Guideline for Effective Instructions

1. **Make sure you have the child's attention; ask them to look at you if necessary**

2. **Do not give an instruction you are not prepared to enforce**
   - If the child learns you enforce commands only some of the time, he or she will continue to test you to see if this is one of those times.

3. **Phrase it as a command, not a question or suggestion.**
   - "Please wash your hands now."
     NOT: "Would you like to wash your hands now?" or "Maybe you should think about washing your hands."
   - Consider starting your instructions with the word "please." This is a model of good manners and respect, but also will discourage you from turning your command into a question.

4. **Keep it short, simple, and specific.**
   - "Please hang up your coat now"
     NOT: "You know your coat belongs in the closet, not on the floor. Please hang it up so someone doesn't trip over it" or "Maybe we should think about picking up in here a little bit."

5. **Use "start commands" not "stop commands."**
   - Tell them what you want, not what you don't want.
   - "Please sit down!"
     NOT: "Quit jumping on the bed."

6. **Specify when you expect the task to be done.**
   - "Please turn off your game now" or "Please turn off your game before you come up to eat"

7. **For younger children, give one instruction at a time, adding more steps as the child demonstrates they can handle more.**
   - "Please put those cars in the toy box now." (wait until the cars are put away); "Thank you. Now please put your shoes in the closet." (wait until the shoes are in the closet); "Great job! Now please put your books back on the bookshelf."
     NOT: "Please put those cars in the toy box in the closet and books back on the bookshelf and go upstairs and put on your pajamas and brush your teeth."
   - Younger children will probably remember only the first or the last item from a list of directions.

8. **Have the child repeat the command back to you if necessary to be sure it is understood.**

9. **Give the instruction once, then deliver a consequence for compliance or non-compliance.**
    - The first time you give an instruction is information; the second time is nagging.
    - Give the instruction, then count silently to yourself up to 10. If you count out loud, you will teach the child to wait until you are almost to 10 before they start moving.
    - If they follow the instruction, show your appreciation by thanking them enthusiastically, giving them a high five, and so on. Make it obvious that you appreciate it when they listen.
    - If they do not follow the instruction, apply appropriate discipline to enforce compliance.
    - This is not the time for discussion or explanations of the rules; rely on action, not more talking.

Written Expectations

When children are younger, telling them directly what you want works pretty well. Little kids don't really think or plan too far ahead anyway, so focusing on what is in right in front of them at that moment makes good sense. As children mature, their schedules fill up. They get more distracted, spend more time away from their parents, and develop their own plans and agendas. A lot of dissatisfaction and conflict happens when parents continue to give instructions to older children as they did when they were much younger. They tell them they need to do something right now when the child knows perfectly well the task could be done any time in the next few hours or days.

Think about what is happening in that case. The parent interrupts the child's activities to give them instructions about something that could easily wait until later. Not surprisingly, children tend to resent this. They think they are being disrespected because they *are* being disrespected. The message they hear is that the parent cares only about their own agenda. Of course, there are times that require an instruction to end with, "right now," but if every direction ends that way, the parent is overdoing it and resentment may be brewing.

As children get older and more sophisticated, we can add more steps and complexity to their rules and chores. We can – and should – also give them more control over how chores fit into their schedules and plans. Rather than telling them the chore must be done straight away, we give them a future deadline for when it needs to be done. This gives them the opportunity to learn how to manage their own time and organize daily activities for themselves.

A lot of parents would say that if they don't tell the child directly what to do, it won't get done. This might be true, but the way to respond to this inaction is not to tell them over and over again which will only give them more practice with being non-compliant. When parents do this, they are accepting responsibility for making sure the task gets done instead of holding the child responsible. If the job doesn't get done, deliver a consequence, not a lecture.

When you write out a list of expectations and consequences, you are creating a simple contract. The basic terms are that, if the child does what is spelled out in the contract, you will let them go on with their life without interruption. They can keep all of their regular privileges and maybe earn something extra, like allowance or extra privileges. On the other hand, if they choose not to observe your rules or fail to get a chore done correctly or by the specified time, they will lose all of their privileges and have to earn them back. In other words, their life will go on hold until the problem is corrected, the penalty is served, and privileges are earned back.

Basic written instructions might look something like the following example. Don't be too concerned about consequences at this point. We will get to this. You will see a reference to something called job cards, a tool for discipline we will discuss in more detail in the next section. The most important point for now is that Rules and Chores sections describe child responsibilities and Consequences outlines parent responsibilities. If you want them to be reliable in holding up their end of the bargain, you must be reliable in holding up yours.

Rules

- Follow instructions the first time they are given
- Use appropriate language (avoid yelling, arguing, name calling).
- Food and drink in the kitchen only

- Two hours or less screen time daily (Phone, tablet, TV, and video games combined).
    - Schoolwork and chores must done before using electronics
- Bedtime (in bed, lights out).
    - Sunday - Thursday: 8:30 PM
    - Friday and Saturday: 10:00 PM

Chores

Daily:
- Make bed before breakfast
- Load dishwasher right after dinner
- Put dirty clothes in hamper before bed

Weekly:

- Collect all trash and take cans to the curb by 8:00 PM Wednesday
- Clean bedroom by noon Saturday
    - All clothes and personal items off the floor and put away appropriately
    - Bed made
    - Dust dresser and chest
- Vacuum living room and dining room before bed Sunday

Consequences

- Following all rules and completing all chores appropriately and on time will earn daily privileges and $3.00 per day payable by noon Sunday.
- Breaking a rule or failing to complete a chore as required will result in loss of allowance for the day, loss of all privileges for 4 hours and assignment of a Job Card.
    - Privileges will be earned back when:
        - The problem that caused the grounding is corrected (if possible)
        - No privileges are accessed for at least 4 hours.
        - The Job Card is completed in an acceptable way.

Turning the chore list into a chart or whiteboard checklist can be useful for some kids because it helps them keep track of where they are in the process. The same goes for parents who might be busy and easily distracted from monitoring the child's progress. Notice that each chore has an assigned time for completion. This eliminates arguments about you interrupting their activities by telling them the chore needs to be done right now. If the expectation is that the child's room is to be clean by noon Saturday, they should have every opportunity to get it done without interference or reminders right up to 12:00. But if one minute after noon rolls around and the room is still not cleaned appropriately, the next parental act is to deliver a consequence, not a reminder.

One variation for use with younger kids is to write or print individual chores on strips of paper, wooden craft sticks, or index cards. When chore time rolls around, each member of the household takes a turn pulling one of the cards out of a hat or box and they are responsible for that task. You can also include nonsense items such as "make a funny face" or "hop on one foot for 30 seconds" and require all participants to stop what they are doing and perform that task before moving on to the next chore. Another

approach is to create a numbered list of all the chores that need to be done and have each child roll dice to determine which task they are assigned.

It's been said that 90% of success in life is just showing up. The longer-term benefit of deadlines for chores is that children learn the adult skill of being where they are supposed to be when they are supposed to be there and doing what they need to do when they arrive. It helps them learn how to show up on time.

Step 2: Oz or Kansas?

People sometimes get the impression that the word consequence means the same thing as punishment or that only negative events can be consequences. In fact, a consequence is just something that happens as a result of something else happening first. The cause comes first and the consequence follows. So, punishment is definitely one kind of consequence for behavior. A reward is another kind of consequence for behavior.

Think back for a minute to our discussion in chapter three about repetition and contrast. The essence of contrast is making good, desirable consequences happen in our children's lives when they choose to do what we ask and bad, unpleasant consequences when they do not. The greater the difference between the goodness of the good outcomes and the badness of the bad outcomes, the easier their choice will be. If it is not clear to your child that their life will change in some meaningful way as the result of their behavior, they will be less concerned about making the right choice. Their job is to choose, your job is to let them know what you think of the choice by following through with a consequence as promised, time after time.

Here is another way to think about it. Remember the old movie *The Wizard of Oz?* When your children are behaving in ways you like, you should try to make their lives like Oz – full of beautiful colors, happy music, interesting characters, and loads of enjoyable activities and foods. But when they misbehave, it's Kansas. Dull. Flat. Black and white. Boring. Kansas. All of the more entertaining and enjoyable features go away and mind-numbing monotony takes over. This is contrast.

However, just like in Dorothy's bedroom out on the farm in Kansas, the doorway to Oz is always in front of them and it is in their power to open it and return to Oz. All they need to do is accept the correction or discipline you assign and get back on track. Your job is to make the door available. It is up to them whether or not to open it.

So, the process of using consequences to create contrast can be summed up like this:

1. Make life more like Oz when expectations are met.
2. Make life more like Kansas when they are not.
3. Rinse and repeat.

Life in Oz includes access to all regular privileges and possible extra rewards or reinforcers. Life in Kansas includes having only needs (not wants) met until they earn their way back to Oz. Anything you add on the Oz side or withhold from the Kansas side will make their choices easier. This is the best and clearest way to tell them what direction you want them to go. No lectures – or munchkins – required.

Levels of Consequences

Think of consequences as happening at three different levels. Ideally, children should experience all of them at one time or another. They range from those you do not have to plan or put any effort into at all to those that are a part of a structured, planned approach to motivation and discipline.

Natural Consequences

The first variety, natural consequences, are those that happen without any involvement by the parent. When your daughter rides her bike too fast, falls down and scrapes a knee, this is a natural consequence. Nothing you did made this happen – except maybe that you bought her the bike. When your son fails to observe classroom rules and has to stay after school, this too is a natural consequence. The only thing you have to do is stay out of the way.

Older children and adolescents sometimes face more serious consequences like detentions at school, being dismissed from a sports team, or problems with the legal system. When you can see a natural consequence about to happen and also see that it will be painful but not harmful or damaging, let it happen. Your child will learn a hundred times more from the experience than they would if you jumped in to protect them and just talked about it later. Natural consequences are the most powerful and useful because they are, well, natural. These are the kinds of consequences we experience most often as adults.

Keep in mind that like all the other varieties, natural consequences also operate in a positive direction. Getting good grades is a natural consequence of studying. Moving your belt in a notch is a natural consequence of eating more salads and fewer donuts. You can add even more value to these positive events by praising or congratulating the person who earns them

Of course, natural consequences are not available in every situation. They also might not occur soon enough to affect behavior in the present moment – like health problems from smoking or belt problems from donuts – or be potentially dangerous or damaging, too serious for you to stand by and allow them to happen.

Logical Consequences

The next level is usually referred to as logical consequences. Rather than occurring naturally, these are chosen by a parent or other adult and have some obvious, logical connection to the behavior. Suppose a child leaves a toy out on the floor after it was supposed to have been put away. The parent picks up the toy and puts it out of reach somewhere. When the child asks about it later, the parent says something like, "I had to pick up your toy, so you will not be able to play with it for the rest of the day." Another example might be having to scrub all the walls in a room after drawing on one of them with a crayon. The consequence is related in a logical, understandable way. Extending curfew by a half hour because your teen has observed the current curfew consistently is a more positive example.

When you are able to come up with a logical consequence for a particular behavior and it would not be harmful or damaging, use it. Often though, it is not possible to deliver an appropriate logical consequence in a timely way. Sometimes, there is just no good way to make the punishment fit the crime.

Planned Consequences

This is the final and most artificial level of consequences. These are responses that are intentional and planned in advance for use in situations where natural or logical consequences are not available or not immediate enough to be useful. Specific examples of planned consequences we will look at here are

time-out for younger children and job card grounding for older children and adolescents. Positive planned consequences might include treats, extra privileges, or an allowance. The two primary advantages to planned consequences are (1) parents don't have to come up with a consequence on the spur of the moment – they decide in advance how they will respond to misbehavior and (2) they can be used to respond to nearly any behavior at any time.

Consequence History

If children are used to having lots of parental attention and plenty of privileges, they are more likely to notice quickly and experience more discomfort when they are lost or removed. Greater contrast means faster learning. Some parents are almost always affectionate and attentive toward their children and their kids are used to having plenty of toys and electronic devices to play with and enjoy most all the time even when their behavior is not what it should be. As often as not, the main struggle for parents in these families is to be more assertive and consistent in withholding privileges when expectations are not met. They feel they are depriving their children somehow or the kids put up a big fuss when they have to face real consequences and the parents back down.

In other families, children get little notice or recognition when they are doing well. For parents in these homes, the first step is to make a point of acknowledging and praising their children's appropriate behavior more often and more powerfully. Even if the parent has to work to find a reason to praise the child, it is almost always worth the effort. There is not much chance that more good behavior will develop if the little positive behavior they do display goes unnoticed and unrewarded. Not only that, but if they rarely have privileges and are ignored most of the time anyway, they don't have much to lose by misbehaving. You can't lose what you don't have.

For younger kids, the plan might be something as simple as increasing the amount of brief physical touch or praise. It is almost always useful to set aside a specific amount of time each day to devote to one-on-one, structured interactions with your child at least through their pre-school years and even beyond. These are times when you do not make demands on your child, give instructions, or try to teach any specific skill, but just notice and comment on their appropriate behavior instead and hang out.

You might have heard the phrase, "catch 'em being good" somewhere along the way. The idea is that it is important to notice children when they are doing well and express your approval to them. Do that. But don't even wait that long. "Catch 'em being okay" might be a better saying. There is no reason to be stingy with praise and expressions of gratitude for behaviors you like, even small accomplishments or simple acts of compliance. ==Praise doesn't cost anything. It is portable and you never run out of it.==

The author of a book about a successful employee motivation system based on recognition and rewards said it like this:

> Saying, "Thank you" and "You're welcome" is bedrock communication. In my experience, if someone says, "Thank you" often enough, it's pretty hard not to say, "You're welcome" . . . If the objective were to say thank you as often as possible, it seemed we should design a way of saying, "Thank you" to employees who did, day-in, day-out, what they were supposed to do: "Thank you for coming to work," "Thank you for not being late." (*D.C. Boyle, Secrets of a Successful Employee Recognition System: The 100 Point Solution*)

So, if reliable, routine, productive behavior is what we want, then reliable, routine, productive behavior is what we should be rewarding. At home, this might translate to: "Thank you for playing quietly while I was on the phone" or "Thank you for putting your dishes in the sink." At school, it might sound more like: "Thank you for having your materials ready" or "Thank you for completing your work on time." ==Make a point to respond positively to acceptable behavior, not just exceptional behavior.==

This serves at least three main purposes. First, noticing and rewarding behaviors we like is the most powerful method we have for telling the child which way we want them to go. Second, and most important, being seen as "the giver of good things" helps build a positive relationship and increases their interest in pleasing us. Finally, if the overall value of the child's regular environment increases – if it becomes more Oz-like – they will notice a lot sooner when attention and privileges are withdrawn. In other words, there will be more contrast. There is an additional benefit to parents here because it turns out that expressing gratitude also tends to have a positive effect on the person who is doing it as well.

Beware of the No Bias

Parents sometimes develop what I call a *no bias*. No matter what their child asks, their automatic first response is to say no, sometimes even before the child has finished asking the question. Then, at least some of the time, the child whines long enough or badgers the parent into changing their mind and giving them what they want.

Being bullied into saying yes does not feel good. Parents in this situation often get upset with themselves for giving in and become even more determined to say no to more requests and the cycle repeats and intensifies. Most children in this situation learn to ignore the first no and to be more forceful and persistent in bullying the parent. Both parent and child gear up for a negative interaction before they even start to talk. Parents who have not communicated expectations clearly are a lot more likely to fall into this trap.

I suggest parents try to adopt a *yes bias* or, more accurately, a *yes, if bias*. I encourage them to make this their default response to child requests. "Yes, you can do what you want if you have done what you are supposed to." In other words, "Yes, you can have some ice cream if you have eaten your broccoli." This puts the responsibility squarely back on the child. What the parent is communicating is that they are willing to let the child do what they want to – as long as it is within the rules. It is really up to the child to determine whether or not they get the chance because they get to decide either to meet expectations or not. Children should know the answer before they even ask the question. They should know because the expectations have been spelled out clearly and they also know better than anyone whether they have met them.

We want our children to have privileges, lots of them. We want to have plenty of reasons and ways to let them know we approve of and appreciate good behavior. If they have privileges, they have something to lose and are more easily motivated. If they have privileges, they are probably going to be easier to get along with. ==Privileges should be earned, but it should not be so hard to earn or keep them that kids give up trying.==

Rewards and Privileges

What makes a good reward? I have no idea. Okay, that is not strictly true, but the reality is there is no one-size-fits-all list of items or experiences that all children will find rewarding or reinforcing.

I said earlier that I like chocolate. Most people I know also like chocolate, but I have met some kids who can take it or leave it. I don't have much use for video games, but many kids would choose video games over chocolate in a heartbeat. We said before that most young kids like attention, but I have worked with children with autism who would do just about anything to avoid any contact or attention from other people. The point is that what makes a good reward is that it is rewarding. That's it. It does not matter what we think *should* be rewarding. Anything your child finds interesting, enjoyable, or exciting is a potential reward, whether or not we think it should be. ==Rewards are simply the items and activities the child is willing to work for.== Even broccoli can be rewarding for some children.

One good way to figure out what might be reinforcing or rewarding to your child is to watch their choices. When they are allowed to do what they want, what activity do they choose? When they are allowed to pick what they eat, what snack do they go for? When they have a choice among playmates, which friend is invited over? Do they care about money, shoes, screen time, chocolate? Chances are good the answer to these questions will give you a good idea what they value and what activities and items can be used to motivate them, but there is only one way to know for sure.

Way back in chapter three, we said that behavior is motivated; it either gets children what they want or gets them out of something they do not want. The behaviors that produce either one of these results will probably happen again for the same reason that getting a paycheck increases the chances you will keep showing up at work. If any behavior keeps happening or happens more, it is producing a desirable result from the child's perspective. It does not matter whether we think the behavior is being rewarded, if the behavior keeps happening or is increasing, it is being reinforced somehow.

