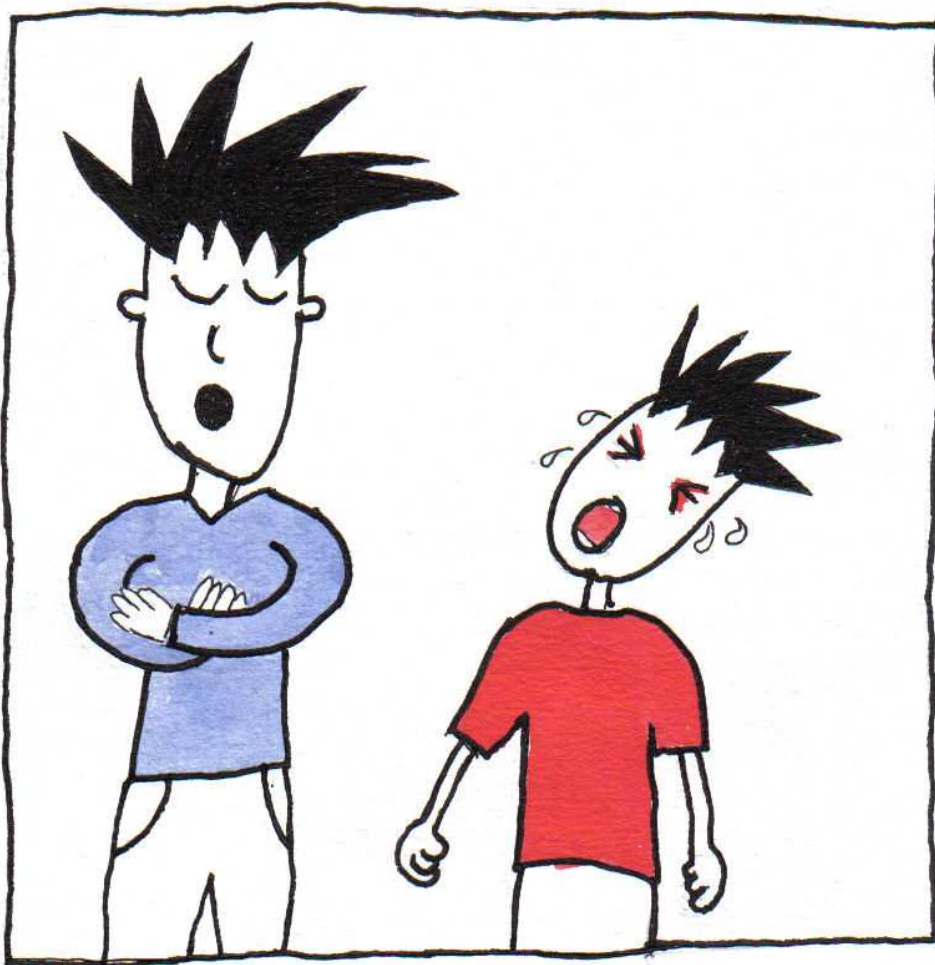


# The Rules

A small book about managing and changing children's behaviour and creating a happier family life



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The only thing that I ask is that you do not change it in any way.

### **Nobody gets it right**

Sometimes parents need extra help to sort their kids out. The help they get will often be rubbish because services are really stretched and we do not put enough money into supporting families in this country. If they are lucky enough to get decent help, they will learn much of the stuff that is in this book.

Parenting is not an easy job, but it is perhaps the most important and rewarding job in the world. I found out as a parent that you never stop learning, there is always something else that you can learn to make life easier. I hope that for you this book is one of those things. I want to congratulate you for taking this step and doing your bit to make the world a better place.

You **can** be a happy parent with a happy life and happy successful children. You might be feeling that would take a miracle. But every day people change their lives and make their lives better. I have seen hundreds of them do it, I see people do it every day in my work with families. It is never too late, remember that every passing minute is just another chance to turn it all around.

### **If you really try, you can change things**

Whatever situation you find yourself in, by paying attention and thinking about how you are doing things, you can make the situation better. This book holds some tools and ideas that you can use to take control. But you have to do them, just owning this book won't help, holding the book in your hand won't help, reading it won't help. Doing the things in the book, sticking with it, doing it over and over again will really help.

How do I know?

I have done this stuff with parents so many times, over and over again, it is tested in the fires of experience. Sometimes it hasn't worked and the children's behaviour hasn't improved, when this has happened and I have watched parents trying to manage their children, in nearly every case it has been obvious from the beginning that they have not really been trying very hard to follow the rules or that they have given up too soon.

Every single time a parent has really tried and stuck to one of the techniques in this book it has had a positive effect. Now you are not going to make your family perfect, but you can certainly make things better than they are.

Doing these things is not difficult. In fact the things I ask you to do are very easy. They are easy because they help you to stay calm and not get involved in arguments. Instead you put your point across and get the behaviour that you want. This is easier than arguing, getting upset, upsetting everybody else and having a miserable time. Following the rules is far less stressful than screaming, shouting, crying, smacking, stamping storming off down the pub and finding some awkward way of making up again afterwards.

### **It takes four weeks to make a new habit**

It can be difficult to change the way we normally do things, to break old habits and create new ones. It often feels easier to just leave things as they are, to avoid rocking the boat. But you know really that over time you will be really pleased that you made the effort to build a happy and relaxed family atmosphere where everybody acts in a sensible way.

It is important to keep using the tools in this book. Make them a habit and your kids will soon learn who is in charge. I believe that it takes about four weeks to create a new habit. So I would like you to give it four weeks. That is all I am asking of you, four weeks of effort to change the rest of your life, and your kids lives too! Invest four weeks of trying these tools and I mean properly trying them, not just making a half-hearted attempt at it. After four weeks have passed, think back to what life was like when you first read this line. I bet you that it will be very different, you will feel calmer and happier, your kids will feel calmer and happier and you will be looking at a brighter future.

Of course you don't just stop doing them after four weeks, the more you do this stuff the better it gets. Right through the years. Soon enough you will realise that you are doing the same stuff with adults, shopkeepers, parking wardens, officials of all sorts and making a big difference to your life. Now I think that every single one of us is a beautiful poetic expression of the total beauty of a wonderful and mysterious universe and I love every single expression of that universe. No, don't laugh, I do really. But some of those beautiful people have taken on the job of being a 'human obstacle' and need people like me and you to show them how wonderful they really are if they would just stop being so difficult for a moment.

### **It is mostly 'common sense' – when you think about it!**

I am going to teach you how to be assertive, how to be more confident, how to give your kids confidence. How to avoid arguments, I will tell you what your kids really want. I will tell you what kids really need to grow up healthy and happy.

I use these tools every day in my work with children and families. They are all well tried and trusted. There is nothing new or groundbreaking about this stuff, it is all well researched and based on the tools and ideas used by psychologists, parenting groups and social workers across the world. I have used these tools with families with a very wide variety of problems. From parents who had difficulty with bedtime routines to children who had violent temper tantrums. These are tools that will have some positive effect on anybody. If you use these rules and stick to them, then you can make your life better and improve your children's chances of success.

I like practical books, books that I can read and then try something straight away. If I was writing this book for professionals I would have written a different book, it would have been a lot fatter, a lot more expensive, full of research and evidence and it would have been a lot harder to read (and write). But I felt that there was a place for a book that was easy to use and had ideas that were pretty sure to work. So this is a practical book for parents to use.

### **Add some tools to your parenting 'toolbox'!**

I think about these ideas as tools in a toolbox. This book focuses on six tools that can make your life better. No matter how old or young your children are, these ideas will help you manage better. If you are going to take control of your life and manage your children's behaviour, you are going to need to feel strong and confident, so I have also included some ideas for things that can help you to feel more in control, more confident and ready to deal with anything.

These tools are based on one of the most basic and powerful aspects of human beings. Because of that that they also work with adults, with anybody in fact. They are all based around a simple truth about human beings. That truth is this: **We all want to have our uniqueness be recognised by others and praised by them.** This book tells you how to use that basic desire so that your children learn how to behave themselves.

There are six basic tools or ideas for managing children's behaviour. So before we start, here are the six rules that are about to change your family life.

- 1. Understand that rules are important**
- 2. Give positive attention**
- 3. Be clear about the rules**
- 4. Be assertive – say what you mean**
- 5. Back up your words with actions – punishments and rewards.**
- 6. Look after yourself.**

## **Rule 1**

### **Understand that rules are important**

People don't usually want to live with lots of rules and regulations. We are not machines and most of us prefer to use our personal skills, our ability to be inventive and creative rather than have rules imposed on us. As new parents, the dream we all have is that our children will be just like us and quickly learn our way of doing things. We hope that they will understand our likes and dislikes about the way family members should behave and that they will care for us enough to just fit in and not bring trouble to our home.

But kids are not really like that.

Now I am not a big fan of rules and I am still first in line to break rules if I feel they are unnecessary, unfair or limit my creativity or spirit in some way. So I like rules that don't limit me, that enable me to do things and live my life better. Some rules can be useful, they can make your life better, and help you to feel more free. If you have some rules, you can try them and see if they work for you. And if they don't work then you will be able to say why they didn't work and change them for better ones. If you don't have any rules at all, then you deserve the chaos that you will get.

