

## **Part 2 – No-Cry Discipline Parenting Skills and Tools**

### **Everyday Challenges**

Children are joy. We love them with every cell of our being, and we can't imagine what our world would be like without them. Yet, everyday life with our children can be challenging, frustrating and exhausting. All day, every day, there are so many things we must get our children to do, or stop from doing. Beginning with getting them out of bed in the morning, and ending with putting them to bed at night (and maybe not even then), a parent's job involves an incredible amount of providing organization, guidance, direction and correction. Regardless of our beliefs about parenting, our theories about children, or our life goals, it is the essence of everyday living – the daily routines and ordinary actions – that make up Life.

When you have young children in your home, this everyday life can be a challenging adventure from sun-up to sun-down. Even when you try to see the big picture and make decisions based on your goals for the future, the daily process of living seems to create a whirlwind of activity and emotions, so that in any given moment your thoughts are wholly focused on the *now*. This is very different from living in the moment and enjoying it. Instead, we often struggle through the day, trying to stay ahead of the many problems and frustrations that arise. You may *want* to focus your decisions on creating joy and on your goals and seeing the big picture of your child's future, but you can't even begin to see the big picture because there are so many little pictures in the way. Who would have ever thought that simple tasks, such as putting on shoes, tooth brushing or giving a bath would require so much preparation, negotiation, and emotion? And

who who've thought that raising one tiny child could bring so many frustrating everyday challenges?

Father-speak:

"I didn't think for an instant that raising children would be easy, but I also didn't think it would be the emotional rollercoaster that it has been."

Alan, father to Leanne, age 3 and Timothy, 5 months

Here's the good news: There are very specific approaches that work wonders to keep you calm and in control, help you make good long-term decisions, and help you to encourage your child to *willingly* cooperate with you. Using these methods will help your day run more smoothly. They will help you to build a close, loving and life-long relationship with your children. They will allow you to live in the joy of the moment, since you won't be immersed in the juggling of all those issues involved in daily survival.

A special side affect of using these approaches is that they will actually prevent many of the tantrums, battles and tears that can spoil your day. By using these methods you are using *preventive discipline*. And the more consistent you are in using these approaches, the better your child's daily behavior will be. And looking even further down the road, your child will more likely have solid self-discipline patterns for the future.

When you improve the way you interact with your child, you would be stunned to know how many negative behaviors you actually prevent from happening.

Keep in mind that as children grow they change. Certain skills that work beautifully with toddlers often fall flat with preschoolers, and would cause only eye-rolling with older children. Some approaches will work every single time with one child, yet never work at all with his brother. In addition, parents are as different from one another as children are, so some of the methods will work perfectly for one parent, and fail miserably for the other. It takes some experimentation to figure out what works best for you and your family. But once you settle on a few specific ideas, you'll feel more confident and your home will be more peaceful. You'll set into place routines and patterns that will allow you to make better short and long-term decisions over the next eighteen or more years.

Read over the techniques that follow, and think about the various No-Cry Discipline methods. Choose those that appeal to you, try them out, and gauge the results. Practice and refine as you go. Eventually you'll find your own comfortable rhythm and you'll feel more confident and capable. Revisit this book from time to time to fine-tune your actions, adjust them to your growing child, and remind you of your goals. This active style of parenting will make your parenting journey more joyful, and will keep you on track to meet your long-term goals for your child.

### **First: Solve the REAL Problem**

Often, when a child is stubborn, has a tantrum, fights with a sibling, whines, cries or dawdles, the issue that set off the behavior has little to do with anything that requires discipline. Just as adults

who are having a bad day, a bad mood, a headache, or some other personal issue might snap at a spouse, yell at a child or “kick the cat,” children may be struggling with emotions or situations that cause them to respond as they do. In essence, the issue then is *not* always about how to discipline children, but how to change the environment in order to help them gain control over their emotions and reactions.

Here are some of the most common issues that cause children to act out in negative ways, and some solutions to guide you as you try to help your child cope, or to perhaps even prevent negative behavior:

**The problem: Tiredness**

How much, and how well a child sleeps has a role in *everything* from dawdling, crankiness, temper tantrums, and hyperactivity to growth, health, and learning to tie his shoes and recite the ABCs. *Everything*. A sleep study completed at Tel Aviv University demonstrated that even a *one-hour* shortage in appropriate sleep time compromises a child’s behavior. A missed nap, too-late bedtime, night wakings, or early rising can cause unpleasant changes in your child’s daytime behavior.

This issue is further complicated because when children aren’t sleeping, mom and dad aren’t sleeping either. We simply cannot function well as parents – or, as a matter of fact, as people – when our own sleep is continually disturbed. We become fatigued and our responses to our child’s misbehavior are less than stellar. Instead of using skills that gain

control of the situation, a sleep-deprived parent lacks patience and tries to force changes, which often leads to melt-down on both sides.

Mother-speak:

“I notice that Matthew misbehaves the most when he is tired. If he only naps for an hour, instead of his usual two hour nap, he tends to be fussy and clingy. And if he hasn't had a nap at all, he will start to hit or throw things. When he doesn't nap it causes unnecessary misbehaviors and frustration. So now I do my best to try to let him have a nap, even if we are on the go, because in the long run it is better for everyone.”

Genevieve, mother of Matthew, age 2

### **Solutions:**

Solve any sleep issues – both night sleep and naptime. If your child is five years old or younger, plan for a daily nap. You can't force a child to sleep, of course, but you can set up a situation that invites relaxation and encourages sleep. A good time for a nap is soon after lunch. Create a post-lunch routine where your child lies in a dark room and listens to music or an audio book. If your child is tired he should fall asleep easily under these conditions, and if he doesn't sleep the rest time will still be good for him.

If your child isn't sleeping well at night, do whatever you can to solve the problem. A few quick tips that may get you started on the right path:

- Aim for an early bedtime.
- Dim the lights and calm the activity the hour before that bedtime.

- Have a pleasant, relaxing pre-bed routine.
- Have your child go to bed at the same time seven days a week.

If you are struggling with sleep issues, there is more specific help for you in Part 4, pages XX and XX and in my books *The No-Cry Sleep Solution* and *The No-Cry Sleep Solution for Toddlers and Preschoolers*.

### **The problem: Hunger**

Children can't always identify feelings of hunger, yet being hungry can negatively affect their energy, mood, stamina, and ability to focus and concentrate. While adults have learned how to identify and cope with hunger, children have years to go before they develop this ability, so even mild hunger can trip them up.

Children can also be adversely affected by poor food choices that don't adequately fuel their bodies with proper nutrition. Your child may be drawn to carbohydrates, as many are – having toast or cereal for breakfast, macaroni for lunch, crackers for a snack, and potatoes for dinner – a full day of carbs, sadly lacking in protein, fruit and vegetables. An unbalanced diet like this can directly affect your child's moods, health, digestion and elimination. Children can become uncomfortable, unpleasant and lagging in energy without understanding that a healthy snack or meal would help them feel much better.

### **Solutions:**

It's best to provide your child with breakfast (soon after he wakes in the morning), lunch,

and dinner plus two or three healthy snacks (in between the meals) every day. Children don't need big meals, but they do need frequent nourishment to stabilize their behavior.

In addition to regular meals and snacks, take a good look at the kinds of food your child is eating. Is your child's diet healthy and balanced? Does it contain choices from all the food groups? The composition of your child's meal will determine how it affects behavior and for how long. Balanced meals that contain healthy choices from a variety of food groups will have a much better impact than a snack consisting of only one type of food. When that one food is a non-nutritious choice, such as French fries or cookies, the impact on your child's mood will be only marginally better than the hunger it replaces. A high-nutrition meal, or snack, can refuel your child and improve his behavior.

Children who have undetected food sensitivities or food allergies may have related behavior problems. Signs of a food-related allergy can appear soon after a child eats the food or several hours later. The most common signs are diarrhea, vomiting, abdominal pain, wheezing, coughing, rash, fussiness, gassiness, and difficulty sleeping. Your child may have only one or two of these symptoms. If you suspect that your child may have a food allergy talk to a medical professional.

Improving your child's diet is a simple idea with a big payoff. Make an effort to provide many small servings of a variety of healthy foods each day to prevent hunger-based behavior problems.

Father-speak:

“I am always surprised to see how some parents’ lifestyles have become so busy that they don’t notice the signals that their children are sending to them. It often ends in frustration for both the parent and the child, when the issue could have been easily avoided.”

Ole, father to Lucas, age 3

### **The problem: Frustration**

Children’s minds are often one step ahead of their physical abilities. They may want to tie their shoes, they may think they know how to tie their shoes, but when they grasp those laces they just can’t get them to tie! In their frustration, and their desire to succeed, they often get discouraged and angry. They desperately want to succeed, and as nature would dictate, they are determined to keep trying even when they fail repeatedly – which often makes them appear to be unreasonable and stubborn.

While we do want our children to learn how to be independent, we don’t always have time for the learning process, nor do we always identify this as the cause of stubborn behavior, so our own impatience makes our children dig in their heels even deeper. This, of course, makes us even more upset, and so goes round the circle of negative emotions.

Mother-speak:

“My daughter has suddenly become very independent. She decided that it was time to learn how to dress herself. My normally quiet, even-tempered toddler was now yelling, groaning, grunting, and at times crying in her room. And this didn’t just occur in the morning – oh no, we had to

experience five to ten clothing changes every day. At first I was annoyed with her frustrated attempts, and yet she wouldn't accept help. I determined that the easiest way to handle the aggravation was allow plenty of time for clothing changes several times a day. I let go of the need to control her cute outfits and perfect hair and just let her wear anything she could get her hands on. Inside, outside, all around the house and neighborhood she proudly displayed her unique clothing accomplishments. Two weeks later, I have to say that my willingness to give her space and time, and give up my own agenda, has paid off. She's now down to only two outfits a day in less than five minutes each! Proof that practice makes perfect, even if mama has to put up with some toddler-style frustration!"

Sarah mother to Gracie age 3, and Sam age 1

### **Solutions:**

Understand that your child has a biological drive to master her world, yet oftentimes she's unable to achieve the things she sets out to do.

There are times when you can allow your child plenty of time to practice a new skill.

Other times, when you are in a hurry or when your child is clearly frustrated, there's no rule against helping your child accomplish any task.

Yes, we want to teach our children to be independent, but we don't need to do it all in one day. Sometimes, it's better for you to take over and save the practice for later, during a calmer moment. When you do have the time, a few minutes of guidance and direction can go a long way towards helping your child learn to master a task. It can also help to

look for opportunities to help your child practice her many new skills under unrushed circumstances.