What exactly is a privilege? It might be easier to talk about what your children are entitled to. In my view, they are entitled to your love and affection, a warm place to sleep, nutritious food, and appropriate clothing. That's about it. Everything else is a privilege. A privilege is anything they can live without. ==There is no constitutional guarantee of smart phones, endless snacks, sleepovers, or participation in umpteen different activities.== Your children might feel like these are needs, but they are not. And, by the way, as an adult, no one automatically meets your needs so your kids are already ahead of the game. If you want a privilege, what do you do? You find a way to earn it. There's no reason it should be different for your children.

Removing Privileges

The best approach to planned punishments or corrective consequences is to remove all privileges to create maximum contrast, but only for a short time to create the most repetition. For many children, if their parents were to take away one or two privileges, there would still be lots left and they would just move on to the next activity. Little contrast would be created and the parent would not have done their job of presenting a clear and obvious choice. One other important point here is that parents should be sure they actually have control over the privileges they promise to remove for misbehavior. If they say they are going to withhold something, but the child can easily bootleg it behind the parent's back, the parent will look ineffective to the child and their authority will get tested again and again.

When to Deliver a Consequence

In general, it is best to respond to a behavior – appropriate or not – as soon as possible after it happens. This is especially true for younger kids. Basically, they are built to think that whatever happens a few

seconds after a behavior is the result of that behavior. If they cry and you pick them up right away, they will believe that crying gets them picked up and do it more. If complaining about what you made for lunch results in you making something else, they will complain more and their diet will get more restricted. If you congratulate them and give them a high-five right after they pick up their toys, they will believe picking up toys gets them attention and praise.

Up until the age of seven or so, most children think in pretty simple terms and short time frames. Most people are not able to think or reason in a fully abstract way until sometime in mid to late adolescence or even later. If you delay consequences by hours or days, they will lose the connection between their behavior and the outcome. As children mature, they are better able to understand when you deliver a consequence for a behavior that happened earlier, but there are limits. It is almost always better to respond as soon as you can.

It can be helpful to use a calendar, chart, or some other scorekeeping system to keep track of behaviors over time and then deliver a consequence like an allowance or treat periodically. Setting up longer term goals and consequences can add another level of motivation and help children learn to delay gratification. Charts or tokens can help younger children bridge the time gap until they get the actual, tangible reward. So, a child might get a sticker or a mark on a chart or calendar each day but have to wait to cash in for a bigger reward once a week. Each mark shows them they are getting a bit closer to their goal and helps them practice delaying gratification.

How to Deliver a Consequence

If you are determined to create the greatest possible contrast – and you should be – you must pay attention to *what* privileges you deliver and *when,* but also *how* you deliver them. When you respond to appropriate or positive behavior, do it with enthusiasm. React to good behavior in a way you would be embarrassed to in public, what I refer to as the *good behavior happy dance*. Make it interesting as well as rewarding for the child to behave well and you increase the chances of more appropriate behavior. Again, this is especially true for younger children, but a little enthusiasm can go a long way even with surly adolescents.

On the other hand, when you respond to behaviors you do not like, follow the gravity model (chapter three). Calm. No anger or yelling. No warnings, explanations, or discussion. Absolutely reliable. A force of nature. This emotionally neutral approach is important for a couple of reasons: (1) it contrasts sharply with your bigger, more enthusiastic responses to appropriate behavior and (2) it protects you from being drawn into emotionally charged exchanges which can distract you from the actual issues at hand.

If your child learns you will get wound up when he or she misbehaves, this can become a tool for them to manage your behavior. Some children are what I call *emotional vampires* – the more emotionally wound up you become, the more they feed off it and increase the intensity of their own reaction. The more you turn it up, the more they turn it up until you give in or get frustrated and walk away. Either way, the child is being taught to continue to elevate their emotional reaction to get what they want. Your disciplinary efforts will go much better if you take all of that emotion and channel into your reactions to positive behavior. A more measured approach also demonstrates that good decisions come from being intentional, not emotional. Model the behavior you want.

There are two basic ways to respond to behaviors you do not like; both should be presented in an emotionally neutral way and both create a meaningful change or contrast from the child's regular life. If the behavior is annoying, but tolerable, and you have some sense that attention or emotion has played a

part in keeping it going, ignore it. If you are right that your attention is important to the child, the behavior might increase for a time, but then it will fade because you have taken away the payoff. If you can't tolerate a behavior or it is on your list of non-negotiable expectations, you should punish it by removing privileges using one of the tools described in the next section or something similar.

The other essential step is to present an alternative. It is not enough to tell the child what was done wrong, they must be told what they could do instead. If they earn a consequence for breaking a rule, the next step might be as simple as reminding them of the rule and letting them know how they can earn their privileges back. If they lost privileges because they failed to complete a task, they should be given an opportunity to complete it. Remember, punishment tells the child what not to do but does not tell them what to do instead.

Step 3: Practice Intentional Discipline

You will be much more likely to follow through with motivational and disciplinary actions if you have decided two things ahead of time: (1) which behaviors you are going to respond to and (2) how you are going to respond. Once you have those two things in hand, what matters from then on is how reliably you follow the plan from one teaching opportunity to the next. ==The more consistent you are, the more quickly your children will get the idea and the sooner you will be able to exhale.==

What to Discipline

Any behavior you find inappropriate *can* be disciplined, but any violation of your non-negotiable expectations *must* be disciplined. This, in part, is why it is wise to keep your list of expectations short and avoid including items you cannot enforce. If you have too many requirements on the list, you will probably forget some or be less consistent in enforcing them. If you are not willing or able to enforce them, your child will start treating you like an empty police car sooner or later. Either way, you will end up looking less capable and more ineffective to the child. If they notice you respond only some of the time, they are more likely to test you the next time. ==Better to have a few requirements you enforce consistently than many you enforce once in a while.==

Broken Rules

You might have heard someone say you should pick your battles when it comes to enforcing your expectations. The idea seems to be that you should focus on only more serious violations of the rules and let most minor misbehavior go. This is a mistake. Little things matter. A history lesson might be useful here.

Back in 1994, the mayor of New York City hired a new police commissioner, a man who had a record of dramatically reducing crime on the subway system. How? Instead of focusing only on more serious issues such as muggings and assaults, he emphasized cleaning up graffiti and arresting those who jumped the turnstiles and did not pay their subway fare – about 170,000 a day at one point. The result? The new culture of no tolerance for *any* rule breaking resulted in a dramatic decrease in *all* kinds of crime, including assaults and robberies. Clamping down on littering, public urination, and minor property damage led to significant decreases in overall crime rates in the city including more serious infractions. Little things matter.

It is a good idea to make it clear that little things matter in your home as well. Your children should know that following instructions is expected and will be enforced, but also appreciated. You want to be

sure that if you tell your child to take their dinner dishes to the sink or pick up their socks, this gets done. For one thing, it is a lot easier to enforce these less difficult tasks and this helps establish a habit or culture of compliance. Salesmen call this the foot-in-the-door technique. They know it is a lot easier to get someone to go along with a bigger request if they have already gone along with a smaller one. On the other hand, letting little things go or doing them yourself (because it is just easier) sets you up for more serious violations later.

When it comes to rules, you should always discipline two kinds of violations consistently and without hesitation: (1) not following a direct instruction – verbal or written – and (2) any kind of aggressive behavior including language or actions against people, pets, or property. You should not discipline accidental or unintentional behavior, situations over which the child has no control, or legitimate can't do behaviors.

Late or Incomplete Chores

Chores are either done appropriately and on time or they are not. If you have communicated clearly how and when a chore is to be completed, you have done your part and the rest is up to the child. If the time comes for the chore to be done and it is not, a consequence should follow – even if it is only a minute or two late or the child says they will do it right away.

If the child misses a step or does not complete the chore fully, either because they are just learning the procedure or because you did not explain it well enough, you might allow an exception. In that case, tell them they did a good job overall but missed a step. Then tell them that since they are just learning – or because you did not give them enough information – you have decided not to give them a consequence this time. Then tell them exactly what they need to change or improve next time to avoid discipline. End by praising them for their effort.

It is common for adolescents and children to argue that it is not fair to be punished for being a few minutes late getting home or not quite finishing a chore on time. This seems to be an area where parents are often tempted to give in or compromise a little. It might help to consider some adult world examples of what you are trying to prepare your children for:

Example 1: You can get to the airport as early as you want, but if you get there even a minute after they close the door to the airplane, it's too late. The last one on before the door closes still gets to go, but whether you miss the flight by a minute or an hour, the outcome is the same. You get a chance to wave at the plane from the ground as it takes off.

Example 2: You can pay your taxes any time you want after the end of the year right up until midnight on April 15, but April 16 is too late and there will be a consequence for your tardiness. Apologies and a promise to do better next time might be appreciated, but you will still get a fine.

If you start to allow wiggle room in these deadlines, your child will probably push the boundaries a little more the next time and you will end up with more arguments and resistance when you do decide to follow through. If you decide to become more flexible with a rule or deadline, it should happen as a reward for compliance not because of pushback from your child.

It is important for you to be as good as your word. If you promise a consequence, good or bad, be sure you deliver it. If you expect your child to be reliable, you need to be reliable first.

How to Deliver Planned Consequences

An intentional, planned approach to teaching through discipline will be more successful if you follow a consistent method or approach to each disciplinary interaction. From preschool through high school, each disciplinary teaching interaction with your child should include the following elements:

Step 1: Define the problem

Step 2: Deliver a consequence

Step 3: Set a goal for future behavior

Step 4: Establish a way to earn back privileges

Step 5: Praise and reward compliance

Define the problem

If you have communicated your expectations clearly, this step should not take long. If you gave an instruction and it is not being followed, the only thing you need to say is, "You're not listening." If a rule is broken or an assigned chore is not completed on time or as required, you only need to point to the item on your expectations list or remind the child what it says. If you cannot clearly identify the problem using seven words or fewer, you probably have not refined your expectations well enough.

Be brief and focus on the current behavior, not on what the child has done on previous occasions. If you find yourself using words like always or never to describe behavior, you need to sharpen your time frame. Remember, the first time you describe a problem behavior is information, the second time is nagging. This is not the time for lectures.

Of course, if either the parent or child is not clear about expectations, this step is more likely to turn into an argument. The parent tells the child they have broken a rule. The child says something like, "You never said that." or maybe an even more creative response. The parent follows with, "I did too tell you that" in response. The child argues more forcefully. The parent argues back or maybe begins to question what they did say, and so on. This has the potential to lead to a full-blown meltdown or the parent giving in after making some comment about what will happen next time.

This first step and the next are where your child is most likely to try to draw you into a discussion or to pump up the emotional volume to distract you from the issue at hand. Do your best to maintain a calm, matter-of-fact, gravity-like approach. Focus on the process and try not to be dragged into discussions about content or emotionally charged exchanges.

Deliver a consequence

If you have worked out a plan for responding to your child's behavior, this should be a simple – but not necessarily easy – step. If the behavior has already resulted in a natural consequence for the child, you might just point out what their actions have cost them, let them know what they could do to fix it if they

choose, and leave it at that. Resist the temptation to lecture or pile on additional consequences when they have already paid a price for their behavior.

If there was no natural consequence and you are able to come up with a logical and proportional consequence, let them know what is about to happen and why. For example, "You left your bike outside last night, so I am locking it up in the garage today."

When a natural or logical consequence is not available – which is true most of the time – you will use some kind of planned consequence, usually time-out or job card grounding or something similar. If you use the same approach consistently, your kids will become accustomed to the procedure and you will not have to spend much time explaining what is going on or what they need to do if they want their privileges back. They will already know because it is the same as the time before and the time before that.

Set a goal for future behavior

Once you have identified the problem behavior and the consequence, let the child know what you expect them to do instead in the future. Most of the time, this will involve simply restating a rule you have already listed or clarifying how a chore needs to be done differently. It can be useful to ask the child to restate the rule or identify what was not done quite right. If possible, you might even practice the goal behavior on the spot. For example, show the child the correct way to complete the chore they missed and have them practice the appropriate steps as part of earning their privileges back.

Sometimes practice itself can be a kind of consequence. When the child does something that breaks a rule and is more physical in nature – like slamming a door, running down the hall, or stomping up the stairs – an approach called *positive practice* can be useful. This involves having your child do the appropriate action correctly – closing the door softly, walking slowly down the hall, going quietly up the stairs – ten times. It is not entirely clear why, but ten seems to be a magic number for some reason. It often works best to arrange this practice at a time your child has something else they are eager to get to. They are more likely to cooperate with the practice if they know their friend is waiting to play or their favorite show is about to start.

Establish a way to earn back privileges

Remember, the purpose of punishment is to reduce or eliminate unproductive behavior, not to build positive behaviors. It helps your child learn what not to do, but not what to do instead. Obviously, it is important for your kids to learn it will cost them something if they do not follow your rules or instructions, but it is even more important for them to experience a real benefit when they do listen. This is the purpose of having them do something to earn their privileges back.

If the child did not follow a direction or did not get a chore done, they should be expected to do whatever they were told to before or finish the chore plus a little more to get off punishment. If the problem is not fixable, they should be expected to do some other positive, useful, helpful act to earn back their privileges.

This step means children have an active role in the disciplinary process. They must do something in order to get their life back, not just wait around for time to pass. Discipline does not just happen to them, they are participants. It also introduces an element of control that makes sense to most kids. If they don't

feel like earning their privileges back right away, they don't have to. <mark>Skilled parents are willing to let their children go without privileges for as long as they might choose</mark>. They know that the child will eventrully get tired of having no life and decide to do whatever is needed to get their stuff back.

Praise and reward compliance

Every planned disciplinary interaction, from a toddler's first one-minute time-out to an adolescent's final grounding should end the same way, with a parent saying, "Nice job. Thank you. And, by the way, you can have your privileges back now." The last step recognizes and rewards the appropriate behavior the child completed to earn their privileges back. Without this step, the teaching interaction is not complete.

Even if it takes a very long time for the child to complete the earn back requirement, once they do the parent should respond as if the child has just done them the greatest favor one human being has ever done another, congratulate them on their good choice, and restore their privileges. The positive attention along with getting all of their privileges back creates a sharp and immediate contrast with the child's previous, dull, boring, privilege-free situation. <mark>Losing privileges tells them where not to go. Getting them back tells them which way to go instead.</mark>

Resist the temptation to say something like, "See, that wasn't so hard" or, "You could have been done a long time ago." These comments will suck the life out of the praise that precedes them. Take the win and go on.

PART III

Chapter 8
What to Do About Behavior You Like

Owning a hammer doesn't make you a carpenter. Having a pen in your drawer or keyboard on your desktop won't turn you into a novelist. Tools are great, but they work a lot better if you choose the right one for the job and have some idea about how to use it.

This chapter and the next describe some tools that are used commonly to improve motivation and behavior. They are used often and have been for a long time because they work. They work because they are based on the ideas and principles we have talked about in the previous chapters.

Even if you close your eyes before you swing your hammer, you would still hit the nail once-in-a-while. In the same way, the tools we will look at here would still be useful for teaching and discipline even if you knew nothing about learning and behavior. But, of course, you have learned a great deal about these topics at this point. If you stay mindful of the reasons for choosing these tools, you will hit the nail on the head a lot more often.

A lot of ideas for parenting look good on paper or on some website but turn out to be impractical or burdensome in everyday life. Stick with the basics. Focus on methods you can build into your daily routines without disrupting the entire household. If you have to consult a manual or a spreadsheet every time you make a decision on discipline, your approach has probably gotten a bit too complicated. Consistency matters and you are more likely to be consistent if you don't get distracted by a lot of tedious details.

Time-In

It might seem a little backward, but often the best place to deal with behavior you *don't* like is to pay more attention to the behavior you *do* like. For one thing, children who spend more time doing appropriate things have less time for inappropriate behavior. Remember that we have defined a "good behavior" as anything that contributes to your kids developing life skills and habits that will help them now and later. So, good behaviors are good because they are good for the child, not for parents, even though the child might not see it that way at the time. It can be tempting to leave well enough alone or not bother a child who is behaving well, but if acceptable behavior is what you want, then this is what you should pay attention to and reinforce.

Time-in is the name we give to the total collection of privileges and activities children get to enjoy as long as they are behaving in an acceptable way. If your child does not have access to rich time-in experiences, disciplinary methods like time-out can still work to some degree, but not as well as they should. If they don't have much to lose, there isn't much contrast when they lose it. Positive attention from parents and regular – but not unregulated – access to time with parents, toys, and preferred activities are the biggest part of time-in.

We will focus first on ways to communicate your approval to younger children. For them, attention from a caregiver is usually the most valuable part of time-in. Keeping a high level of positive attention and making interactions with your child as rewarding as possible when they are behaving acceptably – not exceptionally – will not only support your relationship and improve their sense of security but also set the stage for more productive discipline. The richer the time-in, the more powerful the time-out. As

we said before, a good rule of thumb is to make maybe five times as many positive and praise statements as you do directive or corrective comments and actions. More is better.

Proximity

For at least part of every day, arrange your schedule so you will be within reach of your young child. Plan and promote activities and routines that will keep the child near you so little or no extra effort will be needed on your part to maintain contact. Keep the child close in the car, at the market, before and during meals, and so on. As you begin to encourage more independent play, check on the child periodically rather than waiting for them to come to you. If the child knows you can be counted on to look in on them once-in-a-while, they are more likely to feel comfortable being on their own.