One of your jobs is to increase your child's awareness so that they become aware of some of the effects of the way they choose to live, teaching them how to behave is a **gift** that can set them on the road to successful lives.

#### **Getting on your nerves is normal**

Any child very quickly wants to be independent and do their own thing. They want to make their minds up about things and they want to do what they want to do when they want to do it. They do this because they are really driven to learn new things.

Children grow and develop by constantly wanting to do things. Some of those things are not good for them but they haven't yet learned enough to know this. Unfortunately you cannot teach people things that they are not ready to learn. So there is no point trying to teach a one year old how to cross the road or a two year old how to tidy their room. You can set a good example and show them, but don't expect them to learn it before they are ready.

So they will do things that might get on your nerves. They might be constantly putting themselves in dangerous situations, they might never stop moving, always busy, running about, falling down, picking things up, getting things out, opening and closing things, putting things in things and taking things out of things, getting upset when things don't do what they want or expect them to, making a mess, leaving things lying about, making a mess. They might be excitable, active and busy, busy, busy learning about things and relationships and how to use their bodies and their minds.

All that is really just normal.

This is not bad behaviour. It might get on your nerves, tire you out and demand your attention all the time but that does not make it bad behaviour. It is just the normal way that young children learn about the world.

Parenting takes effort. If you are tired and irritated, that is normal for a new parent of a young child. Looking after children is tiring. Later on you will read about ways of looking after yourself, making yourself fitter, healthier, happier and stronger.

If you really make an effort to teach your children how to behave, then you it will pay off in the end and you will be less likely to resent and be embarrassed by your children.

Many new parents I meet in my work are surprised at how difficult it is. Luckily although it is hard work, it can often be a lot of fun because you can sometimes get to be a big kid too.

### **'Problem' Kids**

Most children with 'behaviour problems' have problems that could be made better. Parents often ask me if a child could have a medical problem that makes them misbehave. I have worked with many hundreds of families and thousands of children. You can always improve on their behaviour whether they have a medical condition or not. Even if they have got a mental or physical condition most psychologists and GP's and other experts (including parents), will agree that the best way of dealing with it is to try different parenting techniques before resorting to medication.

I used to work with young prisoners and they were mostly kids whose parents never taught them how to behave, they did not understand the very idea of having rules. These were kids who often didn't go to school,



sometimes this was because their parents were soft on them and listened to their excuses. Other parents didn't want their kids to go to school because they needed them to do jobs at home. Some parents even kept their kids off school and damaged their future because they got lonely, and so they used their kids as company.

Later on, as these children got older, they would refuse to go to school. They were often hard and sometimes violent kids, bullies who spread misery instead of love. But they had no real strength or toughness. When life got difficult they would whine and argue and complain and cry like babies. If they didn't get their own way they would lash out and hurt people and if that didn't get them what they wanted they would hide away and turn to drink or drugs. They had no way of coping other than damaging themselves or others because they had no experience of positive attention and love.

Because they had no understanding of positive attention they had learned no personal code and no rules or ways of coping. They thought they were hard but really they were soft, still babies inside who had never grown up. Giving kids positive attention and rules is part of your job of helping them to grow up.

### **Why do Children misbehave?**

Children often misbehave because they are learning how to behave. They are learning what the rules are, misbehaviour is often a child's way of asking what the rules are. Often they misbehave just because they can.

When people learn new things, they often get it wrong and have to have a few tries before they get it right. That's normal, so children learning what the rules are often have to be reminded.

Sometimes it becomes fun for them to watch you getting agitated, so they pretend they don't know what the rules are. All you have to do to stop this is to gently remind them what the rules are without getting angry or irritated. Like I said you might have to do this a few times and try the Broken Record technique later in this book.

Sometimes children learn that misbehaviour is a way of getting what they want. Children often do not know how to say what they want. Just like the rest of us. Sometimes parents don't know what their children want and give them the wrong thing, giving a child the wrong thing makes them behave badly.



Kids can have a hard time expressing themselves. This is because they are young, they have not learned the communication skills that we all get better at as we get older. If you just listen to what they say they want, you are only getting part of the picture. They may think they know what they want, but often they don't. Because their experience is limited they just say they want what the other kids have got. They don't know any better, all they know is that their friend has a particular computer system so it is only fair if they have one. Chances are that if you get them one, they will not use it anyway. They just want what their friends have got because their experience of the world is limited and all they know about the world is what they see on television and hear from their friends.

You have to know stuff they don't.

### **Who is in charge?**

I like to think of my family in terms of a pride of lions. It takes a strong leader to keep the pride together, to teach the young ones how to survive, to provide food, shelter, clothing and protection for everybody. The leader has to have pride in their pack.

Ask yourself who is the leader in your pack? Is it the one with the most intelligence, the most experience of the world, the most maturity and understanding about how the world works? Or is it the youngster who wants to take control and who will use childish tools like dishonesty, violence, harsh words, bullying, sulking, being rude, aggressive, unpleasant and ignorant, and selfish to get his own way?

To be a parent you need to take control, you need to have clear rules and you need to be strong and gentle. Just like a mother or father lion with his or her cubs.

### **Children need to do what they are told**

Especially when it is really important, like going to school, not running into the road, sticking knitting needles in plug sockets or drinking bleach.

I have come across many, many families where children will not do as they are told, they will not go to school, will not get up in the morning, will not look after their things. Children who do not get sorted out usually get worse. Often they will move on to damaging or taking other people's things and some will learn that sometimes they need to use force to do this. Many become violent and abusive and end up in prison. They have become unfit to live with the rest of us and learned they have the power to make people miserable. Their behaviour is a clear sign that they are

unhappy too but they are often stuck in a trap they do not know how to escape.

As young parents we assume that our children will just accept that they should not be abusive or violent to their parents, that they will do what they are told. But children sometimes have to be taught these things and you don't teach kids anything by screaming at them.

What you put into your body and your mind effects you. What you eat, what you read or watch on television. What you are told, how you are treated, and the things people say or do to you all have an effect on who you are, what you think feel and behave. If you put rubbish in, you get rubbish out.

### **Rubbish In = Rubbish Out**

Put bad ideas, bad treatment, bad chemicals, bad thoughts and bad food into a child, what comes out is bad behaviour.

If children are not taught what the rules are, they invent their own. Teaching children how to behave is called socialisation. That means making them fit enough to live in a society with other people. If they are not socialised they become unfit to live with other people.

If you do not make an effort to teach them and just leave it to them to sort it out for themselves they will try to rule the roost and **they will make your life and other people's lives a misery.**

You can turn your children into people who behave well and have good chances of getting an education and jobs and have good relationships with other people. This is your choice. It depends on whether you want to make the effort or not as a parent and whether you think your children are worth it.

You have a choice, either you can put some effort in and take control in your home, or you can just leave things be. Whatever you do, there will be consequences, good or bad. The more effort and thought you put into it, the better the outcomes can be. For you and your child.

Creating an adult out of a child is one of the few things in life where you can see that what you do or don't do has a clear effect in the future.

If you feel guilty because your kids are running wild and you have not been able to do anything about it, because your life and their lives are being ruined. You can do something about it, like Tom Cruise said in Vanilla Sky, "Every passing minute is another chance to turn it all around".

Here is your escape clause, read this book and do something about it! If you follow these rules, stick to them you will take control and you have nothing to feel guilty about.

Guilt is a pointless and useless waste of emotional energy. Don't waste time and energy feeling guilty; use that energy to take charge. I do not know you; I don't know your circumstances or your life. What I do know beyond a shadow of a doubt is that these rules work, but only if you actually do it and stick to it.

So get angry with me if you want to, waste energy feeling bullied by my words, whine about your problems if you have to but do something to make your life better. Being a parent is the most important job there is, you affect the world and make it into a better or a worse place, you create happiness or misery for this and the next generation, you can spread love or violence, greed or caring, it is all up to you – how do you want the world to be?

- Being a parent is the most difficult job in the world, but nobody teaches us how to do it.
- There is no such things as a perfect parent
- There is no such thing as the perfect child
- All children give problems of one sort or another through their childhood (and beyond)
- All parents make mistakes in bringing up their children
- Never compare your children with other children; this will only lead to unnecessary anxiety.
- 99.9% of problems that children bring are normal, but you don't have to accept them.
- Changing people's behaviour takes time.
- Be consistent and you will see results.

### **Children like having rules**

Children like having rules. It shows them that you love them and care for them. Giving your child rules about behaviour is a gift of values, beliefs and a structure to live their life by. Things that they will remember and eventually teach their own children. You can effect all your future generations. It is a gift beyond any material value. It gives them something to hold on to when times are hard, it gives them ideas and skills that they

can develop and use for themselves, it shows them that you really love them as people who need to survive in the world. It teaches them that they are not useless or in the way. Teaching them rules is paying them attention.

Some kids will search for a set of rules and find them by joining gangs. Gangs all have very, very strict rules, gangs always have a leader who makes the rules. Kids want to be part of a pack with a leader and strong rules. That is why kids join them; those rules make them feel like part of a family. Gangs have the same sort of rules that families have, rules about how you dress, where you go, who you can see, what kind of things you can eat and who the bad people are. When kids are left on their own with other kids, they naturally come up with rules about how they should behave and kids who break those rules are usually punished. Children are very interested in rules. They complain loudly if somebody they are playing with breaks the rules of the game.