Mother-speak:

“I have had to tell my child, "It's okay for Mommy to help you." He wants so badly to do it by himself that although he is having trouble, he refuses help. I think letting him know that accepting help is okay helps him relax.”

Stacey, mother to Tasneem, age 7, Umar, age 5, Yusuf, age 2 , and Zayd, age 1

### **The Problem: Boredom**

Children are incredibly curious and on a constant quest for knowledge. It is a biological necessity and is as powerful a need as hunger or thirst. A child’s job is to learn new things, and when we don’t provide the proper stimulus they will find it themselves, or fill the void with an emotional breakdown. For example, if your child is ushered around town for hours as you run countless mundane errands, it’s likely a tantrum and fussiness will be going right along with you. If he is put in the same room, and given the same toys, day after day to occupy his time, his boredom with the unchanging environment will often lead him to search for stimulation and experiment in ways that are perceived as misbehavior.

### **Solutions:**

Quench your child’s never-ending thirst for learning something new – no matter where you are. When you’re on the go, bring along a small bag of toys, books and snacks. Point

out interesting things at your destinations. Play word games (*I spy something red... How many things can you find that start with 'B'? What rhymes with 'cat'? Can you count the people standing in line?*)

A great boredom buster is to get your child involved in what you are doing. Even a toddler can pick three red apples at the grocery store, snap peas in half during dinner preparation, and fetch a diaper when you are changing the baby. Children who are actively involved and engaged tend to be happier and less disruptive than those who are bored and unfocused.

Rotate the toys that are available to your child for playtime – separate all of your child's toys into three boxes and put out one third at a time in his play area. Every few days, or once a week, rotate the boxes to keep the offerings fresh. Add new things to the mix often. Avoid non-creative toys with limited purpose and instead search for toys that have long-play value and that can be used in a variety of ways, such as building blocks, toy animals, and miniatures of real-life things, such as kitchen sets or tools.

Frequently a daily routine involves having a child play in exactly the same place day after day – often in a toy corner. I encourage you to set up various small play centers throughout your house, since a new environment provides interesting changes and will keep a child happy and engaged much longer.

One more thing to keep in mind! While you want to provide your child with the tools to stay busy and interested, you don't want to become the tour director. Give your child toys and direction, but don't feel that you must orchestrate every activity, nor should you be the permanent playmate. Encourage your child's ability for independent play.

### **The Problem: Over stimulation**

Certain types of situations are breeding grounds for children's unruly behavior. When a child or a group of children are in an intense, noisy, active situation, there is a good chance that behavior will also be intense, noisy and active. Typical events are birthday parties, family gatherings, playgrounds, carnivals and shopping malls. Children take in all the sights, sounds and motion around them, and it seems that they cannot sift through it all, so everything at once is absorbed right into their actions. They want to take it all in, and do everything that can be done, so they become a reflection of the commotion surrounding them.

### **Solutions:**

First, be prepared in advance. Your child shouldn't arrive tired or hungry. Try to plan the schedule so it doesn't interfere with usual nap times or meal times. If the excursion is to be more than an hour long, plan to purchase snacks, or bring along a few healthy snacks, such as pretzels and cheese or granola mix, plus something to drink.

Remember that no matter how busy the planned day will be, there will likely be lulls in the activity – such as waiting in line, drives to the destination, or time at the table waiting

for food to be served. Have an assortment of small toys, activities and books with you to fill any waiting spaces.

A verbal preparation lesson can be helpful. Tell your child a story in advance that details exactly what she should expect – where you are going and what you will be doing. This is a great activity to do in the car or bus on the way to your destination.

If you find your child becoming agitated, try to move off to a quiet place for a few minutes, like a bathroom or a walk outside. A quiet hug or cuddle can often calm a child down. Allow your child to relax and regroup before reentering the activity. Remember to watch for signs of tiredness, hunger or frustration, too.

### **The Problem: Fear**

There are times when children are scared of something, but can't communicate their fear. Other times a child may feel his fear is inappropriate, so he shouldn't admit to it. Instead of letting you know he is afraid, a child might whine, dawdle or fight you, giving you the impression that he is just being difficult. Typical settings for this type of fear are bedtime, separation from parents, visits to unfamiliar places or meeting new people.

Fear can also be present when a child is adjusting to major changes in the family, such as the birth or adoption of a sibling, parents' divorce or marriage, or a move to a new home. At these times parents may be somewhat emotionally unavailable due to their own busyness or adjustment, leaving a child to struggle with unidentified feelings on his own.

**Solutions:**

Examine your child's actions and environment to determine if fear may be at the root of your child's behavior. If you think this might be the case, you can begin by casually asking leading questions to find out if you've correctly identified a problem. Avoid questions that invite a yes or no answer, instead ask open questions that invite more discussion. If your child doesn't respond to direct questions you might be able to use puppets, stuffed animals or other toys to playact the situation together, and then pay close attention to what your child's character does or says.

Once you've identified your child's fear, see if you can find ways to help him overcome it. This may mean conversation or an action – such as installing a night light and buying a flashlight to overcome a fear of the dark, or it might mean approaching a new situation a bit more slowly and cautiously, for example, visiting a new home and neighborhood a few times in advance of your family's move. You can also read books together that show how other children master similar situations.

**The Problem: Feeling powerless**

Children have little say or control over their lives. Parents and others tell them what to do and when to do it. While this is often accepted as the way things are, there are times when a child feels very strongly about something, but is directed to do the opposite. A typical example is when a child is having a grand time playing at a playground or with a friend and is told that it's time to stop and go home. Other times, we impose unpleasant tasks

upon a child who doesn't understand why we are so adamant that it must be done – tooth brushing, bathing, sharing toys, and eating green vegetables, for instance.

**Solutions:**

There are several approaches that can help to alleviate the feeling of powerlessness that often causes a child to erupt with unpleasant behavior. The first is to simply acknowledge a child's feelings, "*I know you are having fun and don't want to go.*" You can follow this up with the facts, "*But the bus leaves in ten minutes.*" Sometimes children feel better just knowing that someone truly understands what they feel.

It can also help to give a child a clear warning of what's to come, so that they are prepared and not caught off-guard. "*We have to leave in 10 minutes.*" Or give a younger child a gauge that she can understand, "*We have time for two more times on the slide.*"

Another way to give a child more control over their destiny is to offer a choice. It can lead where you want to go, but with an option along the way, such as, "*Do you want to walk to the bus stop or have a race?*"

Take advantage of times when you can allow a child more input in some areas of his life. This input can create an investment on your child's part and prevent him from seeing something as an unpleasant surprise. For example, you might ask his input when you are creating the week's dinner menus, bring him along when clothes shopping, or invite him

to help you plan the day's errands. Even a tiny bit of involvement can make him feel important and happy about the choices.

### **The Problem: Confusion**

The amount of things that your child has learned in his lifetime is mind-boggling. Your child has learned how to speak and understand an entire language, including names for things, feelings and concepts. He has figured out his place in the world and how to interact with other people in varied situations. The list of things learned is long, indeed, but it is far, far, *far* from complete. There is a lifetime of new things and concepts to be learned. One of those things is the understanding of just how incomplete his own knowledge really is. Everything your child does is based on this limited understanding of the world, and the lack of perception about his limits. This base of limited information is what your child uses to function every day. He applies what he knows to a situation to make decisions, and often times he doesn't have enough background to truly understand what's happening. As a simple example, your child may be skilled at riding a tricycle, but even a master tricyclist won't ride off on his own the first time he rides a bicycle.

### **Solutions:**

Your child has been on this earth only a few short years, and it may help you to remember this during his tantrums or meltdowns. He's learning more day by day, and he relies on you for much of his information. Be patient and understanding.

As you have seen, there are many underlying issues that can cause behavior problems. There are even more than those listed previously, such as:

- Embarrassment
- Shyness
- Jealousy
- Pain
- Sadness
- Disappointment
- Shame
- Impatience
- Excitement
- Stress
- Forgetfulness

It can help to examine your child's primary emotions and make an attempt to address those when you are faced with his misbehavior. This can help direct you to find the most effective responses to correcting your child's behavior. You won't be ineffectively dealing with a symptom (the behavior), you will be addressing the problem at its most basic root (the underlying emotion).

Mother-speak:

“This idea of *solving the real problem* has given me back a feeling of control and intuition that I developed during my first year of raising my baby using attachment parenting. Instead of selfishly thinking, 'why is she doing this to me?' or feeling bad when others think she is spoiled or manipulative, I try to find the real problem, and attend to it before it reaches the 'critical stage.'

When I am successful, I am empowered to point out to my critics that there was a reason for the behavior, and how great it is to validate that I actually 'know' my child. This is about approaching discipline with a totally different mindset, which requires an effort to keep the question consciously in my mind before I react. It brings my parenting skills to a whole new level.”

Sonja, mother to Ekatarina, age 3 and Aleksandar, age 1

There are times, of course, when you simply can't unearth the underlying problem, even though one exists. Children may not have the words to express their feelings, and you may be unable to figure out what's going on inside that little head. At those times, a cuddle and a bit of unconditional love and understanding may be helpful.

### **Discipline and Cooperation: Choose Your Adventure**

Convincing a young child to cooperate is a little bit like going on a vacation adventure. You can buy your ticket and set a plan, but you never know what will happen after that. You may end up with a wonderful experience or you may not get at all what you expected. You might even get on the wrong bus and have a totally different trip than you planned!

Each parent has certain ways of getting their child to cooperate, a “bag of tricks” if you will.

Some parents have one or two items in their bag – it's like a tiny plastic snack baggie. If they use

the one tool they have – time out, for example, and it doesn't bring results, they can only get frustrated and angry – because they are caught holding an empty bag.

On the other hand, parents who are open to learning and using a variety of methods have a great, big laundry bag filled with many different options. They can sift through the contents and use whichever technique seems to be right in any given situation. If that one doesn't work, it's a simple matter to pick another tip from the bag, and continue doing so until the right approach brings the desired results.

Because human beings – children and adults alike – are complicated beings, there isn't one technique that will work in all situations with all people. Therefore, it's best if you have that great big bag of “parenting tricks” that you can sift through when you need a solution. My goal in this chapter is to fill your bag with plenty of new ideas. You'll want to read through these with a pen in hand and note the ideas that feel right to you. Try them out with your child and keep those that bring you good results. Keep in mind that it may take a few practice runs before you adapt a skill to your personality, and your child's traits, too. And as your child grows and changes your skill collection will need to change as well.