Brief Physical Touch

Physical touch will do more to demonstrate your approval to younger children than just about any amount of talking. Train yourself to touch or pat your child gently on the shoulder, head, or back twenty-five to fifty times a day for just a few seconds each time. This should happen at times when the child is behaving in an acceptable way. Your touch is a way to remind them you are present and to let them know you approve of their activities without interrupting them. If you do fifty touches for two seconds each in a day, you will have invested less than two minutes of your time. This is an investment that will pay off many times over.

You might include a positive comment such as, "I like it when you play quietly" with each touch, but this not essential. The physical contact alone communicates a great deal. There is good reason to believe that this kind of touch helps children manage stress and regulate their emotional state more effectively. If your child reacts in a big way or flinches when you touch them in this way, you are not making enough contact during the day.

Labeled Praise

Describe briefly and specifically what you like about the child's behavior. This helps the child to identify which particular reactions will produce more positive attention. For example, "I like the way you picked up the bathroom after your shower" is better than, "Thanks," but any praise is better than none at all.

Third-Party Praise

Look for or create opportunities to share positive comments about your child's behavior or accomplishments with others in a way that lets your child overhear them. Suggest they show their artwork or math paper to their other parent or grandparents. Publicize their efforts by putting their papers up on the refrigerator, bulletin board, computer desktop, or family website.

Toys and Activities

The other part of the time-in environment is made up of the toys, devices, and activities available to the child. Here are a few ideas to keep in mind as you choose what you will make available to them:

1. Choose toys and activities that require creative input from the child rather than items that can be played with in only one way. Devices with screens encourage the child to be a passive recipient instead of an active participant in their environment. Let the child know that they, not you or some device, are responsible for making their own fun.

1.

2. Outdoor activities are almost always better than indoor activities. There is good reason to believe that as little as two hours a week outside will have a positive effect on health and mood, regardless of what the child is doing during that time.

2.

3. Promote hands-on activities, those that involve both mental and physical effort, such as building blocks, balls, drawing, painting, and sports which add even more stress reducing benefits.

3.

4. Promote games or other activities which require your child to cooperate with another person.

Grab Bag or Treasure Box

This is a way to deliver a positive planned consequence for any behavior you especially appreciate or to support behavioral skills as they are being learned. For example, you might offer a chance to pull from the grab bag when you get a positive report from a teacher, when the child spontaneously does something kind or helpful, when they meet all your expectations for a full week, or when they act in a brave way in a stressful situation like sleeping in their own bed all night or getting a shot. Don't overdo it. It should always feel special to the child to get a chance to pull from the grab bag. This method is suitable for younger kids, though it can be helpful even all the way through elementary school if you change up the rewards as you go along.

Preparation and Delivery

1. Develop a list of items the child will be interested in earning. Write down any small, easily delivered rewards. Be practical. Stick to items that you can deliver right away or at after a very short time. Ask the child for suggestions. Make sure you always include lots of praise, high fives, hugs, and so on when you deliver rewards.

4.

2. Create twenty-five or more slips of paper, each about the same size. Half an index card

5. or wooden craft sticks work well for this. On each paper, write down one of the rewards the list. Include at least one, extra-special item such as a trip to get ice cream or five dollars. Any of these items will seem more interesting if they can be obtained only by earning a chance at the grab bag. Ice cream will not be as enticing if they get to eat ice cream every day anyway.

6.

3. Place the papers in a bag, bowl, shoebox, jar, or hat.

4. When your child meets a goal for behavior, allow him or her to "pull from the grab bag."

5. The child closes his or her eyes and pulls out a slip of paper at random. Be sure that this is accompanied by lots of praise and positive comments about the behavior that earned them a chance at the grab bag.
   7.
6. After the child selects a reward, the card should be returned to the bag. If the extra-special grand prize is pulled, you might want to hold it out for a few days.
   8.
7. Consider having a mystery bonus day once a week, where the child will be allowed to pull from the bag twice if their behavior has been acceptable. The child should not know in advance when the bonus day will be.

8. Do not negotiate for an exchange of items if the child does not get their preferred item. Tell
   9. them they will have another chance the next day.
   10.
9. For older children, it might be useful to have an option to choose an IOU or token. The child can choose either to take a smaller grab bag item right now or choose a token that can be saved up to purchase a big-ticket item. Some parents decide to buy items their child asks for while out shopping but then set a price on the item and not let the child have it until they earn enough tokens to redeem for it. Make sure to create tokens that cannot be easily counterfeited or "borrowed" by another child. You might use different colors of paper or poker chips for each child or require your signature to validate the token. Help them choose a place to keep their tokens safe.
   11.
12. There are lots of suggestions for rewards or reinforcers online and elsewhere. Here are a few examples of items you might include:
13.
14.
15.
16.
17.
18.

Activities/Social

- Blow bubbles
- Extra screen time
  (Write down various amounts of time from 10, 15, 30 minutes or more)
- Family walk or bike ride
- Have a friend over after school
- Have a friend stay overnight
- Help bake cookies
- Make a tent or camp out in the family room
- Family walk or bike ride

- Picnic in back yard or family room
- Play in the lawn sprinkler
- Slumber party in parents' room
- Special time with a parent (example: 15 minutes playing basketball with Mom)
- Visit a relative

Extra Privileges

- Choose game or movie for family night
- Get out of one chore
- Chore free day
- Extra story before bed

- Paint fingernails or toenails
- Pajama day
- Sleep in one hour
- Stay up late (Write down various amounts of time from 10, 15, 30 minutes or more)
- Wear cologne or perfume

Food and Drink

- Add one item to grocery list
- Apple slices with peanut butter dip
- Candy
- Choose dinner menu
- Choose restaurant for next family meal out
- Frozen fruit popsicle, malt, or smoothie
- Order a pizza
- Sparkling water, drink box, soft drink
- Yogurt, raisins, nuts, trail mix

At School

- Get a drink pass
- Good behavior note sent home
- Hand out or collect papers
- Help the custodian
- Listen to music while working
- Lunch with teacher
- Play game with teacher or principal
- Play game with a friend

- Read announcements
- Sit by a friend in class
- Cafeteria helper
- Call parent with good behavior report
- Choose book for story time
- Stickers
- Extra recess
- Feed classroom pet
- First in line
- Visit another classroom

Things to Buy

- Bouncy ball
- Drawing pad
- Fancy pencil, pen, eraser
- Fishing lure
- Hair accessories
- Hot Wheels car
- In game video game item
- Music download
  19.

Money

- Make several cards each with varying amounts (dime, quarter, dollar) Include one grand prize (maybe five dollars). Let the child know this is in the grab bag. If it gets pulled, you can take it out of circulation for a while.

Allowance

Sooner or later – probably sooner – your child will start to ask you for money. As children get a little older and understand the concept of money better, they become more interested in having their own funds and making their own decisions about how to spend them. You might consider setting up a system for allowance at about the same time as you transition to a more privilege-based approach to discipline around age 10 or so.

This is an opportunity to help them learn about earning and managing money. Before you get too far, you might want to keep track of what your children spend over the course of a month. Parents are often surprised at how much cash they hand over just because their kids ask for it.

There is no one right way to approach this issue, but whichever approach you decide on, be sure it is something you can stick with over time. Be mindful of how your approach relates to grown-up finances. Most adults earn their pay by just showing up for work and doing what they are supposed to. If they do something exceptional or work overtime, they expect a bonus or a raise. Their boss never asks them to give back the money they earned before if they miss a day. Consider giving your child a chance to earn allowance one day at a time as long as they meet basic expectations – following rules and completing assigned chores. As long as they show up for work, they get paid, just like most adults. If not, they forfeit their allowance for that day and possibly earn a negative consequence instead. This creates greater contrast and meets the general goal of dealing with behavior one day at a time.

Parents should take care of regular expenses such as school lunches and activities, athletic fees, or dance costumes but require them to use their own money for other recreational activities, fast food, or gaming expenses, for example. You should lend or advance money only in exceptional circumstances. This is part of helping your child learn to delay gratification, deal with frustration, and live within their means, all important adult skills. Here is one possible approach to allowance:

1. Decide how much money you are willing to make available to your child each week. If it is important to you that they save or donate some of their money, be sure to consider this and provide enough funding that they will still have cash left after they give or save some. Divide the weekly amount by seven or six if you plan to give them a chore free Sunday.
   20.
2. Tell the child know they can earn this amount every day the follow rules and complete chores as assigned. They do not need to do anything extra, just do what they are required to do any way and they will earn their money for that day.
   21.
3. Identify a time each week when allowance will be paid. Make sure you are reliable and timely with these payments. If you expect them to save or make a donation to church or charity, you might want to keep a written record of savings or donations to demonstrate how this amount grows over time. Using a clear piggy bank for savings can help a younger child visualize how their money accumulates.
   22.
4. Any day the child meets expectations, mark a calendar or a chart with your initials indicating allowance has been earned for that day. If expectations were not met, tell them they will have a chance to start over again tomorrow.
   - You can help younger children keep track of their progress by giving them a token of some kind like a poker chip or coupon that can be redeemed for money later. You might also consider creating family money for each child and hand it out at the end of a successful day. Be sure to use a method that will not tempt children to either steal from each other or create counterfeit currency. Different colored poker chips or family money for each child usually meets this goal.
   - It will seem like a bigger deal to younger children if you pay with quarters or dimes instead of a dollar bill. This also makes it easier to divide out the portion that goes to savings or a donation.
   23.

5. When the child asks you if they can attend some activity or buy something, answer with, "Yes, if you have finished your chores and if you have the money." If all of these conditions have not been met, the child should not be allowed to participate.
24.
6. Review the amount of allowance from time to time. As children move into their pre-teen years, you might want to increase their allowance, but also add more demanding chores and increase the number of things they must pay for with their own money. Your choice will be guided by how well they manage their funds to that point.

Chapter 9
What to Do About Behavior You Don't Like

When children drift from their best behavior – as all children do on a regular basis – our job as parents is to let them know they are headed in the wrong direction then point them in the right one. The first step is to make clear we disapprove of their actions by making life more boring, tedious, inconvenient, and uncomfortable for them. Hello Kansas. The more enjoyable and Oz-like their world is when they are doing well, the sooner they will notice when this happens. This is contrast.

==Inappropriate behavior crowds out appropriate behavior.== Before we can train the skills we want, we have to make room by decreasing the problem behavior that interferes with them. This is the purpose – the only purpose – of punishment. The next and absolutely necessary step is to provide an opportunity for them to practice a more acceptable behavior and reward it when it occurs. This is discipline.

The child should know their privileges have been paused or suspended, not lost permanently. They should know it is within their control to earn them back and exactly what needs to be done to make this happen.

We meet the second key condition for effective training – repetition – by dealing with similar behaviors in a similar way each time they happen. We keep disciplinary interactions brief and procedures consistent. In other words, we provide lots of opportunities for successful practice.

The procedures described her are not novel or new; you can find similar guidelines elsewhere. Maybe you have even tried something similar before. Even if you have used a comparable approach before or you are using it now, please take the time to read the following descriptions fully and carefully anyway.

==Parent behavior tends to drift in the same way as child behavior.== Disciplinary methods can wander even if they have been reasonably successful. Parents add steps or leave them out and then wonder why the system does not work as well as it did before. Repetition suffers. The child might do very well for a long time and the parent starts to think they are done with the heavy lifting of discipline and go on autopilot. They stop doing the very things that led to the improvement in the first place.

There is nothing magical about the techniques described here, but if you follow the step-by-step directions, you will meet the main requirements for effective and positive discipline. This will not guarantee dramatic improvements in behavior, but it will dramatically increase your chances for success, especially if you stick with it.

The Vending Machine Effect

If you have struggled with discipline for some time, if you have a stubborn or strong-willed child, or if you are asserting your authority as a parent for the first time, you should be aware of what might happen when you turn up the heat. The following story might help to illustrate a common reaction.

Suppose you walk up to a vending machine, make your selection, put in your money, press the button, and nothing happens. No chocolate bar with almonds. No soda. What do you do next? If you are like most people, you will press the button again multiple times, then a different button, then wiggle the coin return. If there is still no result, you might pound on the buttons or give the machine a nudge or kick. You are used to putting something into vending machines –

money – and getting something out in return – a snack or beverage. You do not like it much when you don't get what you think you deserve. In this situation, the natural human reaction is to escalate, doing the behavior that used to work but in a more intense or extreme way.

This is the same kind of button-pushing, machine-shaking reaction you might get from your child when you first impose a more forceful approach to discipline. If they have been accustomed to having free access to privileges or to arguing or being obnoxious to get what they want, they probably will react just the way you would with an uncooperative vending machine. When they put something in – whining, arguing, complaining – but don't get out what they expect – parents giving them what they want – they are likely to escalate, increasing their level of argumentative or obnoxious behavior to try to achieve the same result. After all, it worked before. Don't be surprised if they shake the machine for a time when you change things up.

The good news is that people don't keep shaking uncooperative vending machines forever. Eventually, they figure out that nothing is coming out and either give up or try a different, more productive approach. <mark>Still, the best way to help your children see the light is to let them feel the heat.</mark> If you hold the line and refuse to reward obnoxious behavior by giving into it, there is a very good chance your child will come around too. This will happen much more quickly if you have offered them some other, more appropriate and positive way to get what they want.

Intentional Ignoring

If your child does something you find annoying, but which you can tolerate, your best bet might be to just ignore it. This might be as simple as pretending the behavior does not exist, turning away for a bit, leaving the room, or focusing on some other activity. If attention seeking is part of the reason the child is doing this behavior, this will take away the payoff (remember young Alex back in chapter three?). If they react by increasing the intensity of the behavior, this means you have witnessed the vending machine effect in person and you can be sure that attention is a big motivator. But this is not discipline.

As soon as the child goes back to doing anything that is acceptable to you, respond immediately to them in a big and positive way. Give them lots of what they were looking for – attention – but for reasons that you choose. Even if attention is not the main reason for their behavior, you will at least not add to the problem by letting them see they can get you to react.

Secondhand Consequences

I have to admit I have been stumped a few times in trying to come up with any kind of effective consequence for a child I was working with. It seemed as if no matter what the child was offered, they had no real interest in working for it. Even if all of their privileges were removed, they seemed not to be affected at all. Some of these children appeared to be content to play with a piece of lint or some other useless object they found lying around somewhere.

On several occasions, I found that the most powerful thing I could do to motivate their behavior was not to remove their privileges but to award extra privileges to their siblings instead. These kids apparently did not care much one way or the other about what they had, but they could not stomach the idea of seeing their brother or sister benefit from their misbehavior.

Time-out

Just about every parent of a young child has heard of time-out and many of them have tried this approach. Some complain that time-out does not work for them. Almost always, this is because whatever they are doing is not actually time-out. They have missed the point somehow and end up skipping some of the most important steps in the process. It's no wonder it does not work well for them. It's like changing a tire and skipping the part where you tighten the lug nuts. The wheels are bound to fall off at some point.

Time-out is not just sitting in a chair or a bedroom for a few minutes. To be truly useful, time-out needs to include all of the elements of effective teaching we have talked about to this point. Time-out involves removing the child from a fun, interesting, and enjoyable situation and into a dull, boring, and uninteresting one. Time-out is a transition from Oz to Kansas. Time-out is the loss of time-in. It is time-out from all positive reinforcement or reward, a more rigorous form of intentional ignoring. But even that is not all. To be effective, time-out must include an opportunity to complete an acceptable, more productive behavior, be congratulated by their parents for their good choice, and earn their way back into time-in. In other words, time-out includes punishment, but it concludes only when the child has earned their way back to time-in.

Properly administered, time-out is among the most powerful planned consequences you can use with children up to age seven or eight or so. Of all the privileges a child loses during a time-out, the most important is the attention of their parent or caregiver. This is one of the more common problems for adults who seem to want to talk to or lecture their child while they are supposedly in time-out or after. In fact, the moment the parent speaks to the child, they are no longer really in time-out because they are getting the one thing they want most, attention. On the other hand, if the child does not get much attention when they are not in time-out, they probably won't notice much when they are. ==There can be no such thing as time-out if there is no time-in.== No contrast.

The procedure described here captures all of the most important principles of learning and behavior we have discussed. If you do your best to stick to the steps as described, you have a very good chance of creating effective teaching interactions.

Time-out Preparation

1. The first step in effective time-out is to make sure the child's regular environment (time-in) is interesting and enjoyable. If not, time-out will not be as effective as it should be. 25.
2. Make sure you are giving effective instructions (chapter seven). It is not reasonable to hold a child accountable for expectations that have not been clearly expressed.

3. Choose a place for time-out. An adult-sized chair placed in an out-of-the way place such as a hallway, kitchen, or corner of a room works well. The ideal chair would be solid wood, tall enough that the child's feet do not reach the floor, and with arms to make it a little harder to escape before the parent is ready to release them.
   - Any place that will be dull and boring for the child – but not dark, scary, or dangerous – is appropriate.

- The chair should be in a place where the child cannot see a TV, play with toys or other objects, or be involved in the activities of the home. It's okay – maybe even better – if they can hear other enjoyable activities going on.
- If a chair is not available, the child can sit on a stair or the floor. It is usually best to reserve the child's room for a back-up (see below) rather than the main place for time-out. One advantage of time-out is that it can be used both at home and away. You cannot take your child's room with you when you go out, but there is almost always a chair, stair, or floor wherever you go.
  26.

4. Decide what behaviors will result in a time-out.
   - Make sure all caregivers understand and agree about this. You should include two classes of behavior: (1) doing something they were not supposed to do such as throwing a toy or hitting a sibling, and (2) not doing something they were supposed to do, like not following a direct instruction.
     27.
5. Decide how long the child will remain in time-out.
   - Usually, two or three minutes for a preschoolers and five minutes for school age children works fine. Time-outs longer than five minutes are not likely to produce significantly better results. As long as the child stays in the seat or in the general area during this time, do not react. Their behavior while in time-out does not matter much as long as they are seated and quiet when it is time to get up. Use the same length of time every time, regardless of the reason for the time-out.
     28.