If you watch children at play on their own or with other children, they naturally develop rules and fall out with individuals who do not stick to them. If you ask them about the rules they have, they will tell you that the rules are important because they make things fair. Being fair is one of the most important things to a child.

### **Children will argue about the rules**

Children will always argue about the rules. It is their job as developing people to find out how far they can go and whether the rules make sense.

- They are learning what is safe and what is not, they are learning about how society works.
- They are trying to show how big and strong they are.
- It is good for them to argue about the rules, they need to do it.

That means that you will sometimes find them difficult. Your job when they argue is to make sure first of all that your rules make sense and are fair.

If they are good rules, you have to stand up for them so that the kids know they are strong and important rules and not weak and meaningless ones.

If you don't enforce your rules they children will decide that they are weak and meaningless rules that they can break when they want. The children will destroy and ignore them and you will have taught them that they are in control and not you. You will also have told them that you are unable to stick to things and they will begin to lose trust in you.

If your rules are good ones, is important that you stick by them.

No matter what.

If you have rules that are not important you might as well get rid of them now before the children challenge them and ignore and then just do what they want.

*If a child lives with criticism he learns to condemn  
If a child lives with hostility he learns to fight  
If a child lives with ridicule he learns to be shy  
If a child lives with shame he learns to feel guilty*

*If a child lives with tolerance he learns to be patient  
If a child lives with encouragement he learns confidence  
If a child lives with praise he learns to appreciate  
If a child lives with fairness he learns justice*

*If a child lives with security he learns to have faith  
If a child lives with approval he learns to like himself  
If a child lives with acceptance and friendship he learns to love in the world*  
Dorothy Law Nolte

## Rule 2

### Give attention for good behaviour

#### Positive attention increases good behaviour

People are usually doing the best they can given their level of awareness, all of us are just trying to get on with our lives using the skills and knowledge that we have, parents, children, aunties, strangers in the post office. To make life better the only real way is to give people more skills, ideas, beliefs, resources and tools they can use. You can't take people's ideas and behaviour away from them, but you can give them new and better behaviour. To change people's behaviour we add more behaviour so that the old behaviour gets pushed out. So the second rule and perhaps the most important one is to give attention for good behaviour.

When parents do not give their child positive attention, first of all the children start to feel insecure and unhappy. They start to misbehave and then they gradually become detached from their family, everybody gets fed up with them and so they get worse. Eventually, because they do not know how to behave, they lose their friends. To stop being alone they often end up hanging out with the bad kids. Maybe getting into trouble.

The way to stop this happening and the way to fix it is to pay **positive attention**. That means focussing on the good things; this is what rule 2 is all about.

#### What Kids really want is your attention

Children need your attention if they are to grow up happy. As a parent your first job is to give them your attention. That is what being a parent is about. You cannot be a part time parent, doing things with your child just when it suits you. If you had a job working for a business, its success would depend on you doing your job when you needed to, not just when it suited you. It is the same with a child. Their success depends on you being there when they need you. They need you to parent them while they are young, you can't leave it 'til later.

**You need to praise them as often as you can, this welcomes them into your family, makes them feel part of it and part of the rules that the family has.**

## **Giving stuff**

Some families think that being a good parent means giving their children things. These parents often try to keep their children quiet and happy by giving them **stuff**.

**Stuff** means

toys,  
fashion items,  
sweets,  
crisps,  
pop,  
T.V.

In fact anything that takes the place of spending real time actually with the child. If kids get too much of this and not enough attention, gradually you see them getting more and more spoilt, their behaviour getting worse and worse and eventually they grow up into spoilt adults who make life miserable for everybody else.

What children really want from a mum or dad is attention, doing things that are fun and enjoyable and that help them to learn about and cope with the world. Things like:

sitting and reading,  
talking,  
playing,  
walking,  
running,  
cycling,  
painting,  
drawing,  
swimming,  
cuddling,  
Doing jobs together.

When children are first delivered they are all programmed to prefer a good relationship and decent **attention. They want to be part of the pack.**

When kids are young **Stuff is not important to them.** If you dangle a teddy bear in front of a baby at the same distance from your face, the baby will look at your face in preference to the teddy. People will shake the teddy about to try to make the baby look at it. Babies do not care about teddy bears; they care about you and your face. Especially when it smiles.



## **It is adults that make children interested in having stuff.**

Most people give their babies rattles and squeaky things and soft cuddly things because they think that buying things proves their love. What all babies really want is to be fed, cuddled, talked to and smiled at. If you do not talk to a baby but instead just give it squeaky things, it will not learn to talk on its own, it will just learn to squeak. Professionals often assess people's parenting skills by looking at how well their child can talk.

Sometimes children learn that stuff is all they can get and so they learn to settle for stuff. Eventually they demand stuff because they have learned that **stuff = love**. This starts very early. Eventually they demand more and more stuff because in their minds stuff = love and acceptance and love is what they really want.

### **Doing stuff**

Some parents think that keeping a clean and tidy house is the way to show love for their child and is the most important thing. It isn't. Your child is the most important thing. It must come first. If you ignore it and decide to do the washing up or the hoovering first then you are teaching him or her just what number she or he is on the list of most important things in your life. In his or her head your child might have a list like this...

*This is a list of my Mummy's most important things:*

1. *Cleaning*
2. *Tidying*
3. *Washing*
4. *Drinking beer*
5. *Me*
6. *Shopping*
7. *Television*
8. *Daddy*

Of course many of those jobs need doing if your child is to be clean and healthy and live in a clean and healthy home. Do them later when your child does not need you to be a mum or dad. When they are playing quietly, when they are asleep or at nursery or at school. Best of all is to get them involved in those jobs and do them together. It may take you twice as long to push the vacuum cleaner about with a two year old riding on top of it but remember that you are doing two things at the same time, providing a clean home and paying that very important attention to your child. Teach it to help, to look after itself by letting it share those jobs with

you. Even if they mess it up at first. Remember what your most important job is.

It is often said that happy families are all similar in their happiness and unhappy families are all different. The reason for this is that happy families all do similar things, they spend time together, they respect and listen to each other, they do things together, and they work as a pack.

**Which of the following is correct?**

**Stuff = Love**

**Attention = Love**

### **Reward good behaviour**

If you want to change somebody's behaviour, anybody's behaviour, adult or child, you have to make that behaviour more attractive to them. That means when you come across the kind of behaviour you want, you have to reward it. This works with adults as well as children.

The kind of rewards you choose must be simple, immediate and inexpensive. They must be suitable for the child's age and development. Children, like most mammals, want to be part of a pack and they crave praise and acceptance. Rewards can be praise, hugs, kisses, and smiles, playing with the child or a special game.

All pack animals and mammals crave acceptance more than anything else. An individual animal that does not conform to the rules of the pack will experience the rest of the group throwing him out, ignoring him. They do this because millions of years of evolution have taught them that it works. An individual who breaks the rules is denied the warmth, companionship and protection of the others. Even my cat turns his back on me when I turf him off the sofa.

There is a famous story about a group of psychology students performing an experiment on one of their lecturers. Together they decided that they would deliberately smile whenever the lecturer went towards a particular corner of the classroom. Without realising why, the lecturer eventually ended up delivering his lectures from standing in the corner of the room.

This is the starting point to creating happy, positive, creative, intelligent and energetic children. **The more you reward good behaviour, the more you get good behaviour.**

I cannot stress how important this part is. It is the foundation for a good relationship between you and your child. Children are desperate for acceptance, it is the thing they hunger for most. At the deepest level they are driven to seek the warmth, protection and comfort of the family, in fact we all as individual human beings have a deeply felt need to be accepted and to have our uniqueness be recognised and praised.

The best reward is praise and acceptance. The worst thing that you can do to any human being is make them an outsider. This is why prisoners are punished by being put into solitary confinement, people are tortured by being placed away from human contact, and workers have punished others by sending them to Coventry. People crave acceptance and belonging like they crave air and water.

This is why many children who are removed from their families of origin and put in foster care or children's homes will have a great tendency to try to return to those families no matter how abusive or deprived those homes may be. I have known of children to disappear from foster homes and travel for days to return to homes where they maybe neglected and abused but where they are told they are loved.

**All of us, even us adults, want our uniqueness to be accepted and praised.**

**This praise is the most lasting and effective gift, far more powerful than sweets, flashy clothes or toys.**

**Positive words:**

When s/he is playing quietly and nicely you could say:

*'Isn't it lovely being peaceful like this, you getting on with your things and me getting on with mine'.*

When s/he is sitting at the table eating without complaining you could say:

*'It is so nice sharing a meal together'.*

When a child has been particularly good, for instance when you have asked him to do something and he has done it, say exactly why you are pleased. Don't just say 'good boy' but say: *'good boy, I'm really pleased because you put your toys away when I asked you to because it is very grown up to look after your things'.*

When s/he is just being good you can say something like:

*'It makes me happy when we sit down quietly and read like this'.*

**Make sure that you catch him or her being good and remark on it. Do it until they are sick of hearing about how good they are.**

### **'I' Messages**

Notice that I ask you to use the word 'I', to talk about how you feel. When you use 'I' Messages, it sends a more powerful communication. What you say stops sounding like an order and so it reduces the child's resistance to doing what you say, it makes them connect with how their behaviour is making you feel. Try saying things like:

*'I like it when you play nicely like that'.*

*'It makes me happy when you help me by putting your things away.'*

*'It's great when we get on well together like this isn't it'.*

*'Thanks for keeping yourself busy just now while I was getting on with the cooking'.*

Sometimes things can get so bad that the only messages a child ever hears about itself is how awful and irritating they are, they constantly hear that they are bad, selfish, noisy and unpleasant, if they hear this stuff enough they come to believe it. When kids believe that they are bad, they find it very easy to act as if they are bad. Do you constantly go on at them, tell them off? Children can get some pretty unpleasant messages about what sort of people they are, and they often try to live up to them.