### **The Same Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow: Consistency**

Many parents tell me that they are amazed at how well their child cooperates at daycare with toy clean up time, when the same child doesn't ever clean up at home. Many parents are surprised at how their child sits quietly for circle time at preschool, but won't sit still for two minutes at

home. Parents are shocked that their child is always respectful and polite at school, but not at home. There actually is no mystery here. Most daycares and preschools have big groups of children which require extremely consistent routines and discipline so that they can run smoothly. The first time children break the rules they are immediately corrected and reminded of the rule. The children also watch everyone else functioning according to the consistent guidelines of the group. This consistency is often lacking at home, and children figure that out quickly. Without consistent responses to their behavior they learn that they can do whatever they want, since there is a good chance that no one will stop them.

Think about the important discipline issues in your family – what are they? Whining? Backtalk? Tantrums? Bickering? Then decide how these problems will be handled. Examine the times of day that most often present problems for you. Dinnertime? Bathtime? Bedtime? Set a plan for these time periods and then stick to it as much as possible.

No parent can be consistent one hundred percent of the time, but the more that you can make specific decisions about discipline and then follow through regularly the easier life will be for you, and your children, too.

### **The Power of Offering Choices**

Giving a choice is a very effective tool that can be used with children of all ages. You can offer choices based on your child's age and your intent. A toddler can handle two choices, a grade-

school child three or four. Offer choices such that you would be happy with whatever option your child chooses.

Here are examples of choices:

*Do you want to wear your blue pants or your purple skirt?*

*What do you want to do first: brush your teeth or put on your pajamas?*

*Would you like to run to the door or hop like a kangaroo?*

*Do you want to watch ten more minutes of TV or have ten extra minutes for story time?*

A typical hitch when offering choices is the child who makes up his own choice. For example, “Taylor, do you want to put on your pajamas first, or brush your teeth?” To which little Taylor answers, “I want to watch TV.” What to do? Just smile sweetly and say, “That wasn’t one of the choices. What do you want to do first, put on your pajamas or brush your teeth?”

If your child is still reluctant to choose from the options that you offer, then simply ask, “*Would you like to choose or shall I choose for you?*” If an appropriate answer is not forthcoming then you can say, “I see that you want me to choose for you.” Then *follow through*. Make your choice and help your child – by leading or carrying him – so that he can cooperate. In this case, shut off the television and lead him into the bathroom and hand him a toothbrush.

### **Playing to Win: Cooperation Games**

Children see life as one big game – so why not take advantage of that? Nearly any task can be turned into a game with very little effort. Some games can be a one-time fix; others can become part of your regular routine. Look at these situations – first the standard serious parent approach (that often leads to fussing and tantrums), and then the Game approach. Imagine your child’s response to both:

Serious: “Pick up your toys and put them in the toy box.”

Game: “I bet I can pick up all the blue cars before you pick up the red ones!”

Serious: “Put your pajamas on – now!”

Game: “I’m going to set the timer for ten minutes. I wonder if you can beat the bell and get your pajamas on before it rings?”

Serious: “Eat your vegetables. They’re good for you.”

Game: “Last time I had a plate full of vegetables a bunny would eat some every time I turned around and wasn’t looking. I couldn’t believe it! I wonder if that will happen again?” (Parent makes a big production of turning around so that the “bunny” can steal food.)

Serious: “Drink your milk.”

Game: “Don’t drink that milk! If you do it will make you really strong and then you’ll win when we wrestle. Stop! Don’t drink it!”

Serious: “Come on. Walk faster. We need to get home.”

Game: “Look at me – I’m a pony! And I’m so fast I bet you can’t catch me...”

Serious: “You need to go potty. Put your toy down and go potty now.”

Game: “Here comes the potty train. Chooo! Chooo! All aboard for the potty-town stop!”

Mother-speak:

“One of our favorite techniques is the "No smiling allowed in this house" game - when one of our gals is in a grumpy mood they can often be cajoled into a better mood by being told "Whatever you do, do not smile." 99% of the time, this elicits a smile and they move towards a more positive mood - works much better than giving them a lecture about being cranky!”

Jan, mother to Bella, age 3 and Madeline, age 7

You certainly don’t have to fill every request with fun and games – nor should you. However, this technique is a handy and lighthearted way to get through some of the bumps in your day.

### **Make it Talk – The Remarkable Works-Every-Time Performance**

Toddlers and preschoolers require finesse to gain their cooperation, because they have not yet reached the age at which they can see and understand the whole picture, so simply explaining what you want doesn’t always work. Robert Scotellaro is quoted in *The Funny Side of Parenthood* as saying, “Reasoning with a two-year-old is about as productive as changing seats on the Titanic.” (He must have had a two-year-old at the time.)

You can get around this frustrating state of affairs by changing your approach. Let's look at two situations – first the typical (Titanic) way:

Parent: Ryan! Time to change your diaper.

Ryan: No! (As he runs off)

Parent: Come on honey. It's time to leave, I need to change you.

Ryan: (Giggles and hides behind sofa)

Parent: Ryan, this isn't funny. It's getting late. Come here.

Ryan: (Doesn't hear a word. Sits down to do a puzzle.)

Parent: Come here! (Gets up and approaches Ryan)

Ryan: (Giggles and runs)

Parent: (Picking up Ryan) Now lie here. Stop squirming! Lie still. Will you stop this!

(As parent turns to pick up a new diaper, a little bare bottom is running away)

I'm sure you've all been there. This tug-of-war can be very tiring for a parent to deal with day after day. I discovered a much better way to gain gleeful cooperation from a young child:

Parent: (Picking up diaper and holding it like a puppet, making it talk in a silly, squeaky voice)

Hi Ryan! I'm Dilly Diaper! Come here and play with me!

Ryan: (Running over to Diaper) Hi Dilly!

Parent as Diaper: You're such a nice boy. Will you give me a kiss?

Ryan: Yes. (Gives diaper a kiss)

Parent as Diaper: How 'bout a nice hug?

Ryan: (Giggles and hugs Diaper)

Parent as Diaper: Lie right here next to me. Right here. Yup. Can I go on you? Oh yes?!

Goody goody goody! (The diaper chats with Ryan while he's being changed. Then it says, Oh, Ryan! Listen, I hear your shoes calling you – Ryan! Ryan!

The most amazing thing about this approach is that it works over and over and over and over.

You'll keep thinking, "He's not honestly going to fall for this again?" But he will! Probably the nicest by-product of this method is that it gets you in a good mood and you have a little fun time with your child.

When you've got a toddler or preschooler this technique can be a pure lifesaver. Remembering back to one day, when my own son was almost three, we were waiting in a long line at the grocery store, and he was getting antsy. I started making my hand talk to him. It was asking him questions about the items in the cart. Suddenly, he hugged my hand, looked up at me and said, "Mommy, I love for you to pretend this hand is talking."

Mother-speak:

"We were on vacation and our son, Daniel, was getting into trouble and not listening. I had brought along your notes, and read through to see if I could find a tool to help with him. When I came across the talking diaper section I thought "no way!" but decided to try anyway. I used my hand as a puppet. Well, sir, you could have knocked me over with a feather! Not only did he listen but he absolutely and completely believed my hand was another person! I now also use it on my daughter and she's just mesmerized by "Mr. Hand." She'll ask for him specifically and

always listens to what HE asks her to do. I have told all my friends about it, but I think some of them feel too silly to try it. Me? I say, whatever works, and THIS one definitely works!”

Ezia, mother to Daniel, age 4, and Sedona, age 2

It’s delightful to see how a potentially negative situation can be turned into a fun experience by changing a child’s focus to fun and fantasy. This is a particularly popular parenting skill because once mastered it can be used in virtually any situation to bring pleasant results.

Mother-speak:

“We love doing the cooperation games, making things talk, and making cooperation fun. If life can't be fun for a child, then what's the point in being a child? The adult world is so very serious, there’s plenty of time for that. So, with our daughter, we try not to take too many things too seriously.”

Kristi, mother to Arianna, age 3

### **Engage the Imagination**

A variation on the “Make It Talk” technique, that also works very well, is to capitalize on a young child’s vivid imagination as a way to thwart negative emotions. You might pretend to find a trail of caterpillars on the way to the store, hop to the car like a kangaroo, or pretend a carrot turns you orange as you eat it. Medicine can be transformed into magic power solution, a toothbrush can have a voice and locate every speck on food on the teeth as it does its work, or the toys can come alive and make a parade into the toy box.

Children love to pretend and by entering their world and playing along with them you can prevent many skirmishes over everyday chores. Once you open your mind to the possibilities you'll see that almost any event can be sweetened with a little fun imagination.

Mother-speak:

“I learned the hard way about being too serious versus making a game out of things. One day, Maya and I were going for a walk to the park. When we walked through a neighbor's yard she picked up some pebbles and threw them. I told her that we don't throw rocks. Then I said “If you throw those again then we are going home and not to the park.” She did throw them again, so I picked her up and we started back home. She screamed bloody murder the whole way. I was sure the neighbors were all watching me do the walk of shame home with a screaming child. Long story short, I guess it was good that I kept my word but I learned that lots of times I was going much too quickly to the consequence, without attempting a more pleasant approach first. Now when something like that happens I am more creative. We usually end up following imaginary caterpillars or marching in a parade to the park. And it's so much nicer for both of us.”

Michelle, mother to Maya, age 3

### **Sing a Song**

Even if you can't carry a tune, putting anything to music makes you easier to listen to and fun, too. You can wash your child's hands while singing “This is the way we wash our hands, wash our hands.” One mom of five that I know discovered a great way to keep her children content

during car rides. She loved to sing, so she made up opera tunes about the scenes she saw as she drove along the road. Her kids would often chime in with their own versions.

You can sing whenever the spirit moves you. You can sing songs that you know just to liven up the moment or you can create a particular song to be used as a cue to certain tasks – such as a clean up song that takes place whenever the toys are picked up and put away.

A beautiful side effect of putting your words to music is that both you and your child will end up feeling much happier.

### **Tell a Story**

Children love stories. These will hold their attention and can get them to willingly do what you want them to do. They can be used to teach a lesson, ward off boredom, or keep a child focused on the task at hand.

Stories can be told in advance of any event to let your child know what's about to happen and prevent fussing when the actual event occurs. You can tell a little tale about a boy who goes to Grandma's house for dinner – how he says please and thank you and the Grandparents are so proud of him. This is in preparation for an actual visit, of course!

You can tell a story about a puppy who goes to the doctor for a checkup, a Tyrannosaurus Rex who visits the dentist, or a penguin's first day at daycare. You can use the story format to teach

important lessons about sharing, being kind, being patient or any other life skill you are trying to teach your child.

“The storytelling tip is effective with Oscar. He is fascinated with other kids’ misbehavior. When he observes a situation he later says, "You talk about it." This means he wants me to tell a story about the little boy who wouldn't take turns on the slide or the girl who was yelling at her mommy in the locker room at the Y. Oscar asks me to tell these stories over and over. I think it is very interesting that he’s not at all interested in stories about kids who behave well! But I feel he learns from other children’s mistakes. Now, Oscar will often tell his dad these stories at the end of the day.”

