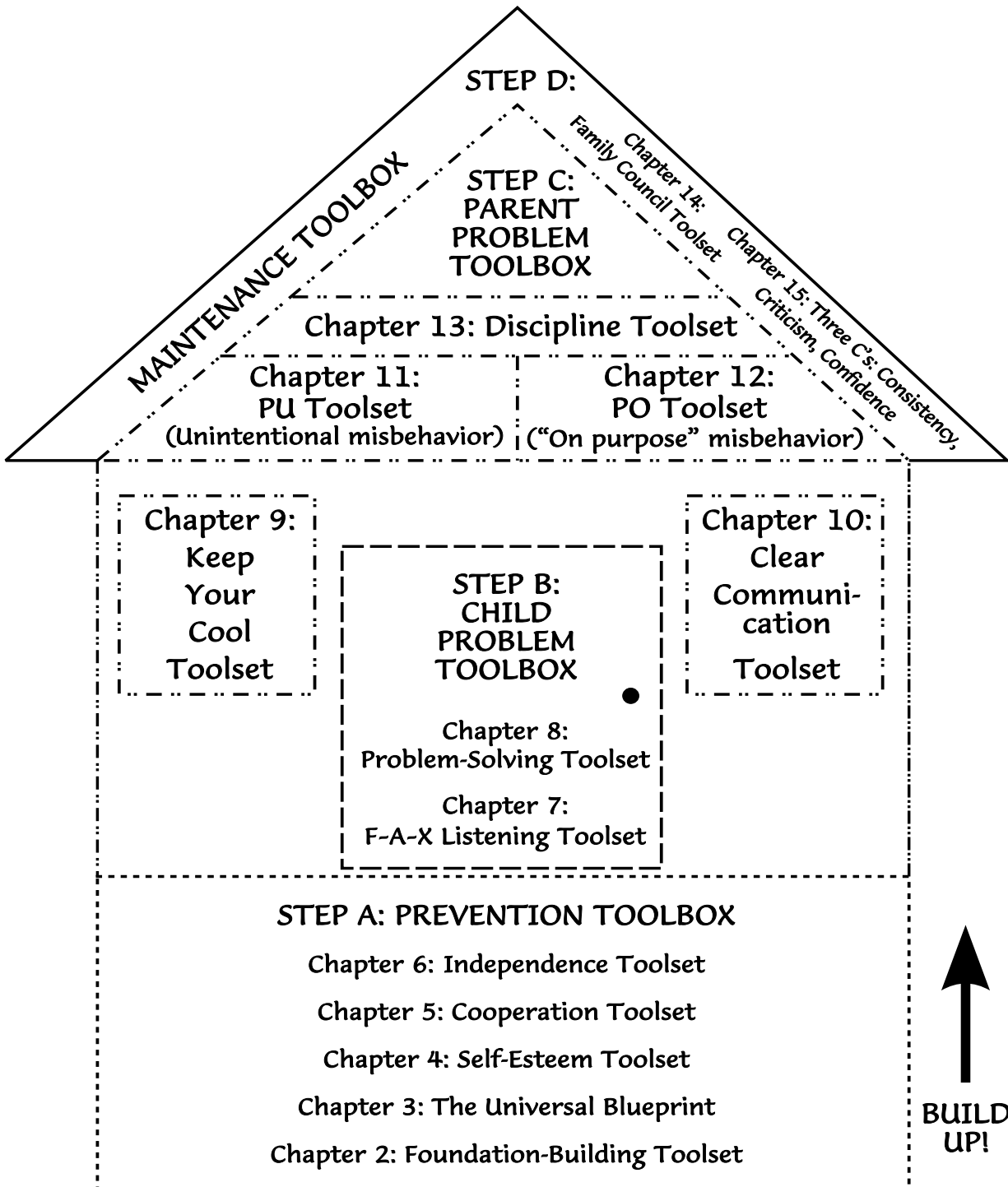


# CHAPTER 1

## TOURING THE PARENT'S TOOLSHOP



## CHAPTER

# 1 TOURING THE PARENT'S TOOLSHOP

*When we want to build a house, we don't call a bunch of workers, give them a pile of wood, and say, "Go to work!" We need a blueprint to follow and skilled workers who know when and how to use specific types of tools to build or repair the house. To build a stable family, parents also need a plan—a blueprint to follow. We need to know how to use several types of parenting tools, when to use them, and how to use them to their maximum effectiveness.*

*The Parent's Toolshop is a comprehensive, step-by-step plan that uses the most effective tools available to parents. Its "Universal Blueprint" helps us build healthy relationships, prevent problems, and respond effectively to situations that occur. Beyond parenting, we can follow this Universal Blueprint and use its skills to improve **any** relationship.*

## ANOTHER PARENTING BOOK?

Of all the jobs and professions in the world, parenting is the most important, difficult, and potentially rewarding. It is the only job that never ends; we are parents 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 12 months a year, every year. Even when children are adults, we are still their parent. We don't make money by having children; we spend it. Our paychecks can't be measured by material standards; they are hugs, thank-you's, smiles, and seeing our child grow and mature. We need skills, not luck, to reach our parenting goals. Yet, despite its importance, parenting is one of few professions that does not require a license, degree, or any special training.