**Criticism makes people act worse**

**Praise makes people act better**

**Try to give at least 2 X more praise than criticism**

You need to try to give them at least twice as many positive words as negative words. If you do this you start to rebuild bridges, and the child feels an emotional connection and re-enters the family.

I am going to let you into a secret now, a very powerful secret that can quite literally transform your life completely. If you become a master of this idea it will allow you to take control of others. To be happy and in control

of your life, to be looked up to by others, respected and cared for, to spread love and joy wherever you go. This is something that wise people, Buddhists, Yoga masters, Christians and Occultists have known for thousands of years and something that new research in Brief Solution Focussed Therapy, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and Neuro Linguistic Programming is proving time and time again to be true. The secret is this:

### ***What you pay attention to in life tends to get bigger***

If you focus on negatives you get more of them. If you continually tell children off, criticise them, judge them, they will get worse.

In your own life and in your own mind if you continually dwell on and worry about depression, drugs or drink, anger, disappointment, sadness, failure, misery, they will all increase and you will feel sadder, drink more, be more angry and feel more hurt.

Of course you live in the real world and have to pay some attention to the problems, but think about success rather than failure, focus on the good stuff rather than bad stuff, as your mother used to say, count your blessings. Deal with the problems and move on. Use your energies to focus on positives and watch the good stuff grow.

So to start right now, lets pay attention to some of the good things about you and about your children. Sometimes, especially if you have had a hard time with a child, it is difficult to find anything good to say about them. You have to remember that you are the adult and they are the children and so you need to be able to stay in control and not get dragged down into a childish place where you end up blaming them.

Have a think about your child's strengths. What are they good at, what do you love about them? Each one of us has special skills and abilities. If you can find them in your child and help them to express them you will be doing something very important for them. Tell your child that you appreciate his strengths.

#### **Giving children Stuff as rewards**

You can show children that you love them by taking the time to stop what you are doing and praise them properly and spend time with them. That is **the top way** of changing behaviour.

If you reward children by buying them things later, the reward loses its effect. The child does not make that deep understanding between being

good and being rewarded. They come to think of having gifts as a right and not as a reward. Explaining it to them does not work – explaining goes in one ear and out the other.

Actions speak louder than words. Children very soon learn that they and their affections are being bought and they learn to sell their affections and their behaviour rather than give them freely. So **buying things for them later on can actually make their behaviour worse.**

**It is important that rewards come immediately and children are not made to wait. To change behaviour you have to give rewards immediately.**

If you do choose to give gifts as rewards, when you give it, give the child plenty of attention as well. Remember that all humans are programmed to be pack animals, **separating** them from the pack is a punishment, **praise** is the opposite, it welcomes people into the pack. So whatever you do, if you want the child to re-join the family and learn its rules, you have to praise them and make them feel that they belong and the rules are the rules of **their** family.

**Never ever reward children with food, or punish them with withdrawal of food. That way you will create eating disorders and desperate unhappiness in the future. Food is a right not a privilege.**

Find out what your child particularly likes as a reward, some children prefer hugs and kisses, others would prefer a game of football.

As the children get older, it becomes a good idea to sometimes give stuff as rewards. In families and relationships **attention** and **family life** is the most important thing, but in the world of work, let's be honest, if you are lucky enough to do it, you do it for the money. When children are older, you need to think about teaching them that good things come to those who are willing to work and wait. This doesn't work before children are about nine years old. So when they get to about nine or ten you can start to think about rewarding them with pocket money or trips out, things they value.

The best way to reward good behaviour is with **positive attention**, that is good words. You might feel that you are being mean and words don't

really say anything, but kind and positive words and attention are the most powerful things that you can give a human being. Think about yourself and what is important to you. I bet you would rather have a good relationship with the people who are important to you than any number of gifts. Gifts are often seen by children as a brush off or a bribe given by people who can't be bothered.

### **Keep your promises**

If you are going to give stuff as rewards, older children will tell you what they think is a fair reward. Obviously they will try it on and try to get as much out of you as they can. Don't be silly and make promises that you will have difficulty keeping. When you make promises to a child they will expect you to keep them and if you don't you will be made to suffer.

Children believe everything you say, they start off as babies with 100% trust in you. Don't start by letting them down and teaching them that you cannot be trusted. It will take a long time and lots of effort to get them to trust you again. Promising them stuff you aren't 100% guaranteed to deliver on is a recipe for pain and suffering.

Let them know what the limits are. My children were younger they had jobs to do in the house, usually the washing up after dinner. Their reward was **plenty of praise at the time** and pocket money at the end of the week. I gave it at the end of the week so that they learn to trust that I will do as I say. Also to help them to learn to wait, to save up and not go straight for the reward. I did not expect them to feel grateful; they have done a job and got paid for it.

### **Should they be grateful?**

When you make a promise to a child, for instance she has done something wonderful and you say 'that's fantastic I am going to buy you a new bike for doing that' they will be grateful and excited. They will talk about it all the time, want it to be here **now**, tell all their friends and generally fantasise about it. By the time they get the new bike, they have fantasised and talked and thought about it so much that it has become part of their world. You made a promise and it is accepted that they will be getting it. They will not feel grateful yet again. They will just feel that what you promised them all that time ago has at last arrived and that you made them wait a damn long time for it!

If you have a history of breaking promises they may feel relieved that you actually made good on your promise. Alternatively they may have learned that you are a liar and your promises never come true.



### **Gifts from Children**

When a child brings you something to show you, a picture, a shell they have found, a snail or a frog **they are looking for praise and acceptance**. Give it immediately, for example:

*'What a lovely picture you made, you are very kind to do that for me.'*

When they do this they are saying 'look mummy or daddy, I love you, I am special and I have brought this for you'. **Do not ever brush them off.**

Children have very little power or property and so **when they offer you a gift you must take it graciously**. To refuse tells them that they are not important enough and not worth your attention. So if they come up and offer you a sweet, even if it is their last one, take it and eat it and thank them for being so kind and generous. This is not 'mean', they will feel special and important, and they will feel that they have shown you love. Don't throw their expression of love back at them by refusing.

If they bring you a frog from the garden and you say: 'Uh, disgusting, take that filthy thing away'. They learn lots of things, they learn that nature is dirty and disgusting, they feel that they are dirty and disgusting for being interested in it, they learn that you do not appreciate them as individuals, and they learn that they have the power to disgust you. Either they will go away feeling personally hurt or they will express the power you have just given them by waving the frog in your face and trying to upset you further.

Much better to say: 'Isn't nature beautiful, let me see, but make sure that you do not hurt it.'

If you are squeamish or fearful and cannot bring yourself to do that then perhaps you could say: 'Nature is really wonderful, but frogs make me feel a bit funny, perhaps you should take it outside but don't hurt it'. That way the child learns to respect the world it lives in and respect your feelings.

## Rule 3

### Be clear about your rules

#### Whose rules are they?

Being clear about what you want to achieve is very important. If you can be clear with yourself, then you can be clear with others. **If you don't know where you want to go then you are very unlikely to ever get there.**

It is important that you have rules, and that those rules are fair. If you do not have clear and fair rules then you are storing up problems for the future. You need to think about your rules.

Sometimes you will catch yourself turning into your mother or father, saying things to your children that your parents or carers said to you, and then later on you will wonder why you said it because you don't even really believe it yourself and didn't think it was fair when you were a child!

Maybe it was a parents' rule that you disagreed with when you were a child, and now you find yourself being as unfair as you felt your parents were. Sometimes your parents were right and sometimes they were not. Times change and old rules become pointless over time.

When I was a boy I went to school in short trousers a tie and wore a cap. Everybody did then, now the rules are different. If I had sent my boy to school like that I would have deserved every bit of criticism I would have received. You need to make sure that a rule is enforceable. There is no point having a rule or fighting a battle that you will never win. Enforcing an unreasonable rule is impossible.

Your rules have to make sense. Before you get into an argument with a child who disagrees with the rules you have to ask yourself why it is a rule. Is it a rule just because it is one you were brought up with, something carried on from your parents? You also have to ask if it is a realistic rule, does it fit with the age of the child and the culture you live in. You then have to ask if it is enforceable, there is no point having a rule that a child will never be able to stick to.

Make sure that you actually believe your rules, that you believe they are fair given your child's age and the way people live nowadays. Unfair and harsh rules will always be broken so there is no point having them, they will just cause stress. If you have a rule you must be willing to enforce it or it is not a rule, just a wish or a dream and we all know how often wishes come true.