Nicole, mother to Oscar, age 3

Stories can also be used to keep your child still and mentally occupied, such as when you are dressing him, waiting in a long line at the post office, or putting him to bed at night. A storytelling routine can be a handy tool in all of these cases. If you have a talkative, imaginative child, invite him to tell his own stories, too!

### **Be Silly**

Experts say that children laugh about 300 times a day, but we serious adults laugh less than 15 times a day, and for many stressed-out parents it’s probably much less than that. Not only does laughter reduce stress, lower blood pressure, and boost your immune system; it makes you feel happy, encourages your child to cooperate with you, and ends fussy moods.

Children don't require a scripted comedy show for entertainment. Any light-hearted banter will do the job. Humor – like pretending to fall, exaggerated speech, or funny accents can often create a joyful moment. Being silly—like putting your child's sock on his hand instead of his foot – often elicits a laugh, along with the desired cooperation.

Mother-speak:

When my children start to whine I say, "Uh oh, where did your big boy (girl) voice go? Do you know? Is it under the table? In your shoe? Is it in your hair?" Usually one or two questions and they will find their voice in the middle of their shirt and tell me, "It's right here!" I tell them they better hurry and grab it so it won't get away."

Marisa, mother to Elijah, age 4 and Marin, age 2

The added benefit to acting silly, just like the other cooperation games, is that it will lighten your spirits as well as your child's. And you may find yourself smiling and laughing a lot more often.

### **5-3-1 Go! Fair Warning Prevents Battles**

When children are immersed in play they usually put their entire being into the activity. It is this intensity that allows them to absorb so much about the world in the early years of their life. They are always learning, always taking in something new. Because of this intensity it can be very hard for a child to switch from one activity to another without first making a mental adjustment.

When a child is in the middle of a wonderful puzzle, and a parent calls him to dinner, it's an unusual child who can immediately drop the piece in process and run to the table. (Actually, it's a rare adult who can do this...)

You can help your children change activities by giving them time to process the change mentally before they follow through physically. Prior to expecting action from your children, call out a five minute alert, then a three minute alert and finally a one minute alert. Watch how this happens:

Julie and Alex are happily playing at the park while Mom is reading on a bench nearby. She gets up, comes over to them and at eye-level announces, "We are going to leave the park in five minutes." (She holds up five fingers.) She returns to her bench to read. A few minutes later, she calls out, "Julie! Alex! We are leaving in three minutes!" (Holds up three fingers.) A few minutes later: "One minute. (One finger is raised.) A minute later, "Do you want to have one more slide or one more swing before we go?" After the final slide, Mom announces that it's time to leave. Her kids don't respond immediately, so she segues into a fun choice to get things moving, "Do you want to run to the car, or hop like bunnies?" Almost immediately the two kids begin to hop towards the car.

This type of counting is different from the typical countdown to disaster, "1...2...3. Okay, now you're in trouble! Time out!" This method is a respectful way of letting your child know in advance of what's upcoming and allowing him to finish up what he's into so that he can make the change. 5-3-1 can be used daily as a way to help your child cooperate with you on many

tasks, such as getting dressed, finishing lunch, putting away toys, getting into the bathtub, getting out of the bathtub, and getting ready for bed.

Mother-speak:

“I’ve been using *5-3-1-Go* with Anna and it works like a charm. The biggest challenge was training my adult friends that when I started the countdown, it meant them too! Sometimes I’d get to “Go” and my friends would want to continue to chat. Now my friends know that when I start the countdown, I mean it for us as well as the children.”

Tracy, mom to Anna, age 4 and Zack, age 2

### **Eye-to-Eye Discussion**

Very often parents call out instructions to their children from two rooms away. The kids are engaged in their play and barely hear the instructions, let alone understand it’s directed at them. Or parents talk “at” their children, lecturing in a monologue that invites no true communication. Children of all ages respond much better to purposeful, face to face conversation.

You can engage your child’s attention much more effectively if you take a moment to go to him, get down to his eye level, and talk clearly to him face-to-face. When you do this, you have your child’s full attention. There’s no chance that you’re being ignored or that he doesn’t realize you are talking to him. In addition, your child can read your non-verbal communication signs, such as facial expression and body language. This will add to her ability to truly understand what you are

saying. And you will be able to read your child's non-verbal language, which will help you know if she truly understands what you are saying.

Children are not little adults, but they are little people. They love their parents and they want to understand them. Give them an opportunity to listen and to learn and to participate in a conversational exchange with you.

Mother-speak:

“It is a useful reminder that children need more explanation. We as adults take so many things for granted and can sometimes unwittingly forget that our children don't have our lifetime of experience behind them. We unconsciously expect our children to know more than they do when it comes to their behavior.”

Sonja, mother to Ekatarina, age 3

When you have a request, or have something to say, take the extra minute or two to get eye-to-eye with your child and talk to him – clearly and respectfully. Explain what you want and why you want it. Ask questions to confirm that your child understands you. This exchange of information doesn't take very long, and the pleasant results are well worth it.

### **Use Positive Words**

Some of the most overused words in parenting are *No*, *Don't* and *Stop*. It is necessary, of course, that we get our children to stop misbehaviors. However, when these words are overused they

create more problems than they solve. I call these *fighting words* because when you start your sentence with any of these words your child doesn't even hear or comprehend what comes next, the fighting word acts as a fuse to set off a tantrum.

When possible, make an attempt to phrase your words in the positive, rather than the negative:

<b>Negative fighting words</b>	<b>Positive cooperation words</b>
<i>Stop</i> fighting over that truck!	Please share the truck nicely.
<i>Don't</i> hit the baby!	Touch the baby gently.
<i>No</i> , you can't have ice cream.	You can have a banana or a piece of cheese right now.

When this optimistic approach to language choices becomes more common in your home you will find your children imitating this style of speaking, so it's not just a cooperation tool, it's training for a lifetime of positive communication skills.

### **When/Then, Now/Later, You May/After You**

Often, when parents don't want children to do something it's not the act that's the problem for the parent, it's the timing. Candy before dinner is a no-go, but after dinner is fine. Playing outside after dark isn't allowed, but playing outside after lunch is great. The *When/Then* technique teaches children the proper timing and sequence of events. It is a wonderful approach

because it respects and acknowledges your child's desires, but moves your child's action to the correct place in time.

Another lovely benefit to this method is that it is a great way to avoid saying those fighting words (No, Don't Stop) quite so many times in a day. Here are a few examples:

**When** you put your pajamas on **then** we can read a story.

Eat your lunch **now** and then you can have a piece of candy **later** when you finish lunch.

**You may** play outside **after you** clean up your toys.

You'll notice that this pattern has a very pleasant feel to it. You are telling your child that, yes, he can do the thing he wants to do, but after he does the thing you request of him. Or, yes, he can do what he wants to do, but later.

Mother-speak:

“The wonderful thing about *When/Then* is that you are, in effect, giving your children the power to make something happen. They feel in control and they learn that they can be responsible people who make good decisions. You accomplish your goal of getting them to cooperate with you ... and everyone's happy!”

Barb, mother to Caroline, age 4 and George, age 3

## **Distraction and Redirection**

Distraction can be a lifesaver when an insignificant issue is at hand and you're just too tired to be otherwise creative, or it's just such a minor issue that it's not worth getting into it. It can also work to end fussiness and tantrums before they really get rolling. A child who is in the middle of a low-level fuss can often be distracted by the mention of a cat walking on the front lawn, a butterfly flitting by, or when given a pepper shaker with a white napkin to sprinkle on, or another interesting task to carry out.

Distractions can be part of a usual routine in some cases. A flashlight used during diaper-changing, a shoebox of special toys to be used when mommy or daddy is on the telephone, or a child's backpack filled with fun activities to take along on car, bus and airplane rides.

Redirection is when you purposely alter a child's attention from one thing to another. For example, if your child is getting frustrated while putting together a puzzle, and you sense a tantrum is building up, it's sometimes best to move him away from the puzzle and direct his attention to a different play activity. If two siblings are getting on each other's nerves, you might send one off to a different room to run an errand for you. If your child is getting bored and whiny, bundle him up and take him for a walk.

Distraction and redirection are particularly helpful for families who have more than one young child in the household. If you have to deal with every single fuss, whine and struggle you could make yourself a bit crazy. Instead, be willing to fall back on the distraction technique from time to time to keep your sanity and peace in the house.

Mothers-speak:

“Here’s an idea that works well for us: I send the children outside to play and let them run. Fresh air and exercise can help everyone feel happier.”

Suzanne, mother of Laetitia, age 4 and Clément, 10 months

“After a particularly trying day I transferred my daughter and I onto my bike for a lovely long ride. We both rode silently enjoying nature and the wind in our hair. Our moods calmed, and we shared smiles when we returned for a quick dip in our pool, and then a nursing session. In unison, we forgot our troubles and reconnected.”

Lynne, mother to Erika, age 2 and Colin, age 6

### **Family Rules: A Key to Peace**

Even the youngest child can grasp the idea of a rule. It may be a simple daily ritual, such as “we brush our teeth before bed” or “we take our plates to the sink after we eat.” Or it can be a guide to behavior, such as “We don’t hit.” Rules work best if they are short, simply stated and consistently followed.

The first thing you need to do is to decide on your top rules. Too many rules make life complicated, and when there are too many they are easily forgotten, so you’ll want to determine your top ten or so. The best way to figure out your top ten is to make a list of the behavior issues that most bother you. When you see what these are you’ll know which issues are most important to address with a formal rule.

Once you've made a list of your top behavior issues, translate each one into a clear, simple rule. For example, if your children are too rough with each other and often push, hit, kick, pull hair or wrestle to the point of tears, then come up with a simple easy-to-understand rule that will encompass all such behaviors such as, "No hurting each other."

Mother-speak:

"When I was in college studying to be a teacher, I took a class on behavior management that covered rule making. The professor recommended making the rules a positive experience from the beginning. Instead of creating the rules yourself, have the children make them up with you. You could shout, "Is this how we should talk in the house!?" Children: "No, we should use our quiet voices." Adult: So, what should that rule say? Children: "No, yelling." Having them involved in this way they feel that they were a part of making the rules and may feel more inclined to follow them."

Genevieve, mother to Matthew, age two

As you create your rules, make sure they are ones you can and will enforce. This isn't a wish list of every nice thing you hope for, it's the top behaviors that you expect and are willing to enforce consistently.

A great way to proclaim the new rules is to make a family rules poster. Use bright colors and decorations to make it friendlier, and then place it on the wall for all to see and remember.