*Anyone* can have a dramatic influence on a child's life because children record every experience, positive or negative, in their memory. Their minds replay these tapes over and over, influencing their entire lives. Thus, each adult who interacts with a child has a profound responsibility to fulfill—yet often few guidelines to follow.

Since the beginning of time, family and friends have been the primary source of parenting advice. Only in the twentieth century have professionals researched child-rearing, educated parents, and developed parenting expertise. While many of us were growing up, parenting pioneers were testing and refining many theories about the different styles of child-rearing. Some techniques provided short-term successes but had negative long-term effects. For over four decades, one general parenting style has proved to be most effective in producing self-sufficient, well-balanced adults and healthy family relationships. Within this style, there are several types of skills parents need to use, and within each skill area there are dozens of options from which to choose.

## Common Problems with Parenting Resources

We are one of the first generations of parents to have a multitude of resources easily available to us. In each of our homes, we can probably find some evidence of parent education—a flyer from a maternity ward, a newspaper advice column, a parenting magazine or book. Throughout my 20-plus years of working with families, and especially after becoming a parent myself, I have read hundreds of these resources. Like many parents, I found a lot of helpful, accurate information, but also had frustrations and concerns. This book is my attempt to correct the following problems with parenting resources:

- **Some books are philosophical, with few practical applications. *The Parent's Toolshop* is practical, not just philosophical.** Chapter 2, "Foundation-Building Toolset," presents a balanced parenting philosophy that is the foundation of effective parenting. Subsequent chapters briefly explain the philosophical basis for each set of tools and why they are more effective than other

common parenting techniques. The bulk of each chapter explains nearly a dozen skills in simple terms and applies each tool to sample situations. Plus, there are opportunities to practice using the special language and actions that are a part of effective parenting.

- **Some authors focus on what *not* to do, without offering positive alternatives. *The Parent's Toolshop* focuses on what parents *can* do.** I promise to avoid telling you *not* to do something unless I offer one or more positive alternatives. We learn the universal guidelines and the options available within those limits. This is how we create individualized plans for our own families.
- **Many books have good ideas, but no one book seems to have them all; they are spread throughout hundreds of resources.** Parents must buy several books and find the good ideas to get all the information they need for an effective parenting plan. ***The Parent's Toolshop* is a one-stop resource that equals dozens of books combined.** It represents ten years of researching literally hundreds of resources. Consequently, it teaches over one hundred practical skills and addresses over one thousand issues or problems parents could face. Best of all, we can use the Universal Blueprint to file ideas from other resources and know how and when to use them most effectively.

*A Graduate's Comment.* *Of all the books and magazines I've devoured regarding parenting skills, this one put them all to shame. I learned more from one chapter in this book than I could have learned from one hundred books put together.* — Debbie Klein

- **Many books discuss only one skill area, one developmental stage, or one type of relationship.** When our children mature or we want to improve an adult relationship, we must read a whole new series of books. Many parenting skills can be slightly adjusted to improve adult relationships. It's less confusing and more consistent to use similar effective relationship skills at work *and* at home to improve *every* area of our lives. **The tools in *The Parent's Toolshop* are useful in any relationship—with children of any age and in adult relationships.**

*A Professional's Comment.* *The Parent's Toolshop* is absolutely excellent. It is appropriate for all human relationships. It is amazing to me how I can see organizations in all this. There's great value in relating to people at work the way we do with families. The tools are very practical, so we can use them every single day at home and at work. — Donna Lehner, lay counselor

- **Books that have many helpful ideas often present them randomly.** This makes it difficult to understand, properly select, and use the skills to their full potential. ***The Parent's Toolshop* organizes parenting tools in a logical step-by-step format that helps us plan the most helpful response to any relationship situation.** The order of the chapters is specific and follows each step of the Universal Blueprint.

*A Professional's Comment.* *I've been teaching parenting classes for almost 30 years and *The Parent's Toolshop* is the best resource I've found. It's so comprehensive, like dozens of parenting books rolled into one. I like the way the toolsets put the whole parenting process into a logical sequence that's so easy to use.* — Millie McCarty, M.A., L.P.C., President & Executive Director, Lighthouse Counseling Inc.

- **Few resources explain how to avoid common misuses or abuses of effective skills.** Some people learn a little about effective parenting skills, but not enough to use them to their full potential or in the most helpful way. **With every tool, *The Parent's Toolshop* explains why, when, and how to use it, and how to avoid common misuses.**
- **Parenting advice is often contradictory.** One book says to do one thing while another says the complete opposite. **Every tool in *The Parent's Toolshop* has passed a stringent screening process.** They are consistent in philosophy, and can be cross-referenced with other reliable parenting resources.