You have to develop rules based on what you believe about family life and how old the children are. Your rules will change all the time and children of different ages will have different rules.

### **Think about your rules**

- Does it make sense in today's world?
- Do I really believe it is important?
- Is it realistic?
- Is it fair?
- Can I make it happen?

### **Thoughts about Smoking**

Some people who do not want their children to smoke will allow them to smoke at home because they rather they did it there than somewhere else. I think this depends if you smoke yourself. I don't smoke any more and my rules are that I do not want my child to smoke, my angle is that I know that you do it but rather you didn't and I certainly don't want you to do it in our home. It is not acceptable. This becomes rather difficult if you smoke yourself. If you do smoke then you can't blame your children if they choose to smoke, you need to set an example.

### **Teenagers**

Teenagers need different rules from younger kids. Being a teenager is about learning to be more independent. They will probably seem to listen to their friends more than you. They are still listening to you but they pretend not to. You are old and not cool, and it is certainly not cool to be seen to care about your parents. They do not want to look childish and they are practising being an adult. Let them do this.

They have learned your rules by now and go in search of other people's rules. They talk a lot with their friends so that they can learn whether their lives are really the same as other people's lives, they are finding out about other people's lives, different ways of living. This is the times they might to start experimenting with sex, drugs, and alcohol. This is a time they will flatly refuse to do as you ask. For many parents this is the most challenging time of all because kids will often not seem to care at all about your feelings.

They do care, they still love you but they are trying to be their own people. Your job now is to be consistent, clear and there for them. You WILL worry about them because of course they are your babies, but in reality they are no longer babies, they are their own people.

You need to carry on with the praise, carry on with the rules although they might be different rules now. **You will be worried**, every parent of a teenager is worried. There is very little that you can do about that. Your job now is to give advice when they are willing to accept it and keep quiet when they are not.

### **Plan some of your rules**

You need to know what your rules are. If you do not know what they are, then *they* won't know what they are and will break them all the time without knowing. That will really get on your nerves. So make your life and their life easier by having some clear rules. You need to have a plan.

I would like you to write a list of rules for your children. I have started you off with a few of my own.

1. Children should be in the house for dinner at 7pm. In return I will provide them with a healthy meal at that time.
2. I do not want to hear children swearing (let's be realistic, they are going to learn to swear at school, the best I can hope for is that they don't do it around me). In return I will not verbally abuse them or swear around them.
3. **Everybody** will speak to each other with respect.
4. **Everybody** will say please and thank you.
5. My children will do as they are asked. In return I am happy to discuss whether this is fair or not in a calm way. I am in charge, I will try to make sure that what I am asking is fair but I will have the final say and if children refuse, then I will apply some **consequences** (see rule 5)
6. Children will do their fair share of family chores, like looking after their own stuff, their own rooms, putting their laundry in the basket and washing up after dinner for pocket money. In return I will organise their washing and pay their pocket money, clothe and feed them and provide them with a nice clean well furnished room with some privacy.

You will see that if they do something, I do something. It is only fair and as I said before one of the biggest complaints from children is that something is not fair.

Write your rules in this box:

The rules:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.

Sometimes as your child gets older, you have to change your rules. My son is now working, I expect him to be responsible for coming home and going to bed at a time that he can manage, I don't have a coming home time or a bed time for him any more, but I still expect him not to swear and I still expect him to do his share of washing dishes. If he isn't in when we eat he can sort his own food out when he gets in, (I am not his slave to cook for him whenever he likes). If he is lucky there will be leftovers.

### **Rules need to be agreed**

Now unfortunately some of my rules may not be the same as my wife's rules so if I try to apply them to the children she will end up on their side and argue against me. That means that the rule does not work any more. If she chooses to do that in front of the children I will lose all of my authority and the children will very quickly learn to divide and conquer. If you have a partner you have to agree on rules or the rules will fail. You need to discuss with your partner what the rules are and do it when the children are not there. If you cannot agree on a rule, you might as well give up on it.

### **Negotiating rules**

With some rules you can negotiate with your child, catch them on a good day and ask them if they feel the rules are fair. If they think some of them are unfair, see if you can find some common ground, and change the rule so that you both agree it is fair. Don't be a complete bully and impose a set of rules that are just there for your benefit. The focus has to be on creating a calm, relaxed and loving family home and caring for the child's future. Rules are there for their benefit.

Sometimes they might see one or more of your rules as unfair but you have to stick to them because they are about safety or the child's future. Then you have to remember that you are in charge. Tell them why you have that rule. See if you can get them to agree that you have a duty to protect them and prepare them for the future.

For instance being in at a certain time for dinner means that you know where they are and that they are safe. It also means that they get fed properly, they feel part of the family, and you know they are safe. If they are not going to be able to be there, they should let you know before you have to think about calling the police.

### **Setting an example**

If you are going to have rules in your home, if you are going to create a nice homely friendly loving and warm atmosphere, you need to have rules for your own behaviour too and you need to stick to them.

You can start by sticking to the rules yourself. Don't shout, swear at your kids or do anything you don't want them to do. If you want them to stop losing their temper, swearing and shouting but you carry on losing your temper, shouting and swearing at your kids, then you are just being a bully, being unfair and we know how kids hate unfairness, they will refuse to change and they will resent your hypocrisy.

Earlier on I told you about Rubbish in = Rubbish out. What you do as an adult affects not just your life, but also your children's life, their behaviour, their future chances, the environment you live in and the feel of your home. Love is about being, about communicating, about sharing what you have.

Lots of research shows that in environments where violent or abusive behaviour is allowed, people become more violent. Football fans in pubs that permit aggressive behaviour have been shown to become more aggressive and violent. When they go into pubs that do not allow such behaviour they calm down. People feed off each other, if one person is

seen to get away with bad behaviour, then others will feel they have the right to take part.

Young people brought up in an atmosphere where misbehaviour of any sort is acceptable are far more likely to repeat those patterns. It is a parent's role to set the standard, which their children should try to attain. Misbehaviour is something that becomes normal over time. People doing it come to see it as normal and so do the people around them.

I believe that watching violence on television and video games and reading about it in stories brings violence into the home. You will not stop children from being interested in violence, because in an immature mind (of any age), violence means power, children have very little power and sometimes they crave it. Cartoons are full of comedy violence, video games are full of the kind of violence that young people fantasise about perpetrating on those who cross them, rap music is full of sexual violence and films bring in more violence.

This stuff will pour into your home and there is very little you can do to stop it. But my philosophy is not to try to build barricades and dams that people will try to push against. If you are forceful and show power, people will resist. I like to divert the flow and so I do two things, I make sure that my children know that all that violence is immature and childish and I make sure that they have as much power as I can safely give them.

**Real power is the ability to make choices; if you have no choice then you have no power.**

You can give your children power by making sure that they have choices about their future. You can do this through communication and education, through giving them guidelines, rules and consequences, through spending time together with other people and giving them a variety of experiences, through doing things with them, camping, going for walks, even just around your area, talking together and sharing.

It may sound at first like I want everybody to be bland and middle class and if you follow the rules you will all turn out rubber stamped children. Nothing could be further from the truth. Rules like this give people choices and having choices in life is real power. You can still be an individual, still be different from the crowd if you want to be and still have fun, in fact you will have more fun.

**Moods are catching**



Loads of research tells us that if you are in a certain mood, other people will pick it up. So if your child is in a bad mood, you need to make sure that you don't get infected.

Behaviour snowballs. That means if any type of behaviour is allowed to carry on, it gets bigger and bigger and more and more people join in. When one person starts doing something, eventually other people will start doing it, they can't help it and don't even realise they are doing it most of the time. Like when you quietly sing a tune to yourself and suddenly you notice that people around you are singing it too without realising that you started it. It works slowly and there are ways to speed it up, but the most important thing is for you to be respectful and calm and adult even when other people are not.

Remember that if you are in a bad mood, depressed, angry or frustrated, you need to stay in control of it or get rid of it. Your feeling is your responsibility and nothing to do with anybody else. You may feel that it is somebody else's fault that you feel like this, but really it was your reaction to them that is the problem.

**You can choose to react in a way that makes it better and increases the amount of warmth in your family.**

**Or**

**You can choose to react in a way that makes things worse and reduces the amount of warmth in your family.**

It is up to you. Your feelings are your responsibility. At the very least you can find a happy place in your head and go there instead of choosing the unhappy place. You can decide not to get angry or upset. **Every decision you make in your life is a choice between love and unhappiness. Choose love.**

Remember, what you focus on gets bigger. If you don't sort your attitude out first, you can start a whole chain reaction off with everybody getting infected with each other's bad feelings, they get bigger and the whole thing ends in misery.

- If you pretend to smile, stretch a great big fake smile, a funny thing happens, your body releases chemicals that make you feel happier.
- Try it, hold smile for about half a minute.
- And then stop. You will carry on smiling for a while. With practice it gets longer and more powerful.

## Rule 4

### BEING ASSERTIVE – apply your rules

It is one thing having some rules. Anybody can sit down and think of a wish list, it is quite another to get people to stick to them. So rule number 4 is to be assertive.