Another advantage to specific, written rules is that they carry with them additional implied rules. “No hurting each other” may have been created to curb the physical fighting between your children, but it can also impact emotional hurting. Rules are as much a creation of a family personality and culture – the values and morals that guide all of your actions and establish what’s most important in your family unit.

### **Make it Brief, Make it Clear**

In an effort to be a good parent, many people say way too much, turning an intended lesson into a lecture of wasted words and negative energy. Children often tune out after the first few sentences (you can usually tell by that glazed look in their eyes!) And while you may be trying hard to teach an important lesson, as you carry on with a long and involved dissertation your child may not understand a single word.

The less you say, the more your child will hear, understand and remember. So get your child’s eye-to-eye attention, and then make a short, concise statement. Repeat yourself if necessary, but don’t elaborate and lecture.

Mother-speak:

“I always know when Eva is hungry, because she starts whining, fussing and badgering me for cookies. (*Solve the real problem*) If I say no for any reason, a meltdown ensues. (*Avoid fighting words*) Lately I've discovered that kneeling down and asking her if she's hungry (*Eye-to-eye*) and offering her a selection of some healthy snacks (*Choices*) tends to defuse her. I tell her *when* she

calms down *then* she can pick her snack (*When/then*) I finish by taking her to the cabinet to get her selection (*Distraction*)

Jocelyn, mother to Elena, age 5, Eva, age 3 and Rory, 18 months

### **Think it, Say it, Mean it, Do it**

A common complaint from parents is that their child “doesn’t ever listen to me” or “won’t do what I ask the first time.” As frustrating as this is, I must inform you that the main reason children don’t listen to their parents is because their parents don’t require it. This is a common mistake that even the best parents make: They repeat a request over and over and over, until they either explode or give up. To compound the problem, the first request made is not well planned, so it isn’t followed through to the end.

For example, consider a parent who calls to a child that it’s time to leave the house, but then gets busy with something along the way. A bit later, the parent calls, “Ready to go!” but again gets side-tacked on the way to the door. Only after a few more rounds of this game is the parent actually – finally - ready to leave. The child, in the meantime, has been ignoring all requests made. Another example is a parent who asks a child to clean up his toys. After several more requests, the parent realizes how late it is, and rounds the child up for bed (cleaning up the toys after said child is asleep.) For a slightly older child, a parent likely adds a monologue about “why do I have to always clean up myself.”

This *asking, not meaning it, and not following through*, if done once wouldn't be a big problem, but since the pattern happens frequently, the child learns that the parent's requests are optional.

It can significantly simplify your life if you will adhere to this blueprint as often as possible:

- Think through your needs first.
- Make a clear and specific request.
- Follow through (with calm and purpose) if your child doesn't comply.

### **Daily Routines: Predictability Triumphs**

Children respond to predictable patterns in their lives. These routines function as subconscious cues to how they should act, or what they should do. Very often, though, the routines that they are following have happened accidentally, and are contrary to what parents really want. A child may have a routine of falling asleep on the sofa to the sound of the television, and the parents bemoan the fact that he won't fall asleep in bed, but since he falls asleep on the sofa night after night, it is his routine.

Consistency and routine create feelings of security and reliability in your child's life. It's a very big world and children learn so much every day that they can easily become overwhelmed with the enormity of it all. When certain important key points are always the same, these things create anchors of security. Young children look for these anchors and thrive on their consistency. They enjoy routines and easily adapt to them, and even look for them, so it is far better if we *create* the routines we want them to follow. If we don't create routines, children will adapt their own, like the little boy who sleeps on the sofa.

If we aren't happy with the way our days are flowing now, we can change our child's current routines to ones that we choose. Children adapt easily, and when something happens consistently in their lives they will look for it to continue in that same way way.

I remember back to one Sunday morning when my husband woke early to discover our boys, David and Coleton already awake. Since they were the only ones awake in the house, Daddy decided to take the boys out to breakfast. The following Sunday morning our girls were away at sleepovers, and I was busy writing, so Daddy decided to again take the boys out for breakfast. The third week, Robert and I were awakened by the boys standing at the side of our bed. "Daddy! Wake up!" they were whispering. "It's Sunday and we *always* go out to breakfast on Sunday!"

In my sons' analysis of their world, two weeks in a row equaled "always" and created a new routine for them. If you think about this, it may bring to mind similar situations that have occurred with your child – a certain book that *must* be read, a specific path your stroll *must* follow, a certain order a game *must* take, a particular phrase that *must* be said before you leave out the door, or turn out the lights for sleep.

We can take advantage of this natural desire that children have for routine by creating specific routines to help the days flow more smoothly. Since most children share the same reasoning as my sons about "always" it takes thirty days or less for them to adopt a new routine as normal.

It can be helpful to think about the key points in your days and jot down how these actions will fit together. For example, does it bother you when your children run around in their pajamas all morning, and do you prefer that your children get dressed before breakfast? Then make that part of your daily routine. Do you hate waking up to a family room cluttered with toys? Make toy clean-up part of the pre-bedtime routine. Once your children fall into the familiar pattern of action it will happen without stress or nagging, making your home happier and more peaceful for all.

To create your daily routine, write down the approximate times and sequence of key family events, such as waking, dressing, eating, play time, clean up, napping, and bedtime. Decide how you'd like your days to proceed. Fashion a poster listing the main events. To take this one step further, you can also create your family rules (see page XX) and add them to the poster. Now you have a daily guideline to follow.

Keep in mind that no routine is made to be set in stone. No rules are absolute. You can be flexible when you decide to. However, when you purposefully *choose* to veer off your routine or rules it is far different than accidentally falling into chaos!

Parent-Speak:

“We both work full-time and we have a nanny care for our twins while we're at work. She has them on a great schedule. For a while we both ignored that schedule on the weekends, because we just wanted to relax and play with them. However, we saw the behavior differences were extreme. They were calm and happy during the week, but they were cranky, needy, and had more

tantrums on the weekends. Once we realized this, we began to keep them on the weekday schedule for the weekends, too. We really see the difference when they wake, eat and sleep on schedule versus when they don't. It has really helped keep the crankiness and tantrums to a minimum.”

Lorraine and Alan, parents to Marc and Mira, 2 years old

Just a note here for those of you who *don't* live by routines and those who *don't* like to follow or create routines. As in all parenting advice, the overriding tenet is to do what works for you. If your family functions beautifully in a relaxed go-with-the-flow sort of way, and then don't change a thing. Any new idea is only worth exploring if you think it will make your life easier or happier.

### **Success with Happy Face Cards**

Many children respond well to a visual reminder about how to behave appropriately. A Happy Face poster provides a wonderful method of allowing children to understand the impact of their behavior choices. Here's how it works:

1 - Make a list of your top 3 to 5 rules. Make them easy to understand. Print them clearly in large letters. (Examples: “No hurting people.” “Do what Mommy tells you to do.” “No tantrums.” “No screaming.”) Hang the list on the wall, at child-eye level, in a location near where your child spends most of the day.

2 – Use oversized index cards or cut a piece of poster board into ten squares, about 3” X 5”. On the front side of ten pieces draw a colorful happy face, or find happy faces online and print and paste them onto the squares. Your child can even help decorate the happy faces, if you’d like. On the back side of each card draw a blue sad face. You’ll start with ten Happy/Sad face squares. After a week or two, if desired, you can reduce this number to eight, and then eventually five.

3 - Hang the faces - happy side up - near the rules. Tell your child that every morning they will all be happy faces. Each time he breaks a rule, one face will change to sad.

4 – After dinner each day you and your child will check the faces.

Some children respond well to this approach without any attached rewards or consequences. Just seeing the sad face is enough to help them identify and curb bad behaviors. Other children need or like to have a small reward connected. You can include a reward system, based on the number of happy faces remaining at the end of each day. For example, your child gets to pick the same number of books as happy faces for pre-bedtime reading, or he gets to choose a game to play with you for that number of minutes. Or perhaps he gets the same number of mini-marshmallows for a treat after dinner. Therefore, 5 happy faces equals 5 books, 5 minutes of his game, or 5 marshmallows. This gives your child a concrete way to understand that his choices and his behavior affect outcomes in his life.

Just a note here – when you change a happy face to a sad one your child may have a meltdown! He may even rip it off the wall. If he does - you must VERY CALMLY say "I'm sorry this

happened, but because you [insert behavior] there is now a sad face." Unwrinkle it and tape it back up. If your child displays great unhappiness when you turn a face over, you will know that the system is working as it should! You *want* your child to be unhappy about his misbehavior and the consequences it brings. This leads to better self-discipline and will help him to make decisions about how to act.

Explain the Happy Face idea to your child completely when you begin. Your conversation might sound something like this, "Honey I want you to know that I love you and you are very important to me. It is my Mommy's job to make sure that you grow up to be a nice person. Some things have been happening that make me sad. Like when you don't listen to me, or when you hit your sister, or when you yell and stomp your feet. We are going to do something to help you stop making these mistakes. I am going to put two things on the wall. This is the first thing. It is our rules. Let's read it. [Read and discuss the rules.] This is the second thing. These are your Happy Face cards. Happy faces mean you are doing the right things. A sad face tells you that you did the wrong thing. You want to try not to have sad faces. After dinner every day we will count the Happy Faces. You will get to pick that many books to read with Mommy, and that many marshmallows to eat after dinner. Do you understand how the Happy Faces work?"

Once you've established this program, stick with it every single day for about a month. Monitor the changes in your child's behavior. If all is going well continue as you are until you feel that good behaviors are set in place. At that time, take down the poster and see how things progress. If your child's behavior backslides, reestablish the program.

## **Time Out: Why, When and How**

Time Out is a traditional and often-used discipline technique. Time Out is not a magic answer to all discipline problems, and if overused it can lose its effectiveness. However, it can be a valuable, positive parenting tool when used selectively and in conjunction with all of the other skills discussed in this book.

Time Out works because it interrupts a child's negative behavior, separates him from the problem or situation that is igniting his emotions, and allows him to calm himself down. Putting a child in Time Out also has a purpose for a parent, too – it allows you to separate from a youngster whose behavior is upsetting you, so that you can calm yourself down as well.

Keep the following tips in mind when using Time Out for your child:

- Decide on which issues will warrant a Time Out and make it clear to your child. Issues such as backtalk, hitting, or destructiveness are perfectly suited to this method. As much as it may seem to be a good solution for tantrums, that sometimes isn't the case, as you'll have to drag a kicking, flailing child to the time out spot and he'll often get right back up again. (For the way to use Time Out for Tantrums, plus alternate solutions see page XX).
- Use a safe, boring location for Time Outs to occur. A childproofed bathroom, laundry room or hallway are all good choices. Young or sensitive children can find banished isolation frightening or disturbing, so it can escalate the problem. In that case, consider

using a chair, step or vacant corner in the same room as you for time out. Avoid using a child's bedroom, playroom or favorite chair for this purpose, as you don't want to create a negative experience in a play space.

