outfit she wants to wear to the party is clean; she's delighted. You've done it.

The gratefulness button works for you too. When your son cleans up the kitchen without being asked, you're delighted. He's touched your gratefulness button. We all have this button in our hearts. It's a way to connect with one another. Acts of kindness are met with gratefulness, resulting in a closer relationship.

The Problem

The Overindulgence Trap

Parents usually intuitively know about the gratefulness button. They often use it. But be careful of the “*overindulgence trap*” because sometimes kids are not grateful.

In fact they expect acts of kindness and don't appreciate the sacrifices parents make and the gifts they give. So a problem develops in the emotional connection department. You hope that your child will appreciate your gestures of kindness, but instead they're met with an it's-about-time attitude or the I-want-more attitude. Emotional distance replaces the intended closeness.

Overindulgence is giving children more than their character is ready to handle.

As one dad evaluated his family, he defended, “*We have a problem in this area but we don't give our kids half of what other kids have.*” We needed to help this dad see that overindulgence doesn't have to do simply with the quantity of gifts given to children. Overindulgence is giving children more than their character is ready to handle. That means

that each child is different.

Selfishness and demandingness are indicators of a significant heart problem. In fact, the more you give to an ungrateful child, the more demanding he becomes. Instead of becoming more grateful and content, children become more selfish and unhappy.

This problem is compounded by the fact that many parents today have greater resources to give their children things that they themselves didn't have as children. Parents want to bless their kids with good things to increase their joy and make their childhood fun. Some parents don't realize that the very thing they want to give to their children, they are taking away. It has little to do with the gifts themselves. It has to do with the heart.

It's important to ask yourself, “*What are the gifts I give to my children that actually touch them with gratefulness?*” And, on the other side, “*What's just fostering the demandingness?*”

The solution for demandingness is painful for both parents and their children. As you look at your own life, ask yourself the question, “*What makes me more grateful for certain things?*” The answer has to do with a longing in your heart over a period of time instead of instant gratification. It’s the thing that one longs for and looks forward to but doesn’t get for a while that produces gratefulness when that thing is finally received. Many children haven’t had time to be without. They’ve come to expect more and more. And they’re not even grateful for the things they have. Some-times parents have to pull back in order for children to appreciate the things they have.

Sometimes parents have to pull back in order for children to appreciate the things they have.

If you think about it, it’s the people who have the least that tend to be the most grateful. You may need to withhold certain kinds of gifts from your child, or allow children to earn the things they want, or to wait and look forward to them for a period of time. That doesn’t mean that you’ve lost the ability to push the gratefulness button, however. Rarely do parents overindulge their children in all areas. If you need to withhold material gifts, you likely can find other ways to give to your child.

For example, one child may receive a lot of things in his life. His parents seem to buy him stuff all the time, and so he’s overindulged in the material area, but he may be lacking in dialogue time. Dad may be able to push the gratefulness button by inviting his son to work on the car with him, or by playing a game with his son after dinner.

Sarah is three years old and gets a lot of Mommy-time. In fact, she has become demanding about spending time with Mom. She expects her mom to drop everything as soon as she feels a need. Mom sees the problem and begins to say “*no*” or “*wait*” more often with Sarah so that she will become more grateful instead of demanding.

Be ready to pull back in an area for a while in order to foster a sense of gratefulness.

Watch out for overindulgence with your kids. Be ready to pull back in an area for a while in order to foster a sense of gratefulness. Sometimes it means children have to work harder for something they’d like. They may have to earn some of the things that they want in life in order to appreciate them more.



Pause and Reflect

What does my child express gratefulness for? In what ways might my child be overindulged?

How can I encourage a sense of gratefulness in my child?