When setting the goals for the child's behaviour you need to be assertive and very very clear about what you want to happen. For example don't say:

*'Oh I wish you would keep this place tidy'.*

That is just a wish, no fairy is going to appear and make it come true. You need to be clear what you want, who you want to do it and when you want it done. For instance:

*'I want you to put your toys away now please'.*

Remember that what you focus on gets bigger so talk about what you want rather than the bad behaviour that you don't want.

If you say: 'I don't want you staying up all night David' He will just say: 'Yes mum' and then he will just carry on watching the TV.

You need to be clearer than that, for instance, you would be clear about what you want and say:

*'David, I want you to go upstairs now, use the toilet, wash your hands and face, clean your teeth and get into bed'.*

Instead of getting into an argument you could say:

*'David I want you to do it now please and we will talk about why it isn't fair later'.*

It is very important that you stay really calm, you do not shout, lose your temper, get into an argument or discussion or hit the child; don't let them suck you into childish behaviour.

When you speak, make eye contact. You may want to gesture or point and if things have not gone too far you can gently touch the child to keep their attention, especially a younger child, for example by putting

your hand on the child's shoulder and looking into their eyes and coming down to their level to keep their attention while you say:

*'David I would like you to sit at the table and eat your dinner please'.*

Young people will often think that they are more clever than you are. Some of them will be. They will try to sidetrack you, to send you off on another track. When all you want is to get them to sit at the table and eat their dinner, you end up in an argument about what their friend Stacy got for Christmas. They will try to get you to talk about something else, blame somebody else and generally try to get you away from what you are saying. When they do this, they prolong the argument, change the subject, confuse you and try to get away with it. They can wear you down. All that happens is that you both end up arguing and then feeling bad.

They do not do this deliberately, younger people find it hard to focus on one thing at a time and so they will bring out all their anger and resentment and throw everything into the pot. Eventually nobody knows what they are disagreeing about any more. This is a sign of their immaturity. A sign of your maturity is that you will stick to the point (or try to).

Do not get into an argument with your child. You need to stay on track with the behaviour you want, for instance:

*'David I would like you to sit at the table and eat your dinner and then we can talk about the other things that are bothering you'.*

In other words you are staying in control of the situation rather than letting the child sideline you and take control from you.

Use the 'I Messages that I showed you earlier in this book to make the child connect with your feelings and to let them know that this is not just a silly rule or an order, but something that would help them to feel more part of the family. Say things like:

*'I would like it if you calmed down a little bit now please'.*

You can make this even more powerful by adding why you would like it, for example:

*'I would like you to clear the table please so that I can get on with doing the ironing'.*

### **The Broken Record Technique**

Here it is at last, the single most powerful way of asserting yourself, staying in control of your feelings, not losing your temper, behaving like an adult and letting people know what you want. If you do this your children have the opportunity of staying in control as well because you don't end up screaming at each other, calling each other names or being nasty. Everybody stays calmer and the situation can remain loving.

When they try to ignore you or sideline you or change the subject or try to get you angry or start shouting at you, you turn into a parrot or a broken record. Just keep calmly repeating what you want, like a broken record.

*'David I would like you to sit at the table and eat your dinner and then we can talk about the other things that are bothering you'*

*'David I would like you to sit at the table and eat your dinner and then we can talk about the other things that are bothering you'*

*'David I would like you to sit at the table and eat your dinner and then we can talk about the other things that are bothering you'*

Try to use the same words each time so that the child will realise they there is no point trying to sidetrack you. They will still try to take you off script, to change your plan. But stick to it. You have seen politicians on television do this all the time. Many Politicians are masters of communication, they take control, lead the conversation in the direction they want it to go and talk only about what they want to talk about. You may or may not like or trust them but they certainly know how to get their point across.

This is like a dripping tap that eventually wears away solid rock when the thunderstorm could not change it.

If you stick to your script, eventually the children will either do what you ask in which case you can praise them:

*'Thanks for listening to me David; I'm pleased that you managed to be adult and stay calm. Now perhaps we can have a proper chat about what is really bothering you...'*

If you carry on with your broken record technique and they are really not going to do what you ask, they will storm out in disgust. If they storm out they will have learned that starting an argument or sidetracking you is not going to work. Storming out is a tactic designed to make you feel bad. They are rejecting *you* and turning their back on *you*. Trying to isolate you from *their* pack.

They think they are punishing you. Some parents will feel bad at this point and worry about where the child has gone, how they are feeling, what they are getting up to. This is exactly what they want you to do. If you feel bad they have the upper hand.

But think about it, the head of a pride of lions would not go bowing his head after the young cub that wants to take control. They would allow the cub to storm off and they would realise that what the cub was really doing, without realising it was isolating themselves. That is why when the youngster comes back they usually have their heads bowed and are ready to accept your authority.

They will come back later when they have calmed down and have to discuss the issue. This is time to praise them again for dealing with their feelings and coming to you to discuss it calmly.

For example:

*'It is really nice now that things have calmed down, let's have a gown up chat about what is really bothering you'.*

If you follow this script all the way through to its end result, if you keep doing it every time they challenge you, eventually they will learn there is no point behaving that way any more, they will stop challenging you as soon as they hear you repeat your request and if your rules are fair you will get the behaviour you want.

### **Diverting**

One very powerful tactic to use with a young child that is only mildly misbehaving, that is not eating their dinner or messing about is to divert their attention. It is classic to feed a distracted child by pretending the spoon is a train and playing choo-choo trains.

Diverting can be used with much older kids. When they come in screaming and swearing that you went into their room you stay calm and talk about something completely different, e.g.:

*'Did you see Eastenders last night?'*

Or when you are taking a pair of scissors off a toddler who screams when you take them away, you replace them with something else or hold up a favourite game.

The idea is to change their script, and to offer something else instead. Instead of confronting the behaviour head on, you sidestep and allow the energy to go somewhere else. It is like judo, the power of the opponents attack is used to defeat them.

Angry behaviour, just like sadness, depression, fear and other strong emotional states have a lot in common with trance states. A trance state is a kind of attention that goes round and round and fuels itself with its own attention. The way to break trance states is to divert attention away from them, get people to focus on something else, because what you focus on gets bigger.

Children sometimes just lose control, they are not happy when they lose control and often appreciate help to stay in control.

### **Staying cool**

The most important thing that you can do is to stay cool, stay calm when dealing with behaviours that you want to change. If you get emotionally involved, you are just joining in, instead of doing anything about it.

### **Getting support**

It is important if you have a partner, that they support you. You need to spend time together without the children to negotiate what the rules are. If you do this and come to some agreement, then your rules will be more powerful and you will have help in managing your children. If your children find out that the adults have different rules from each other they will play one of you off against the other, get away with murder and cause bad feeling and arguments between you and your partner.

## **Rule 5**

### **Back up your words with actions**

Sometimes of course your children will not do as you feel they should.

Sometimes it may feel that your child really does not want to be part of your pack, does not want your praise, couldn't give a damn about it or about you or your rules. They will want to assert their independence and they may do this by trying to make you feel inferior, inadequate or just a bad parent. Making you feel like a bad person is often the only way they can win.

For most children, actions speak louder than words. If they misbehave you need to quickly think about how you are going to back up your words with actions. Ask yourself now 'what do I do if they don't listen?'

#### **Consequences**

The key to managing all behaviour is consequences; there are consequences for good behaviour and consequences for bad behaviour.

Consequences for going to school and getting an education might be a good job, college, better income, a nicer home, and a nicer life with nicer people. No matter how angry your child may be, what they really want is a life that they enjoy, they want to be with good people because good people are better than bad people.

Lets face it; many teenagers will look for darkness. Being a teenager can be emotionally painful, and many will express their pain in their clothes, their music. These are not things to worry about. It is a tribal thing; they use these things so they can spot others that they might be friends with. Often such expressions are a sign of a good imagination, a clever mind, and a creative and thoughtful personality.

What you should worry about is behaviours that are criminal, harmful, uncaring, selfish, greedy or dangerous to self or others.

Consequences for not listening to people who know better might be accidents and injury caused by ignorance. Other consequences might be bad decisions in life, wrong choices leading down paths that end up in misery. Of course we all have to make our own mistakes but you can teach children that their choices have an outcome.



You need to teach young people that what they choose to do makes a difference to their lives and the lives of others. Their actions have a consequence - sooner or later. This gives them a sense of responsibility, a sense of empowerment. You wouldn't give a teenager the keys to a 190mph motorbike without first teaching him how to ride it properly without killing himself. People will always take risks, but if they do not know they are taking risks then a tragedy is all the more likely. You teach people this vital skill by making sure that there are consequences for their behaviour. Good behaviour has good consequences, bad behaviour has unpleasant consequences.

When a child refuses to abide by the rules. Or when a child says that your rules are not fair, you have to think quickly. Is it worth the fight?

Sometimes you might believe that no matter what you do, you are not going to win this one, you have to ask yourself is it worth the fight. If you are not going to win you are just going to end up feeling bitter and angry and hating your child's behaviour.

- Is it really a fair rule or can you re-negotiate the rule to something the child will agree to?
- Is it a realistic rule – in other words will you ever be able to enforce it?
- Is it really worth the battle?
- Is the argument about the rule worse than the effects of breaking the rule?
- Is it a reasonable rule – in other words is it fair and appropriate to the child's age and abilities?