- There are two ways to decide how long to keep a child in time out. The common rule of thumb is one minute per year of age, which matches well with a child's age-related maturity. The second option is to keep him there until he is calmed down, which could be less or more than the minute method.
- If your child refuses to stay in time out do *not* fight with him, sit on him, or lock him in a room. Depending on your child's personality, and yours, use one of these ideas:
  - Make sure that you've explained Time Out and that your child is old enough to understand what it means.
  - Practice Time Out when your child is *not* misbehaving so he'll know what you expect when it does occur. You can even role-play and pretend to be your child. Show exactly what you expect him to do during a Time Out.
  - When you use Time Out, walk your child to the time-out spot. Calmly instruct him to sit. If he pops up, say "No. Sit." Gently guide him to sit back down. Repeat as many times as necessary.
  - Sit *with* your child in a small room. Don't talk or lecture. Just sit.
  - Have the time out occur wherever your child happens to be. Stand above him, cross your arms, maintain a stern face and announce, "You are in Time Out."

- If your child has stopped the misbehavior, then consider time out over – even if it only lasted ten seconds. (After all, that’s the purpose of time out – to stop the misbehavior.)

- If your child cries, yells or stomps while in Time Out – let him. He is upset, and he should be. Don’t allow swearing or destructive behavior, but do allow him to be mad.
- If your child comes out of Time Out and repeats the behavior that sent him there in the first place – return him to Time Out. And again. And again. This is perfectly normal, as children often need repeat lessons to learn. If you are consistent, he will eventually learn that that the behavior is unacceptable and that you mean what you say.
- If Time Out doesn’t work for your child it’s possible that it’s been used too many times, for too many reasons, or in a way that doesn’t clearly convey its purpose. Either revise how you use it, or discard this technique and use other discipline tools instead.

Time out is not meant to be a punishment. It is a method to stop a specific misbehavior and help a child learn how to calm himself and control his behavior.

- Time Out itself stops misbehavior but doesn’t necessarily correct it. The critical final step should occur once parent and child are calm. This is when the teaching should take place.

Let the child know – briefly, concisely and politely – why he was in time out and how it can avoid going there again. Teach, don't scold or lecture, and try to keep it brief. After you have explained why and what he did was wrong, ask him to apologize for his misbehavior.

You don't have to hold a grudge or stay angry at your child to make a point, the Time Out has achieved the purpose of identifying that his behavior was wrong. At this teaching step you don't have to hold back a hug or an "I love you." This is the time to show your child that he can make mistakes, and he can learn from them. And maybe most important, that he can be in the wrong, and be forgiven, respected and loved.

### **Tantrums, Fussing and Whining: The Big Three**

*Tantrum – an uncontrolled display of negative emotion or bad temper*

*Fussing – excessive and unwarranted crying, complaining, and protesting*

*Whining – carrying on in mournful, high-pitched, (extremely annoying) voice*

If you ask people to list the most frustrating and ongoing discipline problems during the early childhood years, you would find that these three items appear on every parent and care-givers list. Some children start these behaviors at two years old (those notorious terrible twos) and some wait until they are closer to four. Some children are champion whiners but rarely fuss or tantrum, and some grand tantrumers rarely whine or fuss. Some children put most of their energy into

fussing, and just dabble in whining and tantrums. Yet every child masters their own adaptation of these three behaviors – every parent has to deal with them – no one is exempt!

### **Controlling their emotions**

Most often, whining, fussing and tantrums are caused by a child's inability to express or control his emotions and this is further complicated by the influence of other people's demands and external conditions. (See Emotional Control, page XX) Tiredness, hunger, frustration and many of the other causes that ignite The Big Three can frequently be avoided, modified or eliminated. When you can pinpoint the root reason for your child's unpleasant behavior and address that issue directly, you can calm your child and stop the whining or tantrum in its tracks. If you become very observant and learn how to identify your child's emotional triggers before they are pressed, you may be able to prevent many negative situations from even happening.

Mother-speak:

“When I get upset at my daughter I find myself telling her "Sorry honey, mommy is really tired right now and that makes me more frustrated." Then I thought, wow, that's the same reason she gets upset, too. I think we just forget that our kids really are humans like we are, with needs, desires, and frustrations that affect their behavior.”

Kristi, mother to Arianna, age 3

When your child begins a meltdown, try to stop, look, and think, to see if you can tell what underlying issue is causing the problem. Most children have meltdowns because of the same

repeated reasons, so once you understand what these are you will likely be able to make changes that will reduce the amount of tantrums, fussing and whining that occur. Here's a list of many likely reasons and some possible solutions:

<b>Reason for tantrum, fussing or whining</b>	<b>Possible solution</b>
Overtiredness	Provide a quiet, relaxing activity (reading, puzzle, movie) Put a child down for a rest, a nap, or to bed Revise the daily nap/bedtime schedule Solve night-waking or other sleep disturbances
Hunger or thirst	Give child a nutritious, non-sugary snack Provide something to drink (milk, low-sugar juice, water) Revise daily meal and snack schedule
Frustration	Help child achieve his goal (assist with the puzzle, pour the milk) Provide supervised practice so child can master the skill Remove the source of the frustration Use distraction (get child involved in something else)
Fear/anxiety/embarrassment	Hug, hold or cuddle your child Remove child from difficult situation Help him identify and understand his feelings (explain what's happening) Teach child ways to cope with his emotions

<p>Unhappiness</p>	<p>You said no cookie, stop running, or don't jump. Your child does as told, but is unhappy about it. So? Let him be unhappy. His fussing and whining is his way of expressing his feelings about not being able to do what he wants to do.</p>
<p>Inability to communicate</p>	<p>Try to figure out what your child wants</p> <p>Teach a non-verbal child basic sign language</p> <p>Calmly encourage him to tell you or show you</p> <p>Help him by getting him started on what to say, "Please say, Mommy, I need help."</p>
<p>Resisting change (leaving a place or activity)</p>	<p>Give child a 3 minute warning, then a 1 minute warning.</p> <p>This allows time for child to make the adjustment from one activity to the next (See 5-3-1 Go on page XX)</p> <p>Offer a choice (Do you want to walk to the car or run?)</p> <p>In the future, verbally rehearse child's schedule in advance of the event (Tell him what to expect.)</p>
<p>Over stimulation</p>	<p>Move child away from the activity to a quiet place.</p> <p>(Perhaps take a bathroom visit or go to the kitchen for a snack.)</p> <p>Get down to your child's level, maintain eye contact and talk in a soothing tone of voice.</p> <p>Put your child on your lap and your arms around him for a quiet hug.</p>

Boredom	<p>Provide a toy to play with.</p> <p>Initiate a word game or I-spy game for distraction.</p> <p>Tell a story.</p> <p>Take child outside to play.</p> <p>Give your child a small task to do. (Can you find the box of macaroni? Can you snap these beans? Will you go get my slippers for me? Can you pick a new toy for the baby?)</p>
Discomfort	<p>Determine the issue and see if it can be solved: Shoes too tight? Socks too bumpy? Too hot? Too cold?</p> <p>Uncomfortable car seat?</p>
Sickness or pain	<p>Watch your child's behavior for clues to illness:</p> <p>Undetected ear infection? Teething? Headache? Tummy ache? Undetected allergies or asthma?</p>
Confusion	<p>Decide if you are expecting something different of your child every day in this particular issue.</p> <p>Create routines for everyday occurrences.</p> <p>Create and post family rules.</p>
Neediness	<p>Determine if need is warranted, if so, stop the child's misbehavior and <i>then</i> provide the attention she seeks.</p> <p>If neediness is a sign of another problem, deal with the root issue: Boredom? Divert child to an activity. Shyness?</p> <p>Slowly introduce your child to the new situation.</p> <p>Tiredness? Put him down for a nap or to bed.</p>

## **Tips for handling tantrums, fussing and whining**

No matter how diligent you are in reading and recognizing your child's needs and emotions, your child will still have meltdown moments. Or even meltdown days. The following tips can help you handle those inevitable bumps in the road. Look through and study these tips in advance of the next episode. You might even keep them handy (see the summary card at the end of this section) so that in a moment of need you'll have some options to consider.

Remember that all children are different, all parents are different, and all situations are different. So the ideas that you use may change from situation to situation, from child to child and from day to day. Be flexible and practice with those solutions that seem to bring you the best results.

### **Offer choices.**

You may be able to avoid problems by giving your child more of a say in his life. You can do this, while still maintaining control, by offering your child choices. Instead of saying, "*Get ready for bed right now,*" which may provoke fussing or a tantrum, offer a choice, "*What would you like to do first, put on your pajamas or brush your teeth?*" Children who are busy deciding what to do next are often distracted away from their emotional outbursts.

### **Get eye-to-eye.**

Making a casual request from five feet above and six feet away will likely result in your child ignoring you. This noncompliance creates stress which often leads to fussing and tantrums –

from both of you. Instead, get down to your child's level and look him in the eye and make clear, concise requests. This style of communicating will catch his full attention.

### **Validate his feelings.**

When your child is having an emotional time, get help him identify and understand his emotions. Give words to his feelings, "You're really sad. You want to stay here and play. I know." Of course this doesn't mean you must give in to his request, but sometimes just letting him know that you understand his problem is enough to help him calm down.

### **Let it happen naturally.**

If your child doesn't calm down with gentle efforts, then sometimes it's best to let the tantrum run its course. Children have strong emotions, and at times they need to release them in their own way. As long as your child's fussing or tantrum is not dangerous to her or to property, feel free to say, "*I'm leaving the room. Come and get me when you're done.*" And do just that. Busy yourself with something else (peeking in on her, of course) and wait patiently for your child to calm down.

### **Create a Calm Down Room.**

If tantrums, fussing or whining are a daily occurrence, then let your child know in advance that all such behavior will take place in one specific room, such as a spare bedroom, the bathroom, or the laundry room. (Avoid using a child's bedroom or playroom for this.) Once there he can let go of his feelings and come out when he has calmed down – you might call this the Calm Down Room, or The Peaceful Room other name that defines its purpose.

Put something in the room that can assist your child in calming down. Leave a number of comforting stuffed animals, a pillow and a blanket in the room. You might provide a CD player with relaxing lullaby music, or a white noise machine. These play the sounds of ocean waves or rainfall and are a great aid for achieving relaxation. Turn on the music or sounds when your child goes to the room, or even better, show your child how to work the machine.