Putting it All Together

Emotional connectedness is not easy. It can be a challenge for parents to figure out how and when to do it. You'll likely be stretched in some new areas. But love is hard work. You know that. Take time to monitor the climate in your family. How are you doing in the relationship department? How are the kids doing? Sometimes you can tell how hard a child's heart is by how much resistance is in the home. The typical response is to come on strong to challenge the resistance. Maybe what's needed is more emotional connectedness.

Think for a moment about the gratefulness principle in your own heart. Do you communicate a sense of gratefulness for the things you have? Or have you become demanding, even when it comes to your children? Sometimes parents don't express to their kids the things that they're grateful for about them. The gratefulness principle is important for parents and children. Saying "*Thank you*" is a good idea. Training children to express gratefulness is helpful, even though it focuses on behavior. The real work is to motivate children to develop a grateful heart.

Summary: **How to Start Connecting with the Heart**

Emotional connections with children open the heart.

- H** Have Fun
- E** Eat Together
- A** Arrange Activities
- R** Remember the Good Times
- T** Talk and Listen

Use the Gratefulness Principle

But...

Be Careful of the Overindulgence Trap



Pause and Reflect

In what ways am I already connecting well with my child?

How can I improve in my ability to connect with my child?

Personal Prayer

Preview:

This is the last chapter in this book, but there are a lot more ways to parent from a heart perspective. You may want to use the video series *Parenting is Heart Work* in your family or with others as a group experience to cover these same eight chapters again. Or, look for other resources from the National Center for Biblical Parenting on our website: www.biblicalparenting.org.

Free E-mail Parenting Tips



Receive guidance and inspiration a couple of times a week in your inbox. Free Parenting Tips give practical suggestions to help you relate better to your kids and help your kids change their hearts, not just their behavior.

The National Center for Biblical Parenting is here to help you. Visit biblicalparenting.org and sign up today for Free E-mail Parenting Tips, available in English and Spanish. While you're there, discover other great resources for parents.



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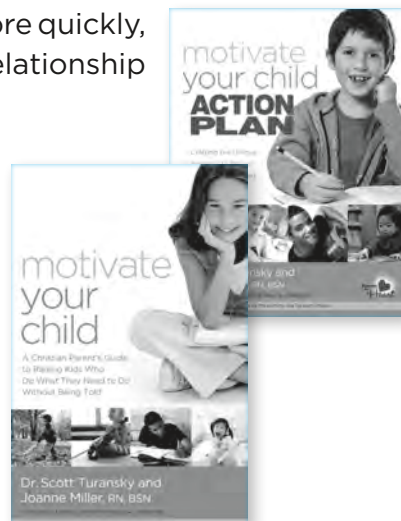
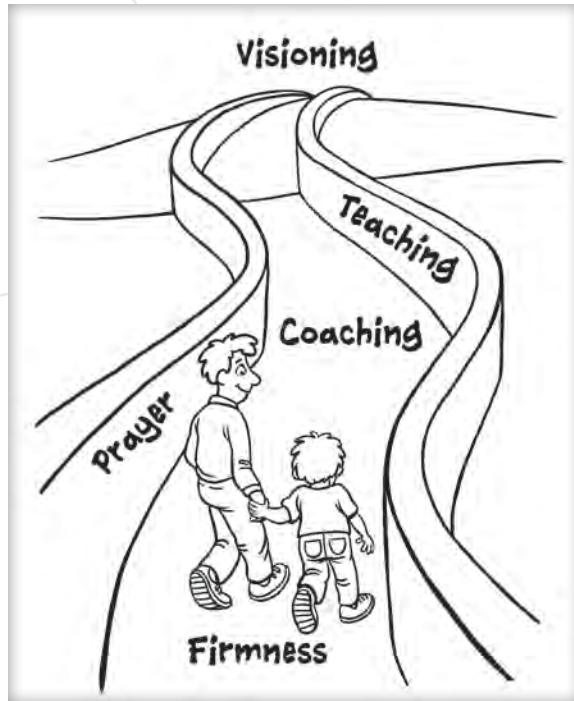
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