Time-out Procedure

1. If you give the child an instruction and they do not follow it within about 10 seconds say, "You are not listening. Time-out."
   - Say this only once in a calm, matter-of-fact way.
   - Once you have said, "time-out," you are done speaking to the child until you are ready to release them.
     29.
2. If the child did something they are not supposed to do – like hitting someone or throwing a toy – say, "No hitting (or throwing a toy or whatever). Time-out."
   - Say this only once in a calm, matter-of-fact way.
   - nce you have said, "time-out," you are done speaking to the child until you are ready to release them.
     30.
3. Using the least amount of guidance possible, lead the child to the time-out chair or spot.
   - Guidance might be anything from pointing to the chair, walking alongside the child, leading them by the hand, or carrying the child if necessary. Regardless of which method you use, do not look at, speak to, or pay attention to the child in any way as you are getting them to the time-out area.

4. Require the child to stay in time-out for the amount of time you decided previously.

- The entire time the child is in time-out, keep your interactions with them to a minimum. Do not speak to the child or even look at them during this time.
- In order to be released, the child must be seated and quiet when the time is up.
- If the child is talking, crying, or otherwise not meeting the requirements for release when the time is up, ignore them, but be ready to release the child the moment they quiet down.

Troubleshooting

It must be clear to the child that not completing a time-out will lead only to a more restrictive back-up procedure followed by another chance to finish the time-out. They should never get out of a disciplinary interaction by refusing to comply. If the child will not stay in the chair, use one of the following back-up methods.

Put Backs

Using the least amount of guidance necessary, put the child back in the chair without saying a word or reacting in any other way that might give the child attention or make the situation more interesting.
- You may have to repeat this multiple times, especially the first few times you use this back-up method

Room Back-Up

Lead the child to a safe room without talking or looking at them and close the door, but never lock it. Remain right outside the room.

- Ignore any acting out or promises to do better while the child is in the room.
- When the child is quiet, open the door and say, "You're quiet now. You may come out."
- Return the child to the chair to finish the time-out

Walking Time-out

Stop trying to directly enforce time-out, but begin at once to actively ignore the child in every way possible.
- Withhold every single privilege you can control without being confrontational.
- If the child asks for a privilege or your help with something, say, "You owe me a time-out."
- Continue to withhold attention and support until the child returns to the chair and completes the time-out.
  31.
5. When the time is up and the child is quiet and in the chair, say, "You are quiet. You may get up now."
- You, not the child, decide when they get up. They are not allowed to get up on their own; you must release them.
- If the child refuses to get up, say, "Then you stay there until I tell you to get up" and start their time over.

- The next time you move to release the child, take them by the hand and say, "You are quiet. You may get up now" and lift them to their feet.
32.

6. What happens next depends on what the child did to earn time-out.

If time-out was earned for not following an instruction, the child should be given another chance to follow the instruction immediately after you release them.
- If the child again does not comply, go back to Step 1 and repeat. If the child still has not complied by the third time you repeat the command, use physical guidance to help the them complete the task. Example: take their hand in yours to help them pick up a toy.
- When the child does comply, give them lots of positive attention – praise and touch – even if your help was needed to make it happen.

If time-out was earned for doing something they were not supposed to do like throwing a toy or saying a bad word, they cannot undo this. Instead, when they are released, instruct them to complete a simple task like picking up a toy or handing something to you. Make sure the task is one you can enforce with physical guidance if necessary.
- If the child does not comply, go back to Step 1 and repeat.
- Follow the steps for enforcing verbal instructions.

IMPORTANT: Your disciplinary interaction with the child is not over until the child has followed your instruction and you have had the chance to praise or reward them for compliance.

7. Once these six steps are complete, the child has a clean slate and should not be lectured or reminded about the behavior that earned the time-out.

Time-Out Checklist

What to check if time-out does not seem to be working:

- Is time-in sufficient? In other words, is their environment interesting and enjoyable when the child is not in time out?

- Are you giving effective instructions (chapter seven)?

- Is the place you have chosen for time-out dull, boring, and uninteresting (away from TV, toys, people, and other distractions)?

- Are you calm when you place the child in time-out? If not, you may be waiting to long to act.

- Do you avoid talking, eye-contact, and other interactions with the child while time-out is in effect?

- Do you make sure the child meets the requirements (quiet and seated) before allowing them to get up?

- Do you place the child in time-out every time you should?

- Do you make sure the child either (1) complies with your original command or (2) complies with a follow-up instruction after being released?

- Do you provide lots of positive attention when the child does complete time-out?

- Are all the adults who might place the child in time-out following the same rules and procedures?

Warnings

Once your child has a good idea about how time-out works and is generally compliant with the procedure, you might choose to start using a single warning in some situations. For example, there are times when circumstances might keep you from delivering a time-out immediately. Suppose you are in a rush to get to an appointment or school and your daughter refuses to put on her shoes. If you give the instruction and she does not comply, decide quickly whether you have the time, energy, or other resources to follow all the way through with a disciplinary interaction in that moment. If not, do what you need to do to get the child out the door – with or without her shoes – and deliver a time-out at the next convenient time, reminding her of the earlier infraction.

When the child gets home from school, say something like, "You did not listen this morning when I told you to put on your shoes so you will have a time-out before you play." This is not nearly as good as a time-out delivered on the spot, but it is better than nothing. The trick is to remember to follow through at the end of the day.

On the other hand, if you decide you do have the time and commitment to follow through right away, use a single warning that always takes the same form: "I said please put on your shoes or go to time-out." This kind of warning is like turning on a big, red, flashing light that says to your child: I AM SERIOUS. Do not give a warning like this unless you are 100% committed to following through with discipline to the bitter end no matter how long it takes. You should not expect a warning to have much effect if you have not built up your credibility with the child by following through with lots of previous disciplinary interactions. Be careful not to let one warning turn into two or three. Deliver a single warning and follow through with lots of praise if the instruction is followed or a complete teaching interaction if it is not.

Job Card Grounding

What time-out is to younger children, job card grounding is for children 8 or 10 years-old and older. Like time-out, this approach includes (1) suspension of *all* privileges for a brief, predetermined time and (2) giving the child an opportunity to earn back their privileges by doing something appropriate, helpful, or constructive. This makes the child an active participant in

discipline, not just the object of discipline and gives the parent more opportunities to reward appropriate behaviors.

The minimum time without privileges is longer, maybe 30 minutes to an hour for an elementary school-aged-child and between 4 and 24 hours for an adolescent. Whatever time you choose, it should be the same regardless of the behavior that earned the grounding. Instead of giving the child an instruction to follow to earn back privileges, the child is assigned a predetermined task written on an index card.

The extra job is not a punishment. Losing all of their privileges is a punishment. The assigned job is their opportunity to earn them back, the same as following an instruction after getting up from the time-out chair. Parents are sometimes tempted to add more time to the grounding or more jobs if the child does not comply right away. This probably will not significantly improve the effectiveness of job card grounding. Deliver the consequence and let it work. In fact, some children will try to bait their parents into overreacting so they can accuse them of breaking the rules for job card grounding. Focus on being consistent and making sure the child is truly grounded from every privilege you can control.

With some adjustments to the length of grounding or the tasks required, you should be able to use job card grounding all the way through high school. The main advantage of this approach is that it gives you a universal way to respond to any behavior you don't like; there is no need to try to come up with a consequence that fits the circumstances. You don't have to use the formal version described here, but there are benefits to this.

Job Card Grounding Preparation

1. Be sure expectations for the youth – rules and regular chores – are appropriate and have been communicated clearly. This generally means writing them down.
   33.
2. Develop a list of 20 or more jobs that can be done regularly in your home. Jobs on the list should include the following features:
   - Are not part of the youth's regular chores.
   - Will take 15-30 minutes to complete correctly.
   - Are currently being done by parents or another member of the household or not being done at all.
   - Are within the youth's capabilities.

3. Write a description of each job on a separate index card. The description should include enough detail to make it clear to everyone how the job is to be completed. For example:

   > **Vacuum the car:**
   >
   > 1. Empty all papers from the cup holders.
   >
   > 2. Wipe dashboard and console with a clean, damp paper towel.
   >
   > 3. Remove any trash from the floor and under the seats.
   >
   > 4. Vacuum all carpet, seats, rear deck, and all upholstered surfaces on the doors.
   >
   > 5. Return vacuum to the hall closet.

6.   Throw used paper towels in trash.

Be sure to keep a copy of the job cards in case the youth decides to throw them away or destroy them

3. Identify a "gripe time," a specific time each week when you will be available for the youth to talk about any issue, including complaints about job cards without fear of earning additional consequences. This time is for discussion, not arguing and the session should be rescheduled if the youth becomes argumentative. If the child complains or argues about the system outside of this scheduled time, remind them they will have an opportunity to discuss it with you then. Make sure you are available at the scheduled time.
34.   Gripe time is a privilege; child is not entitled to this meeting if they have an unfinished job card at the time.
35.
4. Choose a time to explain the Job Card Grounding program to the family.
36.

Job Card Grounding Procedure

1. If a rule is broken or a regular chore or other assigned task is not completed on time or in an acceptable way, the youth is immediately grounded from *all* privileges for a predetermined and consistent amount of time and assigned a job card.
37.
2. The youth picks a card at random from the deck of Job Cards. Fan the cards out face down and tell the youth he or she has earned a Job Card and must pick one. If the youth chooses not to select the job card, the parent selects one for them.
    - If the youth argues or complains when assigned a Job Card, additional Job Cards may be
38.   assigned for arguing or complaining (see Troubleshooting below).
39.
3. Being grounded means:
    - Attending school
    - Completing regular chores
    - Following household rules
    - Losing *all* privileges, including (but not limited to):
    - Cell phone and all social media
    - Computer or personal electronic devices
    - TV or streaming content of any kind
    - Games and toys (including video games
    - Playing outside
    - Use of car, bicycle or other vehicle
    - Visiting friends or having friends over
    - Snacks
    - Social activities of any kind, such as movies, going out to eat, etc.
    - Discussions or explanations from parents about rules, groundings, etc.
              40.
4. During the grounding, unless eating meals, sleeping, working on chores or job cards, or attending school or other required activity, the youth is to remain in the kitchen, family room, or other

assigned area and read, do homework or other responsibilities necessary to get off grounding. If this is inconvenient for the rest of the family, the youth may spend the time in his or her room, but only if it does not contain any of the privileges named above.

Note 1: Make sure you ground the youth from only things you are sure you can control. If you threaten to remove a privilege but cannot follow through, you will be seen as ineffective.

Note 2: If the youth is grounded and unable to accompany you on an errand or family outing, arrange babysitting or adult supervision if possible. If the youth must accompany you, the grounding begins or continues when you return.

Note 3: Team sports or other group activities and one-time events such as homecoming generally should be exempt from grounding unless other consequences have not been effective over time. Try not to remove activities you cannot give back later.

Note 4: During the grounding, parents must observe the following rules:
- No nagging, lecturing, or arguing.
- No reminders about the need to complete the Job Cards.
- No discussion of the grounding or explanation of the rules.

5. Grounding continues until *all three* of the following conditions have been met:

   a) The minimum assigned grounding time has passed. The same amount of time is assigned regardless of the infraction.

   b) The youth has corrected whatever caused them to be grounded (e.g., finished homework, completed chores, apologized).

   c) The assigned Job Card has been completed appropriately as determined by the parent. The youth is allowed to choose when to complete the Job Card but does not earn privileges back until they have done so. Grounding may last for only the minimum time or for several days or more if the youth chooses not to correct the problem behavior or complete the job card more promptly. Parents are *not* to remind the youth that there is a Job Card to be completed or add further consequences if the youth chooses not to complete the Job Card right away.

4. When the youth reports he or she has completed the Job Card, a parent must check to be sure the job is done correctly

   a) If the job is performed correctly, the youth should be praised for accepting consequences and completing the job appropriately and informed of when privileges will be restored.

   b) If the job is not completed correctly, a parent should review the description of the job with the youth, provide feedback on which steps were done correctly and what needs improvement, and – without nagging or complaining – instruct the youth to redo the incorrect portions of the task.

   c) If the job is not completed correctly on the second attempt, no further attempts are allowed for one hour.

Delivering Job Cards

When a rule is broken, implement job card grounding as soon as possible. Work to maintain a calm, matter-of fact approach to delivering job cards. Follow these steps:

1. Tell the youth he/she has earned a Job Card and why.
   - Identify the problem behavior
     - Focus on specific behaviors, for example: "You did not make your bed by 9:00."
     - Focus on the present situation only, do not bring up past difficulties
     - Do not talk about motives (i.e., do *not* ask why the youth broke the rule)

     .

   - Deliver the Job Card as described above
   - Identify the alternative, appropriate behavior; what the youth should have done instead, for example: "You need to make your bed by 9:00 every morning."
     41.
2. If possible, practice the appropriate behavior.

Summary

1. The youth breaks a rule or fails to complete a chore by the expected time or to the expected standard.

2. The youth is immediately grounded from all privileges and is assigned a Job Card.

3. The youth is eligible to earn back privileges after a specified minimum time, but grounding ends only when the youth also has corrected whatever led to the grounding and completed the job card in an acceptable way.

   Note: Requiring the job to be completed provides an opportunity for the parent to end every disciplinary interaction by praising appropriate behavior and delivering a tangible reward in the form of restored privileges. Avoid the temptation to pile on job cards or additional grounding time and focus on being consistent and making sure the youth is truly grounded from all privileges.

Troubleshooting

1. If the youth reacts to getting a job card with further inappropriate behaviors, such as arguing or complaining, do the following:
   - Deliver a calm warning in this form: "You are starting to argue. You may stop now, or you will earn another grounding."
   - If the youth has not stopped the unacceptable behavior within 30 seconds, deliver an additional job card. Walk away from the interaction at this point if possible. Ignore any comments the youth might make about how unfair you are being and so on.
   - Be sure you are not being drawn into discussions, explanations, or arguments during disciplinary interactions; focus on action, not talking; deal only with the current behavior.
   - If the youth continues to complain about too much work, unfairness, etc., say, "I can understand how you would feel that way" and walk away.

2. If the grounding seems to be lasting an excessively long time:
   a) Check to be sure that the youth's life is dull enough during the grounding.
   b) Assure the youth is not "bootlegging" restricted items when you are not around.
   c) Be sure you are not providing attention in the form of nagging, reminders, etc. during the grounding.

d) Be sure the items and activities available when the youth is not grounded are things the youth is really interested in earning – if their life is not generally enjoyable and interesting, there will be little motivation to earn their way off grounding.

3. Consider making access to weekend privileges contingent on staying below a target number of job cards during the week will improve the motivational power of the system. For example: the youth must have five or fewer job cards during the week in order to have privileges on Friday night and Saturday.

4. Adding an allowance or other positive consequence for successful performance will improve the motivational power of the system. These are extra privileges or items which may be earned for meeting daily requirements (i.e., following rules and completing chores).
   - If you choose to add an allowance, it should be earned daily and awarded weekly.
   - Previously earned money should not be lost or taken back as a result of current behavior, but allowance cannot be earned when the youth is grounded.
   - You may wish to offer additional payment for extra, voluntary jobs (e.g., moving, snow removal), but the youth should be eligible to complete this work only if they are not on grounding.
   - Remember, you are asking the youth to be reliable and responsible so you must model the same level of accountability by being sure to deliver rewards reliably and on time.

Sample Jobs for Job Cards

Sweep/Mop

- laundry room floor
- basement
- garage
- kitchen floor
- patio
- sidewalks
- entryway
- driveway

Vacuum

- living room
- dining room
- family room
- stairs
- bedroom(s)
- hallway(s)
- basement
- car(s)

Scrub

- kitchen floor
- basement floor
- bathroom floor(s)
- laundry room floor
- toilet(s)
- sink(s)
- garbage cans
- kitty litter box
- aquarium/fish bowl
- bird cage
- hamster/gerbil cage

Scrub

- bathroom sink & tub
- toilet(s)
- patio glass doors
- shower door(s)
- windows
- mirrors
- car windows
- refrigerator interior
- deck/patio furniture
- oven
- fireplace
- trash cans

Dust

- living room
- family room
- dining room
- ceiling fan(s)
- bedroom furniture
- family room
- basement

Wash/Wipe

- kitchen cupboards
- basement walls
- baseboard
- microwave (inside & out)
- refrigerator exterior
- door and window frames
- dishes
- pots and pans
- stove exterior
- shutters
- light fixtures

Pick up/Organize

- shelves in garage
- shelves in laundry room
- "junk" drawer
- hall closet
- bedroom closet
- dresser drawers
- toy box

Laundry

- sort dirty laundry
- fold towels
- put towels away
- sort & put away a load
- change linens on bed(s)
- wash and dry bedding

Miscellaneous

- "pooper scoop" yard
- wash car
- wash dog
- walk dog
- brush dog
- rake leaves
- hose off driveway/patio
- polish doorknobs
- pull weeds
- water all plants
- clean shed/garage
- load/unload dishwasher
- do a sibling's chore
- shake out rugs
- dust vents and baseboards
- mop kitchen floor

Chapter 8
Some Specific Strategies for Some Specific Problems

PART IV

Chapter 9
Digital Childhood

Suppose I asked you to let a group of strangers come into your home, or even into your child's room, and spend a few hours talking to them about any topic they chose without any interference from you. Most parents I know would not sign up for this, but this is basically what happens each time your child connects to social media or online videos and games.