Let's say that your child is having frequent daily tantrums. At a time when you are both relaxed, explain that you've created a special room just for him when he is upset and not in control. Explain exactly what a tantrum looks like (give a demonstration.) Let your child know that when this happens he'll need to move to the Calm Down Room. Show him how to turn on his music or white noise. When a tantrum starts, you can escort your child to the room with one brief comment, *"You can come out when you're done."* If she comes out of the room, and she's still having the tantrum, just lead her back repeating, *"You can come out when you're done."*

When your child calms down and comes out of the room, then it is time to deal with whatever issue upset her, if it still needs to be addressed. If the tantrum occurred over a trivial issue, then it's best to just leave it in the past and get on to the next activity.

At first your child may spend the whole day in the calming room, but she will learn how to calm herself down and get a hold of her emotions.

**Teach deep breathing and relaxation: The Quiet Bunny**

When children get worked up their breathing often becomes rapid and shallow and their body becomes rigid. These physiological symptoms can keep a child in an agitated state and prevent relaxation. You can teach your child how to relax her body and then use this approach when whining, fussing or tantrums begin.

This technique is most helpful if your child is familiar and comfortable with the pattern, and so can then call upon it in times of stress. You may want to start each morning with a brief relaxation session that you do together. If you practice yoga you can use some of your familiar moves, or check out one of the many books available on the topic of yoga for children.

If you prefer a simpler idea, just begin the day by coaching your child through a brief exercise – I call it The Quiet Bunny:

Let's be a Quiet Bunny.

Close your eyes.

Relax.

Breathe in. Breathe out.

It's time for the bunny to relax.

Wiggle your bunny nose. Now make your bunny face be still and relax.

Wiggle your toes. Now make your toes relax.

Wiggle your fingers. Now make your fingers relax.

(You can add more body parts, such as arms, shoulders, and legs if your child has the patience or need.)

Breathe in. Breathe out.

Relax.

Now you are a quiet bunny.

This can be a very helpful technique with children since they can be susceptible to your gentle suggestions of relaxation. Once your child is familiar with this process you can call upon it at times when he is agitated. (Or getting you agitated!) Crouch down to your child's level, put your hands on his shoulders, look him in the eye and say, let's do our Quiet Bunny. And then talk him through the process. Over time, you won't have to talk him through this, just mentioning it and asking him to close his eyes will bring the relaxation.

If the Quiet Bunny doesn't help your child to relax, you can move to the Calm Down Room.

### **Express yourself**

Children's behavior sometimes deteriorates because they can't describe exactly how they feel or what's happening to them, and they don't understand how their behavior affects others. Since your child likely can't do so this himself you can express this for him. Try to guess at what he feels and put it into words for him. Verbalize how *you* feel about what he's doing. Be calm and clear. Use short, simple sentences. It's even okay to tell him that you are getting upset – so that you can demonstrate to him what to do with intense emotions by modeling how you handle yours.

### **Tell him what you DO want**

Instead of focusing on the misbehavior and what you don't want him to do, explain exactly what you'd like your child to do or say instead. Acknowledge your child's feelings and give him the tools to calm himself and the words to use to express his emotions. Help your child by demonstrating or modeling exactly what you want to see or hear. Here are three examples:

<p>Your two children are fighting over a toy. They are grabbing it and pushing each other.</p>	<p>You take the toy in hand as you crouch down to their level, "You both want this toy right now, but there is only one toy. Pushing and grabbing isn't a nice way to play. It's better to use your words and make a plan. Would you like me to set the timer so you can each have a turn to play with it, or do you want me to put it away?"</p>
<p>You and your child are in the grocery store, shopping before dinner. He wants a cookie, you say no, and a stream of fussing and whining ensues.</p>	<p>I know you want a cookie and it's hard when I say no. To grow up strong and healthy you need to eat your nutritious dinner first, and a cookie later. Can you ask nicely? Say, "Mommy, can we buy a cookie and eat it later?"</p>
<p>Your child wants you to get her a glass of milk and is whining about it.</p>	<p>Get down to your child's level, look her in the eye and say, "I can't understand you</p>

	when you use a whining voice. Please use your big girl voice and say, “Mommy, may I please have a drink.”
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**Distract and involve.**

Children can easily be distracted when a new or more interesting activity is suggested. If your child is whining or fussing try viewing it as an “activity” that your child is engaged in. Since children aren’t very good multi-taskers (they tend to focus on one thing at a time) you might be able to end the unpleasant activity with the recommendation of something different to do. Ignore the fussing for a moment and offer a new activity. For example, if you’re in a grocery store and your child is fussing, get his attention and ask, “Can you pick out three nice, green apples for me?” If what you’re offering sounds more fun than fussing then your child just might take you up on your offer.

**Invoke his imagination.**

If a child is upset about something not going his way, it can help to vocalize his fantasy of what he wishes would happen:

“I bet you wish we could buy every single toy in this store.”

“Wouldn’t it be fun if vegetables were like cookies? I’d say ‘Eat your chocolate chip broccoli!’”

“I wish we could stay home all day today and build the biggest Lego castle ever!”

Children with active imaginations may take the ball and run with it – expanding on your story and creating the best imaginary outcome. This can often change the total direction of your child’s emotional outburst.

### **Use the preventive approach.**

Review desired behavior prior to leaving the house, when entering a public building, or before you begin a playdate. This can often prevent the whining or tantrum from even beginning. Put your comments in the positive (tell what you want, not what you don’t want) and be specific.

Prior to entering a store, you might say, *“Eric, we’re going into the toy store now. We are going to buy a birthday gift for Troy. We are not buying anything for ourselves today. If you see something you like, let me know, and I’ll put it on your wish list. I want you to remember to walk beside me, use your quiet voice, and keep your hands to yourself.”*

### **Make an announcement**

When your child begins talking to you in a whiny, fussy voice, tell her, “When you use your normal voice I will listen to you.” Then turn your back to your whining child and make it obvious you are ignoring her by doing a chore or reading a book held in front of your face. If the child continues to whine, repeat the same sequence, without engaging the child any further. (Pleading or discussing will only increase the whining.)

### **Be funny**

Young children can have major meltdowns over the most trivial issues, like toast cut in the wrong shape or a broken crayon. There is no reason that *you* need to take such matters seriously,

though. Of course, you should understand that in that moment your child does truly feel the issue is the most important thing in the world. But here's the good news – it's only most important thing until the next most important thing comes up. And a funny parent is easily the next most important thing. So lighten up, and try distracting your child with a funny face, a silly song or a goofy action. Instead of spiraling down that unpleasant road of whining and tantrums, you'll both feel joy and gladness in its place.

Mother-speak:

“I use the 'Be Funny' approach quite often to stop my daughter's whining and fussing. I found that this tip works wonders for my attitude as well as hers. I use silly voices, tickles, funny faces and talking stuffed animals to help her calm down. I truly find the laughter to help ease both of our frustrations and it helps us to transition to a new activity with a refreshing new attitude.”

Renee, mother to Kaylie, age 2

### **Allow the fussing!**

There are times when your child is fussing because he is unhappy with something you've told him to do, or stop doing. If that's the case, it's only fair to let him be sad. After all, you can't truly expect him to be happy that you won't let him have an ice cream cone, climb on the table, or spend another hour playing at the park!

Mother-speak:

“I've been so set on never letting my children cry that I have sometimes taken it too far and given in to the fussing so I didn't have to hear them cry. That sometimes just makes things worse. I

have learned that sometimes it's OK if they have to cry for a moment if they are unhappy and just trying to get it all out.”

Christine, mother to Lauren, age 6 and AJ, age 2

If your child carries on long after the issue should be done with, then tell your child that you're going to set the timer for three minutes. She can fuss or whine for three minutes and then she must stop. Some children will complain, “*That's not enough time!*” Then ask, “*How much is enough, four or five minutes?*” Typically, of course, five will be chosen. Make big production of setting the timer for five minutes, and announce that she must stop when the timer rings. Most kids will stop before the timer rings. If your persistent whiner doesn't stop after five minutes, you can fall back on one of the other ideas.

### **Teach**

Often children aren't really aware they are whining, or they don't know exactly what you mean by a tantrum. Have a discussion and demonstrate what this behavior sounds like. (Put on a good show!) Also demonstrate what it sounds like when you use a normal voice. Tell your child you want to help her remember not to whine, or have a tantrum, so every time she does this you are going to give her a signal. When she sees the signal she should take a deep breath and find her regular voice. If your signal is somewhat lighthearted it may prevent things from escalating. You might put your fingers in your ears, close your eyes, make a funny face, and take a deep, exaggerated breath yourself to cue her in to what to do next. If you and your child practice The Quiet Bunny then your signal might be using your hands to make bunny ears, wiggling your nose and making a little hopping motion.

Mother-speak:

“If Eliot whines, I look directly at him, say nothing, and just raise my eyebrows. The more he whines, the higher my eyebrows go! As soon as he gets the message and asks nicely, he gets what he wants – or at least he gets a polite discussion. This is making progress towards Eliot understanding what whining is and when he is doing it.”

Julie mother to Eliot, age 3 and Oliver, 19 months

### **Don't model whining**

Make sure you aren't giving whining lessons. Busy parents often whine about messy rooms, sibling bickering, dawdling children, and of all things, whining. Check the tone and volume of your own voice and eliminate any whining you might be doing. Children take cues about proper behavior from their parents and we sometimes send the wrong messages. Being aware of our own actions can help guide us to modeling the behavior we hope to see in our children.

### **Stopping public tantrums**

The same skills we have already covered apply to public tantrums. The biggest issue is for the parent to stay calm and proceed in the right way, without concern for the audience. Parents' embarrassment over their child's public behavior usually gets in the way of proper response, which in turn creates a pattern for future expeditions. When you can ignore prying eyes and focus on your child instead, most often the episode will end much, much sooner.

Keep in mind that most public tantrums are caused by underlying emotions such as tiredness, hunger, or frustration. So pinpointing the origin can help you calm your child more quickly.

Mother-speak:

“When my two year old daughter has a public tantrum I try to envision that I’m wearing a sign that says, “I am an educated, peaceful person, an upstanding citizen, and a loving and devoted mother and wife. There is nothing wrong with ME right now - it's just that my toddler is overheated, hungry and cranky from missing her nap.”