If they are clearly bullying and trying to get away with it, if they are giving you a really hard time and trying to get you into an argument, if you really feel that your rule is fair but they still refuse to stick to it, you have to avoid stress, avoid the fight and instead change tack and apply consequences.

Simply say:

*'Look, that is the behaviour I expect, you are choosing not to abide by the rules in this family and instead you are choosing the consequences.'*

**These are the rules about consequences.**

- Choose a consequence that will be effective.
- Give the child a choice.
- Be consistent.
- Forgive and forget when the issue is over.

When you discipline your children, stand your ground, even when they test you and try to make you change your mind. Do not back down if they cry or yell etc.

**Here is a list of possible consequences:**

- Time out - being sent to sit on the stairs – isolate them from the pack – **the number one consequence.**
- Grounding, not being allowed out to mix with their friends, that is isolation from the pack as well.
- Withdrawal of a privilege or special treat.
- Missed trip out
- No pocket money

The very best way of deciding on consequences is to do it with the children at another time. Ask them what they think would be a fair punishment and write them down here. I have given you a couple to start with.

1. If you don't do your washing up you won't get any pocket money.
2. You will be sent to your room for time out. This will be limited to half an hour.
3. You will be grounded for the rest of the day.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.

Never use violence. Apart from being dangerous it also teaches your child that violence is the proper response to not getting what they want.

Just like rewards, **consequences need to be immediate.** Making a child wait to be punished is torture, it is unfair and it doesn't help. It teaches your child that it is okay to torture. The child does not develop the link in their mind between the bad behaviour and the punishment and so they just brood and wait and learn to hate you and think about how they can get you back. Immediate consequences are often seen by most children as fair.

**Time out**

There is no point grounding a child for a month. They won't believe you, you will find it hard to stick to and they will resent you every day until you

let them out, so increasing arguments and bad feelings. Make the punishment immediate, make it short and get it over with, it works much better that way, prevents resentment breeding and has a real impact.

Isolation, time out is the preferred consequence, especially for a younger child. Put them in their room for five minutes. Sit outside the door and hold it closed if you have to, but whatever you do, do not speak to them. Wait a few minutes until they have calmed down then you can go in and say:

*'I am pleased that you have calmed down, are you ready to come and join the family again?'*

This is exactly what animals do in the wild, If you get a chance to watch a film called 'The Horse Whisperer' you will see a horse trainer teaching wild horses to behave by using exactly the same technique, ignoring the horse until it decides to behave and do what he wants it to do, horses used to be thrashed into submission.

### **Giving choices**

I always like to give people choices. I get my kids to help in the house by giving them the choice between two jobs:

*'Right, I need you two to help me today, there are lots of jobs to do, I am going to be, shopping, cooking dinner, hanging out the washing, dusting, tidying my bedroom, washing the clothes, you can either do the washing up or vacuum the living room.'*

When I say something like this it lets them know that I am a busy person who does a lot of things, it gives them a choice between two jobs I have chosen and it gives them the opportunity to choose the job they think is the easiest or dislike the least. They think they have got away with something.

When I am applying consequences or making a punishment I also often offer a choice:

*'I am sorry that you did that, it made life difficult for all of us. Either I can take your playstation away for a day or you can stay in for the rest of the day, which would you prefer?'*

If I do this, if the child is able to choose a punishment, this means that the punishment is more likely to happen. They take responsibility for making everybody's life harder. It is important that they accept the consequences and you do not get into an argument about them. They

might say 'neither' and you can say: well if you don't choose, I will choose for you. Give them another chance, then choose: 'Right, *'I'm taking your playstation away for the day'* they could just reply: 'I don't care'. And you might get sucked into responding that they should care. This is pointless. Don't argue, just do it.

### **Changing Particular behaviours**

If your child has particular behaviours that you want to change. For instance, swearing, spitting, staying out late, refusing to go to bed or school etc. you need to focus on these things, set a goal to change them. One or two at a time.

If you have a partner, get together with them and develop a plan that includes:

- The behaviours you want to change.
- The consequences of misbehaviour.
- How you will increase good behaviour.
- How you will look after each other and stay strong. (e.g. by taking turns and by being in agreement with each other)

Support positive behaviour by using praise, special rewards and privileges. Create a balance, set firm limits but praise and reward for being good.

At first reward every time they do as you ask  
As they get into the habit, reward less often

### **A word about being an adult**

You may feel that some of the language I ask you to use with your children sounds very 'grown up' or perhaps unfriendly. There is a reason for this. Your children may be very close, you love them to bits, you spend a lot of time together doing things, sharing space and time, chatting, just like friends. None of that will change. But they are your children first and you are responsible for them. You are an adult and sometimes you have to use your authority.

If you have brought your children up to feel that you are friend and have no authority, when you first start doing this they will try to make you feel guilty and accuse you of being like a teacher or a policeman and try to make you believe that they feel unloved. Let me reassure you that while they may at first be confused because the game has changed and they suddenly have lost some authority, they will quickly come to understand that you are an adult and a loving parent who has the right to some authority. They will very soon feel a lot happier because you will argue less

and so the feeling of love in the house will have got much bigger. Of course they will not thank you for this, when they are twenty years old with a decent job and a happy life, they might thank you, but not before.

Sometimes a child's behaviour is affected by things outside. Something happens that makes the child misbehave. It could be a food, an interaction with a particular person; they could be difficult at certain times of day. It can help to chart this behaviour to see if there is any pattern.

## Rule 6

### Look after yourself

Being assertive is not always easy. Sometimes it is scary and inside you might be thinking that you can't do it and nobody will take any notice of you.

Let me tell you that this nervous feeling is all on the inside, you feel like that because somehow your natural strength and good feelings about yourself have been crushed, cramped and not allowed out. Life can do this to you; it sneaks up on you until one day you can hardly even speak of the things you want out of life.

Now if you are feeling ground down, afraid of speaking up you need to build up your confidence. There is a simple and quick way to do this, I call it **'Fake it 'til you Make it'**. You see most people do not know how you are feeling inside. They are too wrapped up in their own world to even think about how you are feeling, so if you pretend to be your favourite actor and pretend to be confident and just say the words as if you were confident, everybody will believe that you are confident and they will think that you mean it. You have to fake it and sound like you mean it or people will pick up on your uncertainty. But if you say the words with enough conviction, people will get the message. After you have done it a couple of times and been astounded by the result, the confidence will just come flooding in.

Being assertive is not all about shouting people down and getting your own way, it is about expressing how you feel in a calm way, staying in control of yourself without arguing or shouting, if you can do this, you are the boss. Bosses tell the people what they want clearly and calmly and they usually get what they want, non-bosses whine and complain and argue and fret. So be the boss.

It is normal that some children are harder to parent and pushier than others and it is not easy having to defend and enforce your rules all the time. You are the most important thing in your child's life right now so you have to be strong enough to turn them into decent and successful people. That means that you are very very important. They rely on you for everything.

It is childish to get your own way by being dishonest, violent, using harsh words, bullying, sulking, being rude, being aggressive, being unpleasant,

ignorant and selfish. These are not the tools of a leader; they are the tools of a child and doomed to fail eventually.

Think about the people you admire the most, the most grown-up, in-control, cleverest people. Do they behave like children? How do you think they learned to behave like adults? It was no accident. They learned to be like this, we all start off as needy self-centred children. Every single one of us. Growing up is about learning to be independent and show self-control. You can have self-control and you can teach your children to be have it too.

If you really pay attention to these things then it WILL pay off and whether you decide because of this to take up yoga or go swimming or spend more time with friends it will be because it is what you need to be doing right now, in balance with all the other things you need to be doing right now. You are the expert on you and there would be no point me telling you to take a relaxation class or join a dance group because I do not know the full picture of your life. Only you do.

Do you know what I especially love about kids, it is their optimism and enthusiasm, they assume that they are wonderful and everybody should know it, they assume they are special people. And you know what - they are, and so are you. So just to remind you that you are a wonderful expression of the beauty and mystery of the universe I want you pick the book up, go off to a mirror on your own, right now, yes, go on, and holding this book I want you to force a great big stupid smile, hold it for a moment then look at yourself and read the words below:

*'I am a wonderful expression of the beauty and mystery of this fantastic universe. I deserve to be happy and my children deserve to be happy. I love them and I love you.'*

Done? Okay go back to where you were and read on, or better still, read the words above again, smile again, go and make a cup of tea and get a chocolate biscuit before you sit down and read on, you deserve it, this is the first day of the rest of your life and you are taking steps to making it a good one.

## **Food**

Many food additives have been shown to affect children's behaviour. Unfortunately the kinds of additives that do this are the ones most likely to be found in designer foods created for children, colourful sweets, and fizzy drinks, fruit flavoured juice drinks and squashes, Breakfast cereals, biscuits and cakes, children's party food and so on. Many of these highly

processed foods are so far away from the real foods that they pretend they are related to that there are little more than chemically flavoured and coloured concoctions based on liquidised and boiled offal.