These issues are an undeniable feature of everyday life for many parents who find it hard enough to keep up with their own digital lives, much less monitor and manage every detail of online and social media activity by their children. On average, pre-teens and teens spend somewhere between five and eight hours a day in these activities, much of it out of sight of their parents. The trend toward increasing use only accelerated during the Covid pandemic which left people indoors, isolated, and often bored.

Suppose someone asked you to let your child hang out with a group of total strangers for a few hours a day with no supervision or input from you. How eager would you be to sign up for this? Probably not so much. Yet, this is basically what millions of parents do every day when they give their child unfiltered and unsupervised access to a television, computer, tablet, videogame console, or cell phone. There might not be anything inappropriate going on, but it's hard to know for sure if you are not part of the conversation.

What you *can* be sure of is that a lot of what shows up on your kids' screens does not actually reflect reality, that the people they meet are not always who they say, and that some of them do not have good intentions. In fact, as artificial intelligence becomes more common, you can't even be sure those people are really people.

It is easy to lose sight of just how much digital technology has found its way into every corner of our lives. Just about every home, school, business, and institution relies on computer technology and online access every day. We carry internet enabled devices in our pockets and purses, wear them on our wrists, and embed them in our doorbells, toys, and appliances. We don't really know what effects all this connectedness is having on the people doing the connecting. There are obvious benefits, but there also are good reasons for caution, especially when it comes to deciding when, where, and for how long we allow our children to sign on.

One thing you want to keep in mind is this: every device, social media app, and commercial website was created for the same purpose – to make money. There is nothing unusual or immoral about this; the business of business is to make a profit. Still, it is important to remember that no matter how colorful, kid-friendly, or entertaining their products might seem, they are not designed to look out for your children or make their lives better. In fact, everything they do *for* your kids is done to get something *from* your kids. It is up to you to determine the limits of their influence.

The line that separates one kind of digital media from another gets blurrier all the time. Any device with a screen and an internet connection or data plan has 24-hour access to a limitless stream of information. Computers at school and home, tablets, and cell phones are the obvious examples, but also smart TVs and gaming systems like Play Station, Xbox, and Nintendo Switch have internet web browsers built in. None of those smart devices is smart enough to know who is using them; they still connect to all the same content whether it is a grown-up or a kindergartner. Kids can communicate by text message, instant message, direct message, and voice or video chat depending on the device, program, or platform. Gamers can talk in to other players on another continent as easily as someone on the next block as they build virtual cities and fight virtual wars. It can be exhausting just trying to keep up with it all.

There is no way for us to have a complete or fully up-to-date discussion about digital technology in a few short pages. The topic is far too big and evolves too quickly. This purpose of this chapter is simply to call your attention to some of the main issues and provide a little additional perspective as you consider how you will approach decisions about digital access in your family.

Smart TV Might Not Be

For most kids, the first screen they are exposed to is a television and it is part of background of their lives throughout childhood and beyond. On average, kids actually spend more of their screen time watching videos on TV and online than on social media.[3] There is less broadcast content and more streaming these days, but overall viewing time continues to increase among children and the TV is still the main electronic device in most households.

Television has its benefits. Some children's programs support basic social and learning skills (think *Sesame Street*). Documentaries and nature shows are a source of knowledge and information that might not be available otherwise, especially for children who live in remote or disadvantaged areas. Unfortunately, this kind of programming is only a small fraction of the overall mix, particularly on most subscription streaming services.

More importantly, every minute spent watching TV – or gaming, scrolling, or messaging – is a minute not spent outside, face-to-face with other humans, or in some other more healthful or constructive behavior. Watching television is passive. Screen time takes away chances for kids to exercise their sense of adventurousness, curiosity, independence, and creativity, when their play depends on their own imagination, not the limits of an online game decided by someone else.

Children who watch more TV – especially those who have a television in their room – tend to be less active, snack more, and are at greater risk for obesity and related health issues. They have more sleep problems, language delays, poorer reading skills, and more behavioral and emotional health issues such as anxiety and depression.

Whether they watch television in their room or somewhere else, children will be exposed to a steady diet of violence (more than 60% of all programs)[4] as well as sexual messages and behavior (more than 70% of all programs) with almost no mention of the real-world risks, responsibilities, and consequences.

The earlier and more often children are exposed to these examples, the more likely they are to see them as normal or become desensitized.

Enough is Probably Too Much

Way back in chapter one, we mentioned that human beings grow and mature very slowly. This is generally true, but brain development is kind of an exception. Human brains develop more rapidly during the first five years than at any other time of life. The first 18 to 24 months are an especially important period when developing brains make millions of new connections and build structures they will rely on from then on.

Early brain development depends on the quality of experiences – good or bad – the child has during that time. The most beneficial learning experiences are those that involve interacting with other people, manipulating items like toys, blocks, and sand, and opportunities to be creative and solve problems. Since screen-based media do none of these things and have been associated with lots of possible negative effects, there is plenty of risk and no real upside to exposing young children to them. So, up to the age of two years or so, the right amount of screen time is none at all.[5]

There is no shortage of advice about how much viewing time is appropriate for older kids. This will obviously vary a lot from one family to the next and there is no specific research to tell us for sure how much is too much. Maybe the best guidance is to make sure you pay attention to what they are watching and for how long and remember that less is almost always better than more. Other factors such as monitoring content, co-viewing, and talking with children about the programs they see might be even more important than simply controlling screen time.[5]

It is no surprise that parent attitudes and viewing habits have a big effect on how their children interact with television. When parents watch a lot of TV themselves, allow viewing during meals, and have the TV on when the kids come home from school, chances are their children will adopt similar habits. On the other hand, establishing clear limits and watching and discussing content with them gives parents a chance to help their children recognize the difference between reality and make-believe and to better understand what they see.

<p align="center">Free Social Media Isn't</p>

<u>General Issues</u>
Kids who spend time online or on social media are exposed to an unlimited amount of information. They can see the surface well enough – glamorous people doing exciting things in exotic locations – but developing brains lack the structure, experience, and maturity to put it all in a proper context. They do not realize that influencers post only their most positive and attractive experiences. They do not feature photos of what they look like first thing in the morning or videos of themselves cleaning up after their dog.

Children are left with a false or exaggerated view of what others' lives or like which makes their own lives feel dull and inadequate by comparison. They may feel down, even despondent, about not

measuring up to the unrealistic standards. It might feel like all of these other people have it easy while they have to deal with the hard realities of their own lives.

On the other hand, they might end up with a false sense of confidence or fragile understanding that really prepares them for very little. Because they know the language, names, and locations of the social media world, they believe they understand more about adult life and how the world works than they actually do. Like the college students we talked about in chapter 1, when they are confronted with real-life challenges, they may not have the resources to manage. They might believe that, if they mimic what they see and hear, some of the magic of the influencer life will wear off on them. Or at least they will be able to talk with their peers about whoever is the next up and coming star.

There might be some real benefits to allowing children to have free access to social media. I just can't think of any.

It does not take long before users start to adopt some of the ideas and images they see. They learn to speak the language and adopt the looks that everyone else seems to be adopting.

Reliance on peers instead of parents

Learn the language and images that make them seem mature, but underneath they're still kids.

Impression of knowing more but not really -   not able to deal with actual challenges

Why trouble yourself trying to satisfy your curiosity outdoors when you have the world in your pocket?

One of the biggest changes in the digital world is that users are no longer only consumers of content but also producers. They can share their ideas, creations, and life experiences on social media with a worldwide audience. They can view what they want, contribute what they want, and decide when and where they are going to do it. This makes them feel like they have control of their digital lives which is kind of true – except when it isn't.

When we talk about social media here, we mean any app or website that lets users submit their own content and network directly with other users. The top social media sites are huge, international businesses. Facebook alone boasts more than three billion users each month. In other words, more than one out of every three people on the entire planet has a Facebook account and half of them use it every day. Several others, such as YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok, and WeChat report at least a billion users a month. Almost every high school age child has at least one social media profile. So do about three quarters of middle schoolers and a third of 7- to 9-year-olds. The total number of users keeps growing and the age at which they start keeps getting younger.

It's called social media for a reason. Meeting and keeping up with others is the main motivation for logging on every day for most users. With a couple of taps and a little scrolling they can stay in touch with friends and family anywhere in the world and connect with new people and communities with similar interests or identities. This can help people in remote areas, with limited mobility, or those who struggle with social anxiety to feel less isolated. This can allow them to find acceptance, seek help, or offer support to others in difficult times. Users can check in on the newest trends and styles and find information on almost any subject. They can find outlets for their creativity and, anytime they want, an endless stream of funny and entertaining content to enjoy and share with others.

The best parts of social media can also be the worst. For some users, having a glimpse into the lives of others is not positive and uplifting at all. They compare their own experiences to what they see and it seems like they are coming up short. Of course, everything they see posted looks real, but a lot of it isn't. More mature users realize this, but to a younger, developing brain, it might not be so obvious. Kids do not always grasp that people tend to post only the best moments of their lives, not the way they look when they first roll out of bed or all the tedious and boring activities that fill up most of their days.

It's a little like picking up the house before the guests arrive; the visitor never sees all the junk shoved under the bed. Children may have the impression they are being spoken to directly by social media influencers. They do not recognize the presenter as a kind of actor who is being paid to promote certain products or services.

All the way back in chapter one, we learned that kids pay a lot more attention to what is happening now than in the past or future – not now. They are intensely focused on how keeping up with the trends of the moment affects their status with their peers. Their young brains do not grasp such things as how following social media fads like using adult skincare products today can result in permanent damage to their skin tomorrow. They cannot see how dressing like a grown up and using mature language really doesn't help them prepare for adult life. All they know is that, compared to what they see on social media, their own life feels a lot less glamorous and exciting and it seems like they are being left behind.

Young people often

The High Price of Free

A big part of what makes social media attractive is that it is free, or at least it seems to be. But these gigantic, global companies don't stay in business by just giving away services. They all count on the same thing to pay the bills: attracting user attention and keeping them connected. Every image, message, video, and feature on every social media site is focused on the goal of keeping people around longer and coming back more often. They spend unthinkable amounts of money and effort to make this happen.

The longer users hang around, the more chances the company has to show them ads and to collect their personal data. Then this information is sold to advertisers who use it to help them determine which ads fit the user's preferences more closely and improve chances they will buy something like a product or a political idea. The new, improved advertisements show up on their social media feed but also on other, unrelated sites they visit. People they have contact with may also start to notice changes in what they see online. This can happen even if they have never visited the social media site themselves

because the company has learned about them by soaking up their private information from the address books of friends and family who do log on.

So, this is how users pay for "free" social media, by handing over their personal data to unknown third parties. The instant they click the box on the terms of service page – the one nobody ever actually reads – they agree to give the program access to information such as their name, age, phone number, passwords, purchases, internet browsing history, devices, contacts, physical location, texts, emails, personal photos and videos, other apps you use, mobile service provider, keystroke patterns, and who knows what else. The more closely these companies track activity and preferences, the more they have to offer third parties who have something to sell. In other words, the main business of social media operators is surveillance and advertising. They use triggers such as notifications, ads, tags, and emails to encourage users to connect, then other tools to keep them engaged. They work at it all day. Every day. Nonstop. Using any means possible.

Tap. Swipe. Scroll.

Movies, television shows, plays, sporting events, and books all have one thing in common. They have an end. The credits roll. The curtain falls. There is a final page. Even if a games goes to overtime, at some point it is over and it's time to go home.

It's different with social media. The developers don't want your kids to leave and thanks to something called infinite scrolling, there is no obvious cue for them to stop. There is no final page or any pages at all. New content is loaded automatically at the bottom of the feed with no end in sight. For the user, it feels like there is always something more, something interesting or exciting to be discovered because there is.

Our brains react to rewards by releasing chemicals that make us feel good. The smell of cookies baking, shopping, a bite of delicious food, alcohol, and sex all produce this effect. Once we have the rewarding experience, we really want to get to that next piece of chocolate or the next bingo. Social stimulation like messages from loved ones, laughing faces, or recognition by peers, activate the same pleasure centers in our brains. Even anticipating the next reward produces the same positive feeling.

Since most of these things are not available all the time in real life, the craving soon passes, but infinite scrolling has no such limits. For social media users, a photo of their crush, a fresh video from their favorite celebrity, or an ad for the must-have product all their friends have been talking about could be just one swipe away. The positive feelings they encounter are good, but they don't last and soon enough they are looking for more. Nothing forces them to pause along the way. So, they keep scrolling. And scrolling. And scrolling.

These companies know that the best way to keep users involved is to reward them but not in an unpredictable way. Psychology types would call this a *variable ratio* reward system. It is an approach the gambling industry knows well. Everything from bingo to slot machines operate on the same principle. The gambler knows there will be a payoff at some point, but they are not sure when. What they do know is that the more cards they play or the faster they press the button on the machine, the sooner they will get to the next reward. So, they keep at it.

One other thing. It's not just what they get more of that keeps users logging on all the time, it's also what they get less of – boredom. Whenever they choose, they can pick up a device and tap, swipe, and scroll their way to an endless source of entertainment, or at least distraction. The effort required is low and the reward seems pretty big so chances are good they will repeat the same behavior the instant they don't have something else to do.

Even when they are not logged on, push notifications, texts, tags, or direct messages hijack their attention and pull them back to their device. They are constantly interrupting themselves to grab a quick digital reward without having to concentrate, work at a challenging task, or create their own fun – they just receive it passively. Other activities fall by the wayside because it is just easier to pick up a device and start scrolling. It can get to be a habit or, in some cases, an addiction.

Algorithms

Algorithms are the silent partner to infinite scrolling. They work hand-in-hand to keep users connected and advertising dollars flowing. Social media algorithms determine what content users see and don't see on their endless trips through their social media feed.

Maybe you remember the Really Useful Principle of Behavior #2 from back in chapter three. Just in case it slipped you mind, it goes like this: behavior serves a purpose, it is motivated. In other words, we do things for a reason. If doing a behavior gets us something we want or helps us avoid something we don't want, we are more likely to do it again. The best way for a website or app to keep us hanging around longer and coming back sooner is to figure out what we like and give us more of it. This is the work of algorithms.

Social media algorithms are a set of rules or instructions the company uses to determine how content is filtered, ranked, and presented. Picture someone scrolling aimlessly through their favorite website or social media app. Most of what they see is not especially interesting, so they keep moving. Once in a while though, a funny meme, adorable kitten video, or useful kitchen tip – like the best ways to prepare broccoli – catches their eye. They pause to take a look and linger for a few seconds. Maybe they decide to share what they see with a friend, leave a comment, or click on a suggested link to a related site.

From the moment they log on the first time, every single choice they make about where and for how long to spend their time is recorded and analyzed by the site. The program already knows plenty about them from their personal profile and uses this and their digital history to shape user activities, opinions, and choices by controlling what they see– and don't see.

Each time a user connects, the algorithm learns a little more about their likes and dislikes and refines its approach to pushing products or ideas that might interest them. They are encouraged to make a small, easy investment by leaving feedback, sharing a post, or inviting friends which leads them to identify more with the site and increases the chances they will come back. Forums, blogs, news feeds, arts and crafts sites – basically anywhere someone can leave a comment, like a post, buy something, or share content – all do the same thing.

Some algorithms are able to follow users to other sites and track their activities there as well. The company knows where else they go because they agreed to share this information when they signed up.

Before long, more ads for kitchen hacks and cute cat videos start popping up wherever they go on online or on other apps. Algorithms know more about them than their mother does.

This seems mostly harmless and truly useful in some ways. Algorithms help users sort through a massive amount of content and lead them to products and topics they have expressed interest in. This is great, except when it isn't. Algorithms have no conscience and no sense of right and wrong. They do not care whether the information they promote is accurate or false, appropriate or immoral, helpful or harmful. They simply amplify whatever the user seems to be interested in, for better or worse. This can lead to more and better choices for some users but also to much less productive or even destructive outcomes for others.

Algorithms can create echo chambers that endlessly repeat the same beliefs and biases as well as a kind of bubble which insulates users from ever hearing anything to the contrary. Opinions harden and views become more polarized as one position is always supported while no dissent is allowed. To the user, it seems as if almost everyone agrees and anyone who doesn't is just plain wrong and maybe stupid. This is not a big problem if issue in question is the best ways to steam broccoli, but more serious topics get the same treatment.

Imagine a teenager who is a touch overweight and maybe a little worried about their appearance – as many adolescents are. They might start watching a few exercise videos – an appropriate, reasonable response. Then maybe they look around online for some advice on diet and nutrition. The algorithm takes notice and doubles down. Before long they are steered toward more content and advertisements related to body image, exercise equipment, intensive fitness programs, supplements, restrictive diets, and comments from other users with much more serious, related concerns. The posts and ads elevate a particular body type as the ideal or promote extreme weight loss. The youngster is overwhelmed with more information than they can possibly process so their attention is drawn to the most extreme examples. As they are led further down the rabbit hole, their modest concern turns into an obsession and their behavior becomes more self-destructive.

Pre-teens and adolescents can be at particular risk of being led in unproductive and unhealthful directions. At a time when many are uncertain and maybe a little confused about where they are heading in life, these sites can offer an illusion of wisdom and certainty. They may be trying to sort out their thoughts about such topics as social standing, political ideas, emotions, and sexual attitudes but they are approaching these issues with critical thinking skills that are not yet fully developed.

Comments about feeling a little sad or disappointed might be nudged toward a discussion about depression and suicide. A search on issues related to dating morphs into content that promotes a particular point-of-view on sexuality or gender identity. Curiosity about a political event leads to sites advocating radical or extreme views and actions. The algorithm favors one side of an issue without presenting alternative information or perspectives. This reinforces the idea that whatever is being promoted is true and accurate whether is aligns with reality or not. For someone dealing with a complex and difficult problem, the overly simple solutions they offer can be hard to resist. Obviously, these issues do not affect everyone, but for millions of vulnerable or isolated children and adolescents, the risks are real and serious.