Jacqueline, mother of Elena, age 2

If public tantrums are a frustrating and regular occurrence, you might want to plan a training session. Say, for example that every shopping trip involves your child’s fussing, whining and tantrums. Take your child to the grocery store. Buy a few staples and put a nice assortment of your child’s favorite goodies in the cart (potato chips, ice cream, and cookies.) Walk around long enough for the expected misbehavior to occur. Walk the cart over to the register and announce to the cashier that you’ll have to leave the groceries and go home because your child is misbehaving. (Smile at the cashier and she’ll probably smile back, since she sees plenty of tantruming children in the store, and she may even have one of her own – she knows how normal it is!) Then go home. Your child will most likely comment on the loss of the goodies. Just say, “Oh well, some other time.” Expect great unhappiness, but long-term value!

**When it’s over, it’s over – don’t hold a grudge**

After an episode of misbehavior is finished you can let it go and move on. Don't feel you must teach a lesson by withholding your approval, love or company. Children usually bounce right back, and it is okay for you to bounce right back, too.

### **Praise success**

Praise your child's attempts at using a regular voice. *"Ariel, I really enjoy hearing your pleasant voice!"* Try to say "yes" to a request made in a regular, polite voice. For example, if your child normally fusses and whines about not having a treat before lunch, and today she asks pleasantly, try to give her at least a piece of a cookie to reward her for her appropriate manners. Make sure you tell her that's why you said okay, *"Yes, you may have a cookie. I'm saying yes because you asked in such a nice voice and you didn't fuss about it. Lucky you!"*

### **Preventing tantrums, fussing and whining**

There are times when you can prevent a child from losing control of his emotions if you modify the situation that leads up to this. In addition to the chart on page XX, here are some things to keep in mind:

- Keep the same nap times and bed time seven days a week. A consistent sleep schedule is critical for keeping your child even-tempered throughout the day.
- Feed your child frequently. Children have tiny tummies and need regular nourishment to keep blood sugar levels stable. Five small meals, or three meals plus two healthy snacks, keep a child's moods stable, much more so than three big meals with long periods between them.

- Give your child toys and games that are geared to his age and ability level.
- Warn your child before changing activities to allow him time to adjust. (“One more swing, then we’re going home.”)
- Be patient when putting your child in an unfamiliar environment or when introducing him to new people. Don’t push him to do what’s uncomfortable for him.
- Be prepared. If you expect to be running errands all day, or spending time talking with other adults, or if you’ll be standing in long lines, bring along snacks, books and toys in your bag to keep your child occupied.
- Be thoughtful about scheduling. Asking a two-year-old to be pleasant while you spend an entire day on the run is a bit much. Schedule a break, such as a quick stop to the park, when possible.
- Try to be home at naptime and bedtime. Keeping a tired child on the move invites trouble. This can’t always be avoided, but steer clear of it when you can!
- Help your child learn new skills before you ask him to do them on his own (such as pouring juice, getting dressed, or working puzzles).
- Keep your expectations realistic; don’t expect more than your child is capable of.
- Don’t *underestimate* your child’s abilities. Allow him the opportunities and privileges that are appropriate for his age.
- As much as possible, keep a regular and predictable schedule to your child’s day.
- When your child becomes overly emotional, keep yourself as calm as possible.
- Use a soothing tone of voice, a gentle touch, or a Quiet Bunny to help your child calm down. He can’t do it on his own, he needs your help.

**Reminder Page: Stop the Tantrums, Fussing and Whining**

**Offer a choice.**

**Get eye-to-eye.**

**Validate feelings.**

**Let the tantrum run its course.**

**Take child to the Calm Down Room.**

**Do The Quiet Bunny.**

**Express yourself – describe and verbalize.**

**Tell him what you DO want.**

**Distract and involve.**

**Invoke his imagination. (“I bet you wish...”)**

**Use the preventive approach – review expectations in advance.**

**Make an announcement (“Please use a normal voice so I can understand you.”)**

**Be funny.**

**Set a timer: Allow fussing for 3 minutes.**

**Don’t model whining.**

**When it’s over, it’s over – don’t hold a grudge**

**Praise success.**

**Avoid letting your child get tired, hungry, bored or frustrated.**

## **It's OK to Have Fun, It's OK to Be Firm**

You don't *always* have to use a clever skill to get your child to cooperate with you. There are plenty of times when you'll just want to say it straight up. When you do, try to follow these basic rules:

### **Get eye-to-eye**

No calling from a distance, no mumbled directions

### **Say what you mean**

No threats, no empty words

### **Be clear and specific**

No vague requests; don't make your child guess what you want

### **Be polite**

"Please" and "thank you" are magic words for parents to use, too

### **Stay calm**

Anger just makes things worse

### **Follow through with action**

Take him by the hand; put on her shoes; put away the toy. *Help* your child do what you asked him to do.

### **Be consistent**

The more you follow these steps the easier it gets for both of you.

## **Be Flexible. Don't Fret. Pick Your Battles.**

Often a person's desire to be a great parent puts too much stress on everyone in the household, because it's an impossible goal. In life, most things don't fall in the critical category and can be handled in many different ways with fine results. You don't have to be a perfect parent to raise wonderful children.

Remove the emotion and analysis that clutters up your head and try to see daily situations for what they really are. Then look for a solution. A spilled glass of milk isn't a sign your child is clumsy, careless or irresponsible, it's just a spill. It calls for a sponge. A toddler's wet pants aren't an indication that you've totally failed Potty Training 101, it doesn't mean he'll be in diapers until first grade, nor is it an act of willful disobedience on his part. It's just a product of a busy child who didn't make it to the bathroom on time; only wet pants that need a change. Two siblings bickering over a toy doesn't mean they hate each other, it doesn't mean your children are selfish or greedy, nor does it mean you've failed your job as a parent. It just means that they both want the same toy and don't know how to settle their dispute.

Pick your battles. Not every issue needs to be addressed and corrected. Little things can sometimes slip through the cracks with no impact on anything of importance. As a matter of fact, if you feel you must address every single episode of misbehavior of any size, you will likely drive yourself and your children crazy! Sometimes the best thing you can do for family peace is to turn around, pretend you didn't see it, take a deep breath, and move on to something else.

Father-speak:

“I have been getting really stressed out with my children lately. I finally realized that I was over-managing every single behavior of each child. No matter what they said or did I had to show them a better way. When I decided to back off a bit and address only the important issues there were no resulting disasters, and we all became much more relaxed.”

Matthew, father to Megan, age 7, Jack age 5 and Evan age 2

Most of today’s biggest parenting issues can be solved in many different ways. No matter the approach, they are soon resolved and new ones will take their place. If during the course of your days you can remember to use your parenting techniques, and try to be flexible and relaxed, and pick your battles wisely, this can result in your child’s willing cooperation in most issues, while keeping you calm, peaceful and in control. And best of all, you’ll enjoy raising your child much, much more.

### **Compliments, Encouragement and Kind Words**

Children – just like all human beings – respond well to positive words. A child’s world is full of negative input, orders, corrections and criticism. When children receive compliments, encouragement and kind words, it helps them feel great about themselves and their world. It builds their self-esteem. It encourages more of the behavior that prompted the positive feedback.

"Kind words can be short and easy to speak, but their echoes are truly endless."

Mother Theresa

We parents sometimes take our role so seriously that we try too hard to be the ever-present teacher. We want our children to grow up right, so we take every opportunity to correct their path. We need to understand that our kind words can sometimes teach as much – or more – than our corrections can. No child has been harmed by too much encouragement or by thinking that his parent loves him a little bit too much, so relax and *say* all those positive thoughts that are rolling around in your head.

During their growth and development, children go through many stages of self-doubt. They compare themselves to others, or to our expectations for them, and they often see themselves as coming up short. As parents, we can offset this natural tendency in our children by providing them with plenty of encouraging support, which will endow them with the skills to think more positively, which in turn will help them to make better choices about their behavior. Children take many cues about who they are from their interactions with their parents. We want to help them paint a picture of themselves as responsible, capable human beings who make good choices and behave appropriately.

“I don’t believe that children can develop in a healthy way unless they feel that they have value apart from anything they own or any skill that they learn. They need to feel they enhance the life of someone else, that they are needed. Who, better than parents, can let them know that?”

Fred Rogers

Mister Rogers Neighborhood

**Build a Foundation of Love, Trust and Respect**

In their efforts to be good teachers, many parents treat their children in ways that they would never treat a friend. In their efforts to raise respectable children, they become so focused on the end goal that they don't realize that the primary message coming through to their children is not a pleasant one.

Imagine that you've been invited to a friend's home for dinner. Your friend welcomes you at the door and you step inside. Suddenly, your host shouts, "*What is the matter with you! Your shoes are all muddy and you're getting my carpet dirty!*" Embarrassed you mumble, "*Sorry*" and remove your shoes. As you do, you notice the hole in your sock, and so does your friend, who announces, "*Geez. Don't you think you could have dressed properly for dinner? You look like a slob.*" As you take your place at the table, your host knocks your elbow off the table with a whispered "*tsk, tsk, where are your manners?*" The dinner conversation is primarily your friend's story about a guest that joined them for dinner last night who had *lovely* manners and no holes in her socks. The story is sprinkled with your friend's occasional admonishments about your table manners. When you finish your meal you stand up only to hear your friend say, "*It sure would be nice if somebody helped clear the table.*"

Take a close look at your own daily interactions with your children. Check to be sure that you aren't focused so hard on improving your child's behavior that your approach is too insensitive or unforgiving. Make sure that the primary message to your child is, *I love you, I believe in you,*

*and I respect you.*” Children who are confident that they are loved and respected by the important adults in their lives will respond overall in a much more pleasant way.

How do you get this message through to your children? **First**, by giving them what they want most from you – your time. **Second**, give them your ear. Children thrive when they have someone who really listens to them. It’s not as important to give advice and solve problems as it is to just plain listen. **Third**, praise and encourage your children daily. Look for reasons, both big and small, to give your children positive feedback. **Fourth**, *tell* them you love them. Tell them you believe in them. Tell them you respect them. Use your words, and your actions to convey these most important messages, *“I love you, I believe in you, and I respect you.”*

#### **Reminder page: No-Cry Discipline Parenting Skills and Tools**

First: Solve the REAL problem

Tired? Hungry? Frustrated? Bored? Overstimulated? Scared? Confused?

Be consistent.

Offer a choice.

Play a cooperation game.

Make it talk.

Engage the imagination.

Sing a song.

Tell a story.

Be silly.

5-3-1 Go – Give fair warning.

Eye-to-eye discussion.

Use positive words. (Avoid *No*, *Don't*, *Stop*)

When/Then, Now/Later, You May/After You.

Distract and redirect.

Use family rules.

Make it brief, make it clear.

Think it – Say it – Do it

Follow daily routines.

Use Happy Face cards.

Time Out - interrupt misbehavior; calm emotions.

It's okay to be firm.

Be flexible. Don't fret. Pick your Battles.

Give compliments, encouragement and kind words.

Build a foundation of love, trust and respect.