The effects on children of the flavourings and colourings in these foods have been shown to range from tiredness and inattention at school, inability to relax or get to sleep, easily distracted, lack of concentration and hyperactivity, headbanging, full blown tantrums, violence and abuse in children who without these things in their diet turn into normal cuddly and loving children. They can also make worse the symptoms of Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder, Dyslexia, Eczema, Aspergers syndrome and numerous other childhood behavioural problems. It is no coincidence that these problems are increasing in our society along with the increasing use of designer foods.

Suspect chemicals are found in all kinds of foods including over the counter medicines but are most likely to be found in foods designed for children. Cheap colourful foods that are bulked out by chemicals and fats. For that reason I advise never to feed your children foods that are sold as children's foods. Feed them proper adult food. Too many sweet things will make your kids fat, ill behaved, stupid and unhealthy. Sugary foods release their energy all in one go and can cause hyperactivity. We have all seen children's parties where the kids are nearly running around the walls screaming, this is due partly to the permissive party environment and partly to the rich sugary foods we stuff into them as treats at such times.

This means that you have to read labels.

Most children eat far less than half of the recommended five portions of fruit and vegetables a day. The five portions recommended in the UK is really on the low side, in parts of Europe they recommend eight portions.

### **Some food facts**

One Mars Bar has 280 calories, 43g of sugar and 6.4g of saturated fat. For a 10-year-old boy this is three quarters of his maximum recommended intake of sugar and a third of the maximum for saturated fat.

3 Slices of some breads have the same fat content as a Mars bar. Fat is put into bread to make it fluffier and last longer on the shelves of the supermarket. Bread never used to have fat in it at all and was considered a healthy whole food, bread does not need fat. White sliced bread is not healthy - read the labels, many white sliced breads now contain 2-3% fat.



One packet of cheese and onion crisps will provide a three year old with almost all of their recommended daily intake of salt.

You already know which foods are good for you and which are not, in case you are feeling ground down or not 100% sure, here is a simple list of good and bad foods.

### **Bad foods:**

Chicken nuggets, burgers, chips, crisps, anything off a special children's menu in a pub, service station or café, Anything loaded with salt, sugar or fat, anything loaded with colourings, fizzy pop, fruit drinks that don't have real 100% fruit in them.

Anything that has been processed to look like something else, for example: chicken should look like chicken, meat should look like meat. When the factories process food they fill it with chemicals and scrap food that you would not eat if you saw it. This is because the things they stuff processed food with are cheaper than decent food. Salt, sugar, water, fat and offal are cheap ingredients that can really make a tasty looking burger, sausage or nugget.

Now I am not saying that you should never touch any of this stuff, let's face it, nothing is as comforting as a bag of chips when you really feel like it. But at least you know what goes in a bag of chips; most of the stuff in the list above is best avoided completely. A simple rule is if you cannot clearly see what it is made of; don't ever put it in your mouth.

The simpler your food is, the better it is for you and your kids.

### **Good foods**

Food falls into three distinct groups. **Protein** which the body needs because that is what you are made of and cells need to replace themselves. **Vegetables and fruit** provide minerals and vitamins that keep you healthy and functioning well, and also contain fibre to keep your digestive tract working well. **Carbohydrates** give you energy to burn all the other things and keep you going throughout the day with energy being released at a steady pace rather than all in one go.

It is a bit more complicated than that, each group has some of the properties of the other groups but a simple rule to make sure of a balanced meal is to eat a proportion of each of these groups for each meal. To get a balanced meal, half of each plate should be vegetable; the other half should be split equally into carbohydrate and protein.

**Protein** should make up about 25% of each meal.

**Carbohydrate** should make up about 25% of each meal.

**Vegetables** and fresh fruit should make up 50% of each meal.

Here is a list of ingredients that you could consider choosing from:

**Protein:**

Beans and pulses, Tofu, Cheese, Milk, Yoghurt, Eggs. Lean unprocessed Meat (e.g. not burgers), Unprocessed Fish

Unprocessed Chicken. Unprocessed means that it hasn't been messed about with, mixed with fillers or turned into burgers, nuggets, fingers, animal shapes and so on unless the packet says 100% whole meat or something similar.

**Carbohydrate:**

Starchy things like Pasta, Potato, Rice, Porridge Oats, Barley, Lentils, and other grains, Bread.

**Fruit and vegetables:**

Choose whatever is in season and good value. I always look at the label and buy produce as fresh as possible and as local as possible. I also like to buy organic if I can so I am not eating pesticides. If I was choosing apples and I had a choice of organic apples flown from the USA or non-organic local apples I would buy the local ones. Partly for reasons of the massive amount of pollution caused by air traffic, partly because the local ones support local growers and partly in the hope they will be fresher, they should also be cheaper.

Always wash fruit and vegetables very well to get rid of pesticides, these have been shown to build up in the human body, and remember that in most fruits and vegetables the vitamins are concentrated near the skin so peel them only if you have to. Avoid buying salads in sealed bags. These are often washed in bleach in very poor conditions, the bags are usually filled with a gas designed to prevent salads going brown or rotten and have been linked to a large number of food poisoning cases.

Of course if you fill your fridge and larder with the stuff I recommend, you have to actually cook instead of just warming things up, you end up eating a lot of home made soups, stews, pies, stir fries and so on. Having somebody spend time in the kitchen turns it into the hub of the home, and kids absolutely love it, they feel proud to come from a home where somebody cooks and they can learn to cook with you and you can start them off on a lifetime of healthy living.

If you have a carrot in the fridge and a chocolate cake in your fridge, the child will take the chocolate cake.

### **Some final thoughts**

What I have been selling you in this book is the idea of creating a home where people care for each other, a home that is warm and loving, that has respectful forms of communication that leave people feeling cared for and accepted. A place where people can be themselves without being ridiculed. A safe family that people are proud to belong to.

Nobody is perfect; nobody gets it right all the time. We all make mistakes. But if you can reduce the emotional temperature by just a couple of degrees, life will be a lot more comfortable. Be realistic, don't expect the world, but do expect safety, love, respect and care (most of the time).

Finally just to end this book I want you to go shopping and buy the following ingredients: crusty brown bread, cheese, onions, some grains either pearl barley, brown rice or lentils, vegetables of any sort that are in season, cheap and local, (carrots, leeks, swede, turnip) a stock cube, a tin of ready cooked red kidney beans and a tin of tomatoes.

When you get back I want you to wash and peel the vegetables and put everything in a large pan, top up with water, put on a tight fitting lid. Bring to boil and then simmer for at least an hour until the grains are soft and plump.

Sit at the table with your family, ladle it into bowls and eat with the crusty bread and the cheese and talk about what went well today.

With Love

Mark Hamer

# A quick reminder of what you have just read.

'The deepest principle in human nature is the craving to be appreciated.'  
William James, Psychologist, (1842 – 1910)

1. If there is a problem with your child's behaviour, **STOP**, think about it and make sure it really is a problem before you do or say anything. It might be a 'should' statement left over from your childhood that isn't relevant any more. We all have 'should' statements: 'children *should* be seen and not heard', 'girls *should* be clean', 'shoes *should* be put away tidily'. All bits of teaching left over that may not be important any more. Why destroy the peace if it is not really a problem? On the other hand you may be over-reacting because you are stressed. If it really matters, then five minutes cooling off period won't do any harm.
2. If you decide that it is a problem. Decide what you want to happen. Ask yourself if it is realistic, can you make it happen? Is it important enough? If you feel that you cannot make it happen, why try? That will only teach the child that he can get away with it. Just say 'It makes me feel unhappy when you do that' then ignore them while they carry on.
3. When you have decided what it is you want to happen say it aloud to your children as clearly as possible. 'I want you to put your night things on and brush your teeth please.'
4. When they ignore you, or argue, or answer back, take no notice of their bad behaviour. Just repeat what it is that you want to happen. Over and over again if necessary, **do not say anything else at all.**
5. Pay no attention to the bad behaviour. Do not argue, do not shout, do not make eye contact, and do not talk to them apart from saying what it is that you want. Do not reward bad behaviour, even by paying attention to it. If a child is behaving badly to get your attention, then ignore it. Do not teach them that bad behaviour is a good way of getting attention. Do not talk about bad behaviour after it is over.
6. Continue to ignore bad behaviour if you can. Make sure that you can make everybody safe, either by removing the people in danger, or removing dangerous objects. Do not speak to him until he calms down. If you can physically remove the child to his or her room without hurting them, do it. Leave them there for no longer than five minutes. Then allow them back into the family.
7. Be a good example. Children learn how to behave by watching their parents. If you scream, shout and swear, they will learn to scream, shout and swear.
8. Pay lots and lots of attention when a child is being good. Show them that good behaviour is a great way of getting the attention they want. You can do the washing up later, play with the kids. Give one to one attention when the child is being good.
9. Give positive comments and attention at least three times as often as you give negative attention or tell the child off. Work hard at remembering to praise your child when s/he is good. This leads them into being good more often. Say things like:
  - 'I like it when you play nicely like that'.
  - 'It makes me happy when you help me by putting your things away.'
  - 'It's great when we get on well together like this isn't it'.
  - 'Thanks for keeping yourself busy just now while I was getting on with the cooking'.

These comments use what are called 'I' messages. When you talk about your feelings it is very powerful.