Unsocial Media: The Dark Side

Social media is the biggest, uncontrolled psychology experiment in history. The industry grew from zero users to billions in less than 20 years. There is no way to truly manage this kind of explosive growth or to understand the effects it is having on users. Some information is starting to emerge, though, and much of it is not encouraging.

The risks of frequent social media use include sleep disturbance, attention and learning problems, greater risk of obesity and depression, and exposure to inappropriate or unsafe content and people as well as compromised privacy and confidentiality. Frequent or daily social media use was also associated with risky sexual behaviors such as sexting, anti-social behavior like bullying, physical assault, and aggressive/delinquent behavior and almost three times the odds of gambling compared with infrequent or non-daily use. (Glasgow)

Dependency on digital devices resulting in an ever-increasing daily screen time has subsequently also been the cause of several adverse effects on physical and mental or psychological health. Constant exposure to devices like smartphones, personal computers, and television can severely affect mental health- increase stress and anxiety, for example, and cause various sleep issues in both children as well as adults. Risk factors for obesity and cardiovascular disorders, including hypertension, poor regulation of stress, low HDL cholesterol, and insulin resistance are among the physical health repercussions we see. The psychological health effects comprise suicidal tendencies and symptoms of depression which are associated with digital device dependency, screen-time-induced poor sleep quality, and content-influenced negativity. Oftentimes it can cause the induction of a state of hyper-arousal, increase stress hormones, desynchronize the body clock or the circadian cycle, alter brain chemistry and create a drag on mental energy and development. With a focus on brain development in children and detrimental effects in both adults and children, this research article goes on to explore the various aspects of screen addiction and excessive screen exposure.

Since it's a relatively new technology, there's little research to establish the long-term consequences, good or bad, of social media use. However, multiple studies have found a strong link between heavy social media and an increased risk for depression, anxiety, loneliness, self-harm, and even suicidal thoughts.

Social media may promote negative experiences such as:

Inadequacy about your life or appearance. Even if you know that images you're viewing on social media are manipulated, they can still make you feel insecure about how you look or what's going on in your own life. Similarly, we're all aware that other people tend to share just the highlights of their lives, rarely the low points that everyone experiences. But that doesn't lessen those feelings of envy and dissatisfaction when you're scrolling through a friend's airbrushed photos of their tropical beach holiday or reading about their exciting new promotion at work.

Fear of missing out (FOMO) and social media addiction. While FOMO has been around far longer than social media, sites such as Facebook and Instagram seem to exacerbate feelings that others are having more fun or living better lives than you are. The idea that you're missing out on certain things can impact your self-esteem, trigger anxiety, and fuel even greater social media use, much like an addiction. FOMO can compel you to pick up your phone every few minutes to check for updates, or compulsively respond to each and every alert—even if that means taking risks while you're driving, missing out on sleep at night, or prioritizing social media interaction over real world relationships.

Isolation. A study at the University of Pennsylvania found that high usage of Facebook, Snapchat, and Instagram *increases* rather decreases <u>feelings of loneliness</u>. Conversely, the study found that reducing social media usage can actually make you feel *less* lonely and isolated and improve your overall wellbeing.

Depression and anxiety. Human beings need face-to-face contact to be mentally healthy. Nothing reduces stress and boosts your mood faster or more effectively than eye-to-eye contact with someone who cares about you. The more you prioritize social media interaction over in-person relationships, the more you're at risk for developing or exacerbating mood disorders such as anxiety and <u>depression</u>.

Cyberbullying. About 10 percent of teens report <u>being bullied</u> on social media and many other users are subjected to offensive comments. Social media platforms such as Twitter can be hotspots for spreading hurtful rumors, lies, and abuse that can leave lasting emotional scars.

Self-absorption. Sharing endless selfies and all your innermost thoughts on social media can create an unhealthy self-centeredness and distance you from real-life connections.

Results: Sixty studies were included in the review. Higher levels of screen time were associated with more severe depressive symptoms. We found moderate evidence for an association between screen time and poor psychological well-being and body dissatisfaction especially among females. Relationships between screen time and anxiety were inconsistent and somewhat gender specific. Social media use was consistently associated with poorer mental health. Higher levels of screen time are generally associated with poorer mental health outcomes, but associations are influenced by screen type, gender and age. Practitioners, parents, policy makers and researchers should collectively identify and evaluate strategies to reduce screen time, or to use screens more adaptively, as a means of promoting better mental health among children and adolescents.

Results: Of the 2441 children included in the analysis, 1227 (50.2%) were boys. A random-intercepts, cross-lagged panel model revealed that higher levels of screen time at 24 and 36 months were significantly associated with poorer performance on developmental screening tests at 36 months (β, -0.06; 95% CI, -0.10 to -0.01) and 60 months (β, -0.08; 95% CI, -0.13 to -0.02), respectively. These within-person (time-varying) associations statistically controlled for between-person (stable) differences.

Conclusions and relevance: The results of this study support the directional association between screen time and child development. Recommendations include encouraging family media plans, as well as managing screen time, to offset the potential consequences of excess use

The good news is that taking a break from social media for as little as one week [2]

Appearance and Self-Image/Self-Absorption

Young people may be particularly vulnerable to social media's charms—as well as its harms. During adolescent development, brain regions associated with the desire for attention, feedback, and reinforcement from peers become more sensitive. Meanwhile, the brain regions involved in self-control have not fully matured. That can be a recipe for disaster. The "selfieholics" and people who spend most of their time posting and scrolling are the ones most vulnerable to this. Social media often encourages people to compare themselves with others, leading to feelings of envy and dissatisfaction.

Even if you know that images you're viewing on social media are manipulated, they can still make you feel insecure about how you look or what's going on in your own life. Similarly, we're all aware that other people tend to share just the highlights of their lives, rarely the low points that everyone experiences. But that doesn't lessen those feelings of envy and dissatisfaction when you're scrolling through a friend's airbrushed photos of their tropical beach holiday or reading about their exciting new promotion at work.

Constant exposure leads to constant criticism leads to constant pressure to conform.

Cameras distort images. Remember the old saying, "the camera adds ten pounds?" It's true, and sometimes it can add even more. Lenses and lighting make a huge difference in how our faces and bodies look in a photograph and we can present very differently on camera from how we see ourselves in a mirror or how others see us in person. Being constantly photographed or on camera is no longer relegated to movie stars and the like. Thanks to camera phones, social media and remote work, we are all constantly seeing ourselves on screen. Filters play on these insecurities by showing us "better" versions of ourselves; brighter smiles, sparkling eyes, smoother skin. We're doing huge damage to our self-esteem on a daily basis.

A large body of research, cited in APA's health advisory, suggests that using social media for comparisons and feedback related to physical appearance is linked to poorer body image, disordered eating, and depressive symptoms, especially among girls.

Cyberbullying

About 10 percent of teens report _being bullied_ on social media and many other users are subjected to offensive comments. Social media platforms such as Twitter can be hotspots for spreading hurtful rumors, lies, and abuse that can leave lasting emotional scars.

The anonymity of social media makes it easy for individuals to stalk and harass others online. Cyberstalking and harassment can be traumatizing for victims and can lead to severe legal consequences for the perpetrators.

Sextortion

FOMO

Contemporary culture moves quickly. to exacerbate feelings that others are having more fun or living better lives than you are. The idea that you're missing out on certain things can impact your self-esteem, trigger anxiety, and fuel even greater social media use, much like an addiction. FOMO can compel you to pick up your phone every few minutes to check for updates, or compulsively respond to each and every alert—even if that means taking risks while you're driving, missing out on sleep at night, or prioritizing social media interaction over real world relationships.

FOMO has become a common theme, and often leads to continual checking of social media sites. The idea that you might miss out on something if you're not online can affect your mental health.

Feels like the next thing they read might be the most important of all.

But popular culture doesn't stand still for long, and there is pressure to check in more often to keep up with the trend of the day or the moment so they don't miss out on something important.

Isolation

A study at the University of Pennsylvania found that high usage of Facebook, Snapchat, and Instagram _increases_ rather decreases _feelings of loneliness_. Conversely, the study found that reducing social media usage can actually make you feel _less_ lonely and isolated and improve your overall wellbeing. Friends not friends and mayber strangers

Social media can make it easy for people to connect with others, but it can also lead to social isolation. People tend to spend more time online than in person, leading to feelings of loneliness and social disconnection.

With the rise of social media, people are becoming less inclined to interact in person. Social media is convenient, but it can lead to a decline in social skills and emotional intelligence, making it hard for people to develop deep and meaningful relationships.

Taking a social media vacation for a little as one week can have a positive effect on dep2ression, anxiety and sense of well-being.2

Human beings need face-to-face contact to be mentally healthy. Nothing reduces stress and boosts your mood faster or more effectively than eye-to-eye contact with someone who cares about you. The more you prioritize social media interaction over in-person relationships, the more you're at risk for developing or exacerbating mood disorders such as anxiety and depression

Unfiltered Content

Social media has become a breeding ground for spreading false information. With fake news and rumors easily shared across various social media platforms, people are often misguided, leading to confusion, distrust, and chaos. The spread of misinformation can also harm democratic processes and public trust in institutions.

Spending too much time on social media is one cause for concern. Dangerous content is another. Despite efforts by caregivers and tech companies to protect kids from problematic material, they still encounter plenty of it online—including mis- and disinformation, racism and hate speech, and content that promotes dangerous behaviors such as disordered eating and self-harm.

Other research shows that when youth are exposed to unsafe behaviors online, such as substance use or self-harm, they may be at greater risk of engaging in similar behaviors themselves. In a longitudinal study of high school students, Nesi and colleagues showed that kids who saw their peers drinking alcohol on social media were more likely to start drinking and to binge drink 1 year later, even after controlling for demographic and developmental risk factors (*Journal of Adolescent Health*, Vol. 60, No. 6, 2017).

Phubbing

Digital Kidnapping

For example, girls ages 15 to 17 were more likely than any other group to say that they don't post things on social media because they are worried about being embarrassed, the survey said.

My 'dry' January: What I learned from a month without social media

And girls more so than boys were likely to report feeling overwhelmed by drama on social media, the study said.

But all groups acknowledged downsides. Those who reported negative experiences attributed them mostly to screen time, mental health and the impact of online drama, the survey said.

And 60% of all teens report feeling little to no control over the data social media companies collect from them.

Too easy. Lose connection to effort based reward. Social media addiction is a real problem that many people are facing. With easy access to social media apps and platforms, people tend to spend a lot of time online, often ignoring their real-life responsibilities. This addiction can lead to a lack of productivity, depression, and anxiety.

The Social Media Spiral

Warning Signs

While every child responds differently, there are certain changes in behavior that can serve as red flags that a teen's social media use has crossed over into unhealthy territory.

1. Changes to basic hygiene.

"If a teen who was showering daily and brushing their teeth twice a day is now slipping in their basic hygiene routine," says Dr. Lucker, "it might indicate social media is impacting their day-to-day functioning."

2. Sudden shifts in mood and irritability.

While mood changes are common at this age, it is important to note if a teen is more moody or irritable during or after engaging with social media.

3. Pulling away from family.

Similarly, while it can be healthy for teens to seek independence, it is concerning if someone has abruptly stopped engaging in family activities or seems generally closed off from loved ones.

4. Defensive about social media use.

It is a significant red flag when teens clam up if you ask about social media. "If teens are mature enough to be on social media," explains Dr. Lucker, "then they are mature enough to have a conversation with their parents about how they are using it."

By following these tips, parents and providers can help adolescents engage in safe practices on social media while still gaining the sense of connection and belonging that they crave.

What Real Life Parents Can Do

One of the best predictors of problem behavior in children is the amount of unsupervised time they have. This applies in the digital world as well as real life. It is important for your child to be aware you are concerned about their digital activities and plan to stay involved by supervising their use. Let them know you will monitor their activities often and at times of your choosing. Make it clear they are not allowed to have any account unless you have approved it in advance and you have the password. Let them know that if you ever find they have a "secret" account or the password you have no longer works, you will delete all information from all their devices and return them to factory settings. This means they will lose any photos, conversations, or other files and have to start from scratch to set up the device again. Tell them the same thing will apply if you ask to see their device and they do not hand it over.

As much as you can, keep internet connected devices in the public areas of your home. If your child needs to use a computer to do homework, this should also be done in a public space. Rather than focusing on individual devices and programs, find out what your cell carrier offers or connect to the website for your router and change the password every day. Access to internet password is an everyday privilege.

- Plan more green time and less screen time; encourage exercise and active play indoors or out.
- Limit screen time for your child; an hour or two a day should be enough.
- Limit screen time for yourself; model other constructive activities, read and readto your child.
- Model behaviors such as reading
- Eliminate background TV; turn it on when there is something you want to watch and off otherwise.
- Do not hesitate to turn off the TV or other device if you believe the program is inappropriate for your child.
- Do not allow TV or other screens during meals.
- Keep TV and other electronic devices out of the bedroom.
- Choose the programs your child is allowed to watch.
  - Try to provide a choice between two appropriate programs.
  - Emphasize public broadcasting, nature programs, or documentaries.
  - Do not assume all cartoons are appropriate.
  - Daytime programs such as talk shows or soap operas are often not appropriate for children.
- Allow internet connected devices only in public parts of the house where use can be monitored.

Research suggests that setting limits and boundaries around social media, combined with discussion and coaching from adults, is the best way to promote positive outcomes for youth (Wachs, S., et al., *Computers & Education*, Vol. 160, No. 1, 2021). Parents should talk to kids often about social media and technology and also use strategies like limiting the amount of time kids can use devices and removing devices from the bedroom at

night. Caregivers should also keep an eye out for problematic behaviors, such as strong cravings to use social media, an inability to stop, and lying or sneaking around in order to use devices when they aren't allowed.

Research suggests that setting limits and boundaries around social media, combined with discussion and coaching from adults, is the best way to promote positive outcomes for youth (Wachs, S., et al., *Computers & Education*, Vol. 160, No. 1, 2021). Parents should talk to kids often about social media and technology and also use strategies like limiting the amount of time kids can use devices and removing devices from the bedroom at night. Caregivers should also keep an eye out for problematic behaviors, such as strong cravings to use social media, an inability to stop, and lying or sneaking around in order to use devices when they aren't allowed.

Passwords – wipe it and start over

The amount of violence on television is on the rise ([20]). The average child sees 12,000 violent acts on television annually, including many depictions of murder and rape. More than 1000 studies confirm that exposure to heavy doses of television violence increases aggressive behaviour, particularly in boys ([2,21]–[23]). Other studies link television or newspaper publicity of suicides to an increased suicide risk ([24]–[28]).

Nutrition

Because television takes time away from play and exercise activities, children who watch a lot of television are less physically fit and more likely to eat high fat and high energy snack foods ([9]). Television viewing makes a substantial contribution to obesity because prime time commercials promote unhealthy dietary practices ([15,29]). The fat content of advertised products exceeds the current average Canadian diet and nutritional recommendations, and most food advertising is for high calorie foods such as fast foods, candy and presweetened cereals ([14,29]). Commercials for healthy food make up only 4% of the food advertisements shown during children's viewing time ([8]). The number of hours of television viewing also corresponds with an increased relative risk of higher cholesterol levels in children ([8]). Television can also contribute to eating disorders in teenage girls, who may emulate the thin role models seen on television ([8]). Eating meals while watching television should be discouraged because it may lead to less meaningful communication and, arguably, poorer eating habits ([29,30]).

Sexuality

Today, television has become a leading sex educator in Canada. Between 1976 and 1996, there has been a 270% increase in sexual interactions during the family hour of 2000 hours to 2100 hours(31). Television exposes children to adult sexual behaviours in ways that portray these actions as normal and risk-free, sending the message that because these behaviours are frequent, 'everybody does it'. Sex between unmarried partners is shown 24 times more often than sex between spouses (32–35), while sexually transmitted infections and unwanted pregnancy are rarely mentioned.

Blue Light Exposure

Unsocial Media

The positive aspects of social media

While virtual interaction on social media doesn't have the same psychological benefits as face-to-face contact, there are still many positive ways in which it can help you stay connected and support your wellbeing.

Increasing access to resources

Connecting you with like-minded people

Helping you share and sharpen skills

- share your interests and pastimes with others
- sharpen your skills by learning from others with the same interests
- broaden your creative, cognitive horizons by learning about new hobbies and ways to try them
- art, from music to photography

- poetry and creative writing
- flower-making
- decorating

You can also:

- improve your cooking and baking skills, plus learn more about the cuisines of different cultures
- find fun ways to move your body
- learn more about daily life from people living across the globe

The negative aspects of social media

Since it's a relatively new technology, there's little research to establish the long-term consequences, good or bad, of social media use. However, multiple studies have found a strong link between heavy social media and an increased risk for depression, anxiety, loneliness, self-harm, and even suicidal thoughts.

Blurring the Lines – smartphones are not smart enough

Social media may promote negative experiences such as:

Cyberbullying: Social media has enabled individuals to harass and bully others online. With the anonymity that social media provides, cyberbullies can harass people without facing any consequences. The victims of cyberbullying experience severe emotional stress, low self-esteem, and in some cases, even suicide.

Bullying statistics

Every 7 minutes a child is bullied. Unfortunately, intervention is rare, with an adult intervening in only four percent of cases, and a peer in 11 percent. An astonishing 85 percent of all cases of bullying are not addressed.

The following are just some statistics on how common bullying and cyberbullying have become: According to StopBullying.org:

- One out of four (25 percent) teens are bullied, while up to 43 percent have been bullied while online.
- Nine out of ten LGBTQ students experienced harassment at school and online. Biracial and multiracial youth are more likely to be victimized than youth who identify with a single race. Kids who are obese, gay, or have disabilities are more likely to be bullied than other children.
- 58 percent have not told their parents or an adult about something mean or hurtful that happened to them online.
- 5.4 million children stay home on any given day because they fear being bullied.

https://www.healthline.com/health/social-media-and-mental-health

Making you feel bad about yourself

Social media offers plenty of opportunities to compare yourself to others. Scrolling might leave you envious of your social circle's lives, including their:

- fancy vacations
- clean, cozy homes
- tight-knit, smiling, well-dressed families
- seemingly flawless bodies

Messing with your sleep

Contributing to anxiety and depression

Crowding out fulfilling activities

Indicators of Excessive Use

- Feeling increased anxiety, depression and/or loneliness
- Spending more time on social media than with friends and family
- Comparing yourself with others or frequently feeling jealous
- Being trolled or cyberbullied online
- Engaging in risky behaviors or outrageous photos to gain likes and comments
- Noticing that your school work and relationships are suffering
- De-prioritizing self-care (such as exercise, sleep and mindfulness)

Digital Kidnapping

Texting and social-emotional agnosia

It is the inability to perceive facial expressions, body language, and vocal inflection. This disorder makes it very hard to accurately understand another person's emotions in social situations . The condition causes a functional blindness to subtle non-verbal social-emotional cues in voice, gesture, and facial expression. People with this form of agnosia have difficulty in determining and identifying the motivational and emotional significance of external social events,

Link with depression/anxiety/loneliness

Taking a One-Week Break from Social Media Improves Well-Being, Depression, and Anxiety: A Randomized Controlled Trial

Constant exposure to devices like smartphones, personal computers, and television can severely affect mental health- increase stress and anxiety, for example, and cause various sleep issues in both children as well as adults. Risk factors for obesity and cardiovascular disorders, including hypertension, poor regulation of stress, low HDL cholesterol, and insulin resistance are among the physical health repercussions we see. The psychological health effects comprise suicidal tendencies and symptoms of depression which are associated with digital device dependency, screen-time-induced poor sleep quality, and content-influenced negativity. Oftentimes it can cause the induction of a state of hyper-arousal, increase stress hormones, desynchronize the body clock or the circadian cycle, alter brain chemistry and create a drag on mental energy and development.

Research suggests that setting limits and boundaries around social media, combined with discussion and coaching from adults, is the best way to promote positive outcomes for youth (Wachs, S., et al., *Computers & Education*, Vol. 160, No. 1, 2021). Parents should talk to kids often about social media and technology and also use strategies like limiting the amount of time kids can use devices and removing devices from the bedroom at night. Caregivers should also keep an eye out for problematic behaviors, such as strong cravings to use social media, an inability to stop, and lying or sneaking around in order to use devices when they aren't allowed.

The Trouble with Texting

Smartphones are not smart enough to know who using them. Every child and adult has access to basically the same information – and misinformation – whether it is helpful or harmful, whether they are mature enough to handle it or not.

One survey of screen use indicated that by 2021 high school age adolescents interacted with electronic media an average of eight and a half hours a day and pre-teens about five and a half hours. Time spent with screens has trended sharply up recently with use of electronic media increasing more in the two years following the pandemic than the four years preceding it (Common Sense Census). A big chunk of these hours are spent watching television and online videos or playing video games, but social media play a part in the lives of most youth with somewhere around 97% of high schoolers reporting they regularly use at least one of the seven most popular social media platforms.

   The most likely way for kids to connect to this content is through their phones and more of them come online every day. In 2019, about 19% of 10 year-olds and 71% of 16 year-olds had their own phone. By 2021, those numbers were 43% and 83%. Well more than 90% of 18 year-olds have their own phone at this point.

**https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/35512731/

**https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/36381869/

**https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32870464/

Sixty studies were included in the review. Higher levels of screen time were associated with more severe depressive symptoms. We found moderate evidence for an association between screen time and poor psychological well-being and body dissatisfaction especially among females. Relationships between screen time and anxiety were inconsistent and somewhat gender specific. Social media use was consistently associated with poorer mental health. Higher levels of screen time are generally associated with poorer mental health outcomes, but associations are influenced by screen type, gender and age.

https://myvision.org/guides/survey-finds-parents-concerned-over-kids-screen-time/

Survey Finds Parents' Screen Use Has Negative Influence on Children

Devices in General

https://www.studyfinds.org/blue-light-expsoure-harmful/

What can parents do?

- Attempt to model the behavior we want to see.

- Set boundaries right way when you give your child their first phone. Set parental controls on his or her phone, with access to their passwords. Phones should be charged somewhere other than their room at night, and should be shut off an hour or two before bed.
- Have conversations with your children on why some things should be kept private.
- Take time to actively engage with your kids face-to-face. This interaction teaches them how to follow social cues, verbal and non-verbal.
- Talk to your kids without glancing at your phone.
- Find opportunities to have genuine conversations that are not lectures.
- Be aware of privacy concerns and [cybersecurity issues](#).
- Insist on having passwords for all accounts – wipe phone if you can't get in
- Many carriers have control methods
-

Television and electronic media are inappropriate for children from birth to 24 months, under any circumstances. Educate parents not to use television to entertain or educate these youngest and most vulnerable children. Infants and toddlers need frequent human interaction for social, emotional and cognitive development.

Child care settings should consider a television-free policy for children of all ages, particularly if the children are being exposed to electronic media at home.

• For children age 2 years and over, caregivers and parents should limit television viewing to educational programs designed for children. In child care settings where there is some television present, children should be exposed to it only for short periods of time.

• Don't leave young children alone with television or electronic games on. Stay with them to monitor the content of the media and their reactions.

• Answer any questions they have about what they are seeing. Television and other electronicmedia should not be used as a "baby sitter" of young children.

• Teach children to be critical viewers of commercial messages.

• Evaluate the nutritional value of foods promoted on television, and offer children healthy alternatives.

• Educate families to create and implement an electronic media policy at home. The policy should provide children with clear guidance about how much and what types of programsand games are permitted. All of the adults in the setting should agree on the policy and enforce it consistently.

Don't allow screen time during meals

- Pay attention to what your children are watching.
- Watch TV with your kids.
- Put kids on a "TV diet" and limit their TV time just as you limit their junk food intake.

- Don't let your child have a TV in their bedroom.
- Don't let your child watch shows you know are violent.
- Change the channel or turn off the TV when violent or offensive material comes on and tell your child why you are doing so.
- Consider the v-chip or other tools that allow parents to block inappropriate programming.
- Use the ratings system, which offers information about the violent content of a TV program.
- Make sure other parents and caregivers with whom your child spends time are on the same page.

- **Set reasonable limits.** Talk to your teen about how to avoid letting social media interfere with his or her activities, sleep, meals or homework. Encourage a bedtime routine that avoids electronic media use, and keep cellphones and tablets out of teens' bedrooms. Set an example by following these rules yourself.
- **Monitor your teen's accounts.** Let your teen know that you'll be regularly checking his or her social media accounts. You might aim to do so once a week or more. Make sure you follow through.
- **Explain what's not OK.** Discourage your teen from gossiping, spreading rumors, bullying or damaging someone's reputation — online or otherwise. Talk to your teen about what is appropriate and safe to share on social media.
- **Encourage face-to-face contact with friends.** This is particularly important for teens vulnerable to social anxiety disorder.
- **Talk about social media.** Talk about your own social media habits. Ask your teen how he or she is using social media and how it makes him or her feel. Remind your teen that social media is full of unrealistic images.

Unsocial Media

Unsocial Media

There might be some real benefits to allowing children to have free access to social media. I just can't think of any.

The basic problem with social media is that it looks real, but it mostly isn't. Most adults can figure this out, but to an immature developing brain, it is not so obvious. Kids do not grasp that people post only the best moments of their lives, not the way they look first thing in the morning or when they are cleaning up after the dog. It is not always clear to children that social media influencers are a kind of actor who is being paid to promote products and services. They just know that their lives feel much less glamorous and exciting than what they see on social media.

It does not take long before users start to adopt some of the ideas and images they see. They learn to speak the language and adopt the looks that everyone else seems to be adopting.

Social media has not been around that long. Facebook appeared in 2004 and others, such as Twitter, YouTube, Snapchat, Discord, Instagram, and TikTok have emerged along the way. Many video game programs allow users online to communicate with each other directly. We don't actually know what the long-term effects of social media will be yet, but some trends are starting to emerge.

It is harder for kids to realize that most people post the best moments of their lives not the way they look first thing in the morning. Social media influencers work to create the impression of glamour and excitement, not all the tedious and boring activities that fill up most of their days.

More green time, less screen time.

For a lot of children, the lack of practice with successful failure (chapter 2) is part of the bigger issue with a lack of experience in general or, more accurately, experience in the real world. It seems that children now spend less than half as much time outdoors as their parents did and some studies report that kids are outside less than 10 minutes a day on average. There is a huge amount of research that supports the benefits of time spent in nature for both physical and mental health, even brain development, but the amount of time children spend outside continues to decline. It does not take long to figure out what they are doing instead.

On average, children now get their first smartphone at about age 10. Twenty percent of 8-year-olds have their own phone. These devices and programs have become so commonplace that we seem to have forgotten what they represent. It is not just that children are missing out on real life experiences that is a problem but what they are filling up their time with instead. More than half of these children will have at least one social media account by the time they are 12. During their early teen years, they will spend seven to nine hours a day on their phones watching videos, texting – maybe with people they know, maybe not – and searching topics of interest to them.

If I were to ask a roomful of parents how many of them would be willing to allow their child to spend six or seven hours a day hanging out with strangers with no supervision, my guess is that not many would sign up. But that is basically what happens when children have unfiltered and unsupervised access to social media and the internet. Almost nothing they encounter there is designed with their best interest in mind.

Influencers need to be increasingly radical to keep views

Why trouble yourself trying to satisfy your curiosity outdoors when you have the world in your pocket?

There are any number of reasons to be concerned about these trends. Children develop a sort of false sense of maturity as they gain access to lots of information that used to be reserved for adults. They become knowledgeable about more but able to do less. They are educated in a way but not trained and know a lot but don't know how to do a lot.

Creates an illusion of maturity while at the same time suppressing real world experiences and skills. Tie to educated but not trained. Know a lot but don't know how to do a lot.

False impressions of others' lives

Lack of curiosity, adverturousness, exploration > keeping kids from seeking independence IRL > not prepared when time comes

Discourage creativity

?Socializing IRL

?Driver's licenses

Smart phones and social media are a fact of life in most families. Since they were introduced late in the last century, the number of users has grown into the billions and it is a rare to find a home without at least one smart in it. There are lots of advantages to having access to this kind of computing power in your pocket, but not all of the influences are good.

Social media

Menarche

First sexual experience

Crime

Age at pregnancy

First porn experience

Driving – Fallen from a high of about 82% to under 70% among high school seniors

Some anxious

Don't feel the need

Chapter 2: Blurring the Line

We have looked at some of the current social influences that work against keeping a clear distinction between the parent and friend roles. In this chapter, we will take a look at a related, but bigger, more general issue, the blurring of the distinction between adults and children. There are a number of contributors to this but technology and media are maybe the most powerful.

Suppose I walk into a room full of parents and ask them to let me arrange for their child to spend six or seven hours a day hanging out with total strangers with no supervision at all. How many do you think would sign up? Yet thousands of parents do just that every day when they allow their child unfiltered access to the internet and social media. Unfortunately, smartphones are not smart enough to know who is using them and every adult and child has access to basically the same information – and misinformation – whether they are mature enough to handle it or not.

There is a long list of reasons why you should control, limit, and monitor your child's screen time and, especially, their access to social media. Most kids have a smartphone by the time they are 10-years-old and twenty per cent of 8-year-olds have their own phone. Half of these kids will have at least one social media account by the time they are 12.

It might not always be clear to children that social media influencers are actors of sorts. They take on a particular role as a way to attract users to they can point them to other sites or products that will pay the influencer for delivering them there.

Unstructured Play
There is reason for concern not only about what children are exposed to through these media, but also what they are missing out on. It might not be directly related, but it is true that as the number of hours kids are interacting with screens increases, the amount of time they are spending in nature and in unstructured play decreases. Their activities are directed by the site, game, or platform instead of their own curiosity, adventurousness, and independence.

Children now spend about half the amount of time outdoors that their parents did. Some sources estimate kids spend less than 10 minutes a day outside on average. The benefits of being in nature are well-established. People who spend more time outside enjoy better mood, XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Emotional and Mental Health
The association between social media and anxiety and depression is pretty clear at this point. It also seems that these mental health issues get worse as the amount of time spent connected to social media increases. This does necessarily mean that social media causes these problems, but it does mean there is good reason to pay attention.

Red cars

When Ice Cream is not Enough

Most children behave in ways that are inappropriate or even disturbing at times, though they likely don't think of their behavior that way. They are just doing what kids do sometimes. They need adults to help them recognize when they are headed down the wrong behavioral path and to train them away from these actions and toward more productive behavior. Most often, when parents make a some well-chosen and constructive changes in household disciplinary and motivational approaches, then ratchet up their focus and effort a bit, children start to behave better and develop andimproved outlook on life. Or at least they start to move in that direction.

Sometimes, though, these changes are not enough. Some children have more serious problems with behavior, mood, or adjustment. Some have over-activated systems that make it difficult for them to self-regulate or maintain emotional balance. They might not respond well, or at least not fully, to the approach that works for most issues with most children. Often, as we have discussed earlier, these more serious concerns are not entirely clear until the more basic issues of motivation and compliance have been addressed.

More serious issues might develop in a number of different ways:

There is one last important point to be considered here. There is a difference between *disturbing* behavior and *disturbed* behavior.

- Some children have biologically based problems or inherited traits that make them more vulnerable to life's stressors, a *stress allergy* of sorts. They react more strongly and recover more slowly from stress events that most people handle with ease. They might react to even routine events with intense anxiety or loss of emotional control.
- Some children are slower to develop or have more complex conditions that keep them from responding as a more typical child might.
- Some children are denied adequate stimulation or affection in the earliest stages of life or live in chaotic and unpredictable homes. Parents in these homes may be so consumed with dealing with their own issues that they struggle to meet the challenges of parenting, no matter how hard they try. Some of these children have been moved from place to place or home to home and never developed a solid sense of security or safety.

- For others, the problems emerge after they experience or witness a traumatic event of some kind that devastates whatever sense of place and security they may have had.

Any or all of these *can't do* issues can have a serious negative impact beyond the reach of ordinary parenting efforts. It can be challenging and confusing to try to figure out why a child continues to struggle behaviorally and emotionally even when their parents are dedicated and consistent in their efforts.

If your child, or any child you know, has problems that seem severe or persistent, consider contacting a pediatrician or family physician or, better still, a psychologist who has experience working with children and families, particularly a therapist who specializes in behavioral pediatrics.

There is no way to list every behavior that should be cause for concern in this space, but the following would certainly be included:

- If the child seems to be chronically sad, unhappy, or irritable for no apparent reason.
- If there is a sudden and significant change in eating or sleeping habits that cannot be explained by ordinary circumstances.
- If the child has trouble coping with the requirements of day-to-day life, seems to be overwhelmed by stress over ordinary events, or expresses intense fear about or tries to avoid common events or situations.
- If there is a sudden significant drop in performance in academics or other area.
- If the child develops odd or unusual habits, such as an intense interest in cleaning, organizing, or other repetitive actions
- If the child is excessively aggressive or cruel toward pets or siblings.
- If the child engages in dangerous or self-injurious behavior, shows physical signs of having caused intentional self-harm, or indicates a loss of interest in life or a desire or intent to harm or kill himself or herself.
- If the child withdraws from family activities, friends, or other activities they used to enjoy.
- If teachers or other people who know the child well suggest you might want to consider seeking help.
- If the child seems incapable of responding to the basic parenting skills you have learned.

Please keep in mind that no book, website, podcast, or list of signs and symptoms can substitute for consultation with a trained behavioral health professional or qualified physician. If you are in doubt about whether you should seek professional help for mental or behavioral health issues, contact the child's primary care physician for advice. If a more serious problem does exist, the sooner you get assistance, the better the chances for a good outcome for your child.

If you happened to read the Introduction to this book (if you didn't, it's not too late), you saw an account of Tyler, a young patient of mine whose mother was advised to seek help for a possible emotional or behavioral disorder. As it turned out, the main issues for Tyler had more to do with his environment and the struggles common to lots of families than any kind of psychological or psychiatric problem. Of course, more serious issues do exist and, when they do, it is important to seek out some help, but not every childhood adjustment problem calls for professional intervention.

Children misbehave. Children have trouble managing their emotions at times. Not just some children, all of them. Some more than others. Even a well-behaved child can get a little cantankerous when they are tired, hungry, or sick. Even the most stable child can struggle emotionally if their stress level gets high enough. The point is that normal children, just like normal adults, have problems. They might have different problems from one day to the next, but never none. This does not mean they always need to be diagnosed or have some kind of special treatment, but it also does not mean that nothing should be done.

The best place to start is where your kids spend most of their time, especially when they are younger, in your home. Parents are obviously the most powerful force for helping their children learn to manage whatever it is they are dealing with. Parents have the most access and the greatest interest in seeing their children succeed.

Preface

A lot has changed since the first edition of this book was published back in 2011. A pandemic has gripped the world and taken a horrendous toll on the physical and mental health of millions. National borders have shifted with the tides of war and societal and political movements have reshaped the landscape in other ways. Technology and social media have continued their relentless march into every corner of our lives, delivering a constant flood of information that can leave the best of us feeling confused and overwhelmed at times.

Ideas and values we once considered as iron-clad have seemed more fragile and maybe led us to question our own views. Greater uncertainty and anxiety about world events seem to be lurking no matter where we turn. For parents, life has become more stressful as they try to juggle all these influences, along with the ordinary pressures of daily life, and the job of raising children has become more complicated and challenging in many ways.

Some things have not changed though. The bedrock principles of human behavior and learning are the same as they were 10 years ago, or 1,000 years ago for that matter. Human beings still think and react like human beings whether they are driving chariots or hybrid cars, communicating by telegraph or instant message. The fundamentals of development and behavior remain no matter which direction the social and political winds might be blowing and regardless of the constant noise from technology and media. The more we get distracted by changes outside our homes, the more we risk losing sight of these foundational principles and the more uncertain and uncomfortable we become. And these feeling are very likely to rub off on our children.

Some other things have changed over the years as well. Developments in science have added immeasurably to our understanding of human development and activity. New imaging techniques have

allowed us to peer inside the brain and see what is going on in there in real time, giving us new insights into how biology and behavior interact. Every clinical experience helps us decide how to apply this new knowledge and perspective and integrate it with our decades long understanding of why kids do what they do.

The purpose of this new edition is to take a fresh look at how the changing social, technological, and scientific environment has influenced us and our children and to incorporate this new information into our thoughts about the best approaches to parenting. In the midst of all this change and uncertainty, it is important to remind ourselves of what hasn't changed and to reinforce the value and importance of these core principles of human behavior.

Introduction

Tyler was seven or eight years old when he and his mother showed up at my clinic the first time, a tousle-haired, bright eyed, totally charming kid. It seems that some well-meaning, but maybe not so well-informed, friend had told Tyler's mom he probably had some kind of emotional or behavioral disorder. Mother did some research online and filled out a couple of questionnaires but still was not sure about what might be going on with him. She was hoping I could shed some light on the situation.

What his mother *was* sure about was that she was more than a little concerned. She did not know what the next step should be but thought it would help to have a formal diagnosis that could explain why Tyler was behaving the way he was. More than that, she was just about worn out trying to keep up with her curious and energetic son and his two younger siblings and needed some guidance about how to go forward.

As we spoke, the reasons for her concerns became more obvious. She reported that Tyler rarely followed his parents' instructions the first time. He argued over almost everything he was asked to do. Tyler struggled to get ready for school in the morning and bedtime was a battle most nights. He spent more time trying to avoid doing homework than it would take to just do it. Conflict erupted between him and his siblings over some minor issue just about every day.

The situation at school was different. Tyler generally got along well with his classmates and behaved appropriately in the classroom and on the playground. He was respectful of teachers and administrators and mostly timely with his work. He participated actively in sports and earned above average grades. So why was it that Tyler seemed to be a different kid at school?

As it turned out, the schedules, rules, and procedures at school were well-defined, communicated clearly, and followed consistently from one day to the next. Tyler did not have to guess about what the expectations were, who was in charge, what would happen if he followed the rules, and what would happen if he did not. He did not much like the idea of missing out on recess, staying after school, or visiting the principal's office, so he decided to do what was expected and it was smooth sailing for the most part.

Meanwhile, back at home, Tyler and his family were dealing with some very common pressures of modern living. Like so many others, Tyler's parents were busy trying to take care of their jobs, a house and yard, balancing the budget, car maintenance, cooking, shopping, laundry, and, by the way, managing the behavior of an energetic little boy and his siblings. Schedules changed every day as they tried to keep up with all of their own obligations and still get the kids to soccer, gymnastics, piano lessons, Tae-Kwon-Do, dance (take a deep breath), swimming, and tutoring. His mother and father had few chances to communicate as they passed each other on their way from one activity to the next. Many of their meals were delivered through a window, came in a box or wrapped in paper, and were eaten hastily at home or in the car on the way to the next event. In short, Tyler's family was experiencing what we might call "symptoms of life."

It was hard at first to sort out Tyler's bedtime issues because there were so many different bedtimes to choose from. He might go to bed anywhere from 8:00 to 11:00 or even later depending on what was

going on for the family that night, when they got home, fed themselves, settled down and got ready for bed. Tyler sometimes had a hard time getting to sleep because his body was telling him he should stay up as late as he had the night before or he was so wound up from the activities of the evening that he could not calm down right away.

It also was true that Tyler tended to get upset often, although this seemed to be more out of frustration than anger. He had a hard time figuring out what he was supposed to be doing because routines and expectations changed so often. His parents might punish him or yell at him for some behavior one time but not the next.

When he did get angry or upset, Tyler noticed people would pay attention to him and often give him what he wanted to try to get him to settle down. His parents and siblings learned to tiptoe around him to avoid setting him off. It was just easier. Even the possibility that he might get angry got him more of what he wanted so he kept acting that way. His parents felt trapped and out of ideas.

After a few more sessions, life started to get better for Tyler and his family. We focused mainly on discussing and implementing the ideas and methods in this book. Tyler's mom and dad were not bad parents at all, they had just gotten caught up in modern life and bought into some common, but questionable, ideas about how to approach the task of parenting.

We worked together to build a home environment that made more sense to Tyler's little brain. His parents came to an agreement about what should be expected of him and communicated the rules clearly to him and his brother and sister. They helped him learn that the best way to get what he wanted was to behave according to their expectations and that his life would get much more boring – or worse – when he did not. They became more intentional about teaching the behaviors they wanted directly instead of assuming that Tyler and his siblings would acquire them naturally. They became better at noticing and rewarding behavior they liked, correcting behavior they did not, then responding in a consistent way day after day no matter which parent was involved. They learned not to get caught up emotionally in dealing with typical kid behavior but to manage what was in front of them at the moment and move on.

With a little more structure around him and more reliable reactions from his parents, Tyler's world started to feel more predictable and to make more sense to him. He got used to following parental instructions during the day and it carried right through to bedtime which became less of an issue. Most importantly, his mood improved as he began to feel more comfortable and secure. He knew what to expect. Conflict among siblings declined as well as parents made it more uncomfortable for the children to fight but also allowed them room to be responsible for settling their own disagreements instead of always jumping in.

It doesn't always go like this, of course, and it's not as if life was perfect for this young man and his family. Still, all of the therapists I know have seen this kind of major improvement in kids whose parents thought they were unreachable. The ideas and methods in this book are the very topics my colleagues and I talk with parents about week after week, year after year.

For many of these families, a little better understanding of behavior, a few new strategies, and a more focused effort are all it takes to produce big improvements in the children and their household. These are the parents who commit to making a few simple – though not necessarily easy – changes in

A casual approach to parenting is not likely to succeed. All day, every day your children face constant and intense competition for their attention and loyalty from a thousand different directions, many of them not too helpful, some of them clearly destructive. If you expect your kids to somehow automatically tune into only your values and ideas and act only as you instruct them, you are in for a disappointment. If you want to be heard above all the noise in your children's lives, you must act deliberately and persistently, with a plan and a purpose, and the conviction to follow through.

Most of the parents I have met are willing, even eager, to help their kids learn to behave better, but many are not sure how to go about it. Somewhere along the way, the most reliable and productive child rearing practices got lost in a cloud of well-meaning misinformation or buried under a calculated effort to overthrow parental authority. Some of these new ideas sound good in theory, they just don't work in practice. What you will find here are the time tested, tried-and-true, practical methods that have served parents and the children well for about as long as there have been parents and children.

The Good News

The basic principles that govern learning and behavior have not changed. Kids still work to make sense of the world around them and still want to feel loved, safe, and secure. Children want to impress and please the important adults in their lives. They want to grow and learn and believe they can accomplish important tasks on their own. And, in spite of all that has changed for the worse, parents and other trusted grown-ups still have it within their power to help their children reach these goals, to guide them on their way to adulthood ready to face all the joys and challenges they will find there. That is what this book is really about.

This book takes a look at how children learn and the best ways to motivate and encourage them. It is about *how* to teach your children. *What* you teach them is and always should be entirely up to you. This book is about using science and research and my own experiences with hundreds of families to outline and explore the best approach to teaching and training, day in and day out. It is about recognizing and accepting your role as one of the most important people in the world (to your children anyway) and using this authority to help them learn the skills they will need to get along successfully in the adult world. It is about developing a perspective, a philosophy, and a plan for parenting, putting it into action, and keeping it going even long after you have forgotten the details of this book.

Mostly what you will find here are a lot of common-sense explanations and real-world examples that will illustrate what we know about how kids learn and why they act the way they do. This is the information and these are the skills that can help you improve your children's lives and outlook. Starting now.

Before we go any further, I have a confession to make. This book is *not* intended to make life easier for adults. Sorry. The focus here is on improving outcomes for children, not their parents. The skills and ideas we will discuss are those that will improve their chances of living a productive and satisfying life.

It turns out, though, that if you are successful at putting the principles and methods in this book into practice, your life probably *will* get better. It will get better because your children's behavior and adjustment will improve. Children who live in more predictable, structured, and reliable homes tend to be more emotionally balanced and better behaved. Children who can follow instructions, accept responsibility, and cooperate with others are much more pleasant to be around. They get along better with other children and adults. They accomplish more and feel more confident in the process.

So, understanding the ideas and using the tools in this book should help make day-to-day life better for your kids and for the whole family. The concepts and techniques are mostly simple, but not always easy. Just like anything of value, they require time, effort, and energy. The truth is that you are destined to end up spending lots of time dealing with your child's behavior no matter what. If you develop a plan and learn some new skills for parenting, there is a much better chance your efforts will pay off in a positive way. If you choose to take a more casual approach, the outcome is likely to be a lot messier and not so positive. The good news is that it is never too late – or too early – to start working on a more productive approach to parenting and it is always worth the effort.

No single device has contributed more to these trends than the smartphone. The Apple iPhone, the first to offer direct internet access, was introduced in 2007. By now, more than six billion smartphones are in use worldwide. Children typically get their first smartphone somewhere around their tenth birthday. More that twenty percent of 8-year-olds have their own phone. By the time these children reach age 12, more than half of them will have at least one social media account.

On average, children get their first smartphone around their tenth birthday. About twenty percent of 8-year-olds have their own phone. By the time these kids reach the age of 12, more than half of them will have at least one social media account. The devices and apps have become so familiar to us that it is easy to lose track of what they really represent. For starters, smartphones are not smart enough to know whether they are being used by an adult or a child. Everyone has access to exactly the same information – and misinformation – whether they are mature enough to handle it or not.

Children now spend about half the time outdoors as their parents did and some estimates indicate kids spend an average of 10 minutes a day or less outside. Time in nature is consistently connected to better physical and mental health, even better developed brains, but the number of minutes spent outdoors continues to decline. Why trouble yourself with trying to learn about the world firsthand if you have the world in your pocket? On the other hand, more screen time is associated with negative effects on mental health, social functioning, and even brain development. Just because kids have access to more information does not mean they know how to use it in a constructive and mature way.

Sports

Compliance matters.

Sometimes the best way to help them see the light is to let them feel the heat.

Building structure and helping your kids develop good habits now will save everybody a lot of time later. You don't waste time looking for your car keys in the morning if you put them in the same place every night. The same goes for your kids' sports equipment or school ID tag.

We talked earlier about the importance of repetition to learning. Routines and habits are the bricks and mortar of repetition. The more consistent your children's regular activities become, the more time and energy they (and you) can devote to other, more enjoyable and rewarding activities. The more time you spend looking for the car keys or the book bags, the less time you have to enjoy the rest of the day, and the more stressed they and you will be.

Helping kids learn how to keep order in their lives can be challenging. Let's face it, keeping order in our own lives can be tough. In many families, both parents work, sometimes on different schedules. Children often have lots of commitments of their own. Some have some sport, music lesson, or other activity every week night and most weekends.

At some point, whatever benefit there might be for them in being involved in all of this stuff is offset by the unsettled feelings when there seems to be no rhythm or regularity in their lives. If you leave the decision about what they will be involved in to your kids, you can count on doing a lot of driving and dealing with unsettled, cranky, or anxious kids at some point.

For most children, *everything* sounds interesting and they will want to try it all even if there are not enough hours in the day to fit it all in. This is an area where adults need to impose some control. I encourage parents to consider limiting their children to no more than one sport and on other activity – play group, music lessons, scouts – at a time. It is important that home feel like a safe harbor for your children, a place to slow down, settle in and rest a bit, not just somewhere to eat and change clothes on the way to the next activity.

Structure and routine are really important, but there is a difference between a structured environment and a rigid one. In fact, in the midst of all the scheduled and structured activity, be sure to make some room for some unstructured time for them to settle and play and just be a kid. Structure is truly valuable, but be sure you don't eliminate all of the opportunities to relax and recuperate.

We will take a look at three ways to build more structure and into daily life for your family; schedules, procedures, and traditions. Once again, do a quick inventory. Think for a moment about what a typical day looks like in your home. If I took each member of your family aside one at a time and asked about their daily life, would everyone know and agree about when and how various activities happen? Would the children be able to tell me procedures for handling routine tasks like hygiene, homework, and housekeeping? Could they tell me what they will be doing right after school or right before bed?

Most homes with children feel chaotic at times, but your efforts always should aimed toward trying to minimize this by making events, activities, and schedules easily predictable for your children. If day-to-day life *always* feels chaotic around your home, you may want to spend a little extra time on this section before moving on.

By the way, some kids are just naturally difficult or willful. The fact that their parents need to make more significant changes in their approach to motivation and discipline does not necessarily mean they have been doing something wrong. Here is a way to think about this. Suppose a parent is a wonderful cook who prepares delicious and nutritious meals every day. Then they learn one of their children has diabetes. They will have to change the way they cook. This does not mean they were doing something wrong before, only that there was a bad fit between what they were doing and the child's needs. Some parents have been responding to behavior in a reasonable way but the child continues to have problems with behavior and adjustment. They have to change the way they cook.

Blurred Lines / Parentification

In my practice, divorced parents are most at risk for blurred parent-child boundaries for several reasons: (1) They fear losing their child's respect or love; (2) They don't want to be viewed as the "bad" parent; or (3) They're lonely and in need of a friend or confidant.

 Psychologists call a child who is forced to take on the responsibilities of her parent or caregiver a "parentified child." Here are 10 signs to watch out for:

1. Parent and child sleeping in the same bed.

2. A child actively defying his parent or using such inappropriate language as, "Oh please, you're only saying that because he's here. You know when we get home, you're not going to follow through."

3. A child referring to his parent as "cool."

4. A child who behaves as though he is much more adultlike than is age appropriate, or uses language such as "those kids" when referring to peers.

5. Children saying their parents "let me get away with whatever I want."

6. Children reporting their parents are easy to manipulate.

7. Parents reporting that they often need permission from their child.

8. Parents setting few or no limits or boundaries.

9. Parents wanting to have fun with their child but never imposing consequences for inappropriate behavior, lest they "ruin the time they spend together."

10. Parents seeking advice and guidance from their child in such a way that places the child in the caretaker role.

Do you have a parentified child? If so, here are some ways to reestablish your authority. If your child badgers you for more information, say, about what led to your divorce or how much money you make, simply tell her it's not an appropriate topic of conversation. If you normally go to your child for comfort after a bad day, or when you're feeling lonely or depressed, make an effort to seek help and solace from someone outside the house-a friend, counselor, or family member.

Remember, also, that it's perfectly okay to tell your child that you've made some parenting mistakes, but from here forward there will be new rules and limits. Be prepared for emotional pushback. If your child tells you you're not cool anymore and you're acting like a parent, accept this as a compliment!

Self-Regulation

https://positivepsychology.com/self-regulation/

https://fpg.unc.edu/sites/fpg.unc.edu/files/resources/reports-and-policy-briefs/PromotingSelf-RegulationIntheFirstFiveYears.pdf

https://childmind.org/article/can-help-kids-self-regulation/

Self-control = inhibiting strong impulses
Self-regulation = reducing frequency and intensity of strong impulses by improving margin and resilience; makes self-control possible or often unnecessary
Not suppressing feelings which can't succeed in the long run, but responding to them

 More than self-control – control of yourself by yourself
 Thinking instead of just reacting
 Feel one way, but act another way

 Environmental – If parents 1) give in to tantrums 2) work overtime to soothe the child

Experiences that promote self-regulation
- Taking turns
- Forced choices
- Waiting
- Games
  o Simon Says
  o Red Light / Green Light
  o Freeze game
  o Freeze tag
  o Duck, duck goose
  o Musical chairs
  o Mirror, mirror
- Losing

As kids develop more language skills, talk more about it

Chapter 10
When Ice Cream Is Not Enough

1.   Lambert J, Barnstable G, Minter E, Cooper J, McEwan D. Taking a One-Week Break from Social Media Improves Well-Being, Depression, and Anxiety: A Randomized Controlled Trial. Cyberpsychol Behav Soc Netw. 2022 May;25(5):287-293. doi: 10.1089/cyber.2021.0324. Epub 2022 May 3. PMID: 35512731.
2.   Lambert J, Barnstable G, Minter E, Cooper J, McEwan D. Taking a One-Week Break from Social Media Improves Well-Being, Depression, and Anxiety: A Randomized Controlled Trial. Cyberpsychol Behav Soc Netw. 2022 May;25(5):287-293. doi: 10.1089/cyber.2021.0324. Epub 2022 May 3. PMID: 35512731
3.   The Common Sense Census: Media Use by Tween and Teens, 2021.
4.   Huesmann LR. The impact of electronic media violence: scientific theory and research. J Adolesc Health. 2007 Dec;41(6 Suppl 1):S6-13. doi: 10.1016/j.jadohealth.2007.09.005. PMID: 18047947; PMCID: PMC2704015.
5.

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marks down and tighten the

spacing.

--Tim Riley, PhD

Here is a way to set up pull quotes within the overall framework of the text regardless of content