- **Many books teach quick-fix methods that are not effective over time.** We want to choose a parenting plan that resolves current problems *and* helps us reach our long-term parenting goals. **The Universal Blueprint and its tools often provide quick fixes, but more importantly, the long-term results are always positive.** For over 40 years, these tools have helped parents build healthy families, prevent problems, and effectively solve problems that arise. In addition, four years of field testing proved *The Parent's Toolshop* is a highly effective resource for improving parenting skills. Here are the results:
  - From 1992 to 1996, over 2,000 parents and professionals of all backgrounds field tested *The Parent's Toolshop*. Of those, nearly 1,000 parents participated in an eight-week parenting class in the Dayton (Ohio) area, which is a representative cross-section of the cultural, racial, and socioeconomic makeup of the United States. In addition, more than 100 professionals received training in using *The Parent's Toolshop's* Universal Blueprint in their business, teaching, and counseling professions.
  - Almost 900 parents received a pre/post-class skill assessment, using an outcome-focused evaluation tool specifically designed for *The Parent's Toolshop* that assesses participants' knowledge and skill mastery in 11 parenting skill areas.
  - *Every* parent who completed a Parent's Toolshop parenting class (100%) showed improvement in their parenting skills. On a scale of 11 points, the average improvement in skills was 3.13 points, from below the midpoint (5.66) to well in the skillful range (8.67). Demographic research showed skill improvement was consistent, regardless of socioeconomic or other background factors. (Parents who had reading comprehension difficulties showed improvement from classroom participation, not just reading the book.) During a 6-month follow-up assessment, the average graduate not only maintained the post-class skill level, but showed continued improvement.
  - Program evaluations, which determine participant satisfaction, showed 92% rated the program "excellent" (the other 8% rated it "good"), 94% said they had learned new information, and 100% said they'd recommend the program to others.

*A Professional's Comment. Each year, since 1992, our agency receives dozens of requests from agencies and community groups to provide Parent's Toolshop programs to parents of all economic and cultural backgrounds. The programs are very popular and successful in achieving significant parenting skill improvement. The Parent's Toolshop is a helpful resource for people of all skill levels. — Ronald Eckerle, Ph.D., LISW, Executive Director, Catholic Social Services of the Miami Valley*

- **Many books have helpful ideas, but also foster myths or include inaccurate information.** Due to my personal and professional background, I can easily recognize inaccurate but commonly accepted information. ***The Parent's Toolshop* weeds out common myths and misinformation that confuse parents or result in less than effective parenting.** We learn a common language and universal guidelines for evaluating information from other resources so we can recognize inaccurate advice we find in other resources.

To give you a sense of the mixture of accurate and inaccurate information experts give parents today, take the true/false quiz on the next page.

## Myth or Truth?

- \_\_\_\_\_ Parents should attend parenting classes when having problems with their children.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Parent educators tell parents what they are doing wrong and how to raise children the right way.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Whenever parents use an effective parenting skill, they should see it work right away.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Children should not be the center of the family; the parent should.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Democratic parenting is too permissive and only works with certain kinds of children.
- \_\_\_\_\_ It is the parent's job to control children's behavior.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Parents need to immediately react to a problem to effectively resolve it.
- \_\_\_\_\_ When parents stop children's misbehavior, the problem usually goes away.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Parents can encourage children by giving them lots of praise and rewards.
- \_\_\_\_\_ When parents let children know they are proud of them, children feel parents are giving them credit for their accomplishments.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Sometimes it's helpful to offer constructive criticism to help children improve.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Children should obey their parents because they are adults in authority. When children ask "Why should I?" parents only need to say, "Because I said so."
- \_\_\_\_\_ Behavior charts with stars or rewards foster internal motivation.
- \_\_\_\_\_ When parents give children choices, children think they should have a choice about everything.
- \_\_\_\_\_ All toddlers go through a "no" stage; it's a normal part of childhood.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Parents should give children more independence when they show they can handle it.
- \_\_\_\_\_ When children struggle with simple tasks, it helps to say, "You can do it if you try harder."
- \_\_\_\_\_ When children have problems, parents should help solve them.
- \_\_\_\_\_ When children aren't doing their homework, parents should set up a homework schedule, make sure they stick to it, supervise their work, and sign off on it every day.
- \_\_\_\_\_ People get angry because other people and events are out of their control.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Children know how to push their parents' buttons because they program and control them.
- \_\_\_\_\_ When children misbehave, parents should show their disappointment so the children will want to change.
- \_\_\_\_\_ When parents repeatedly tell children to stop misbehaving and they don't stop, parents can assume their children know how to behave better.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Children misbehave to get what they want or sometimes just to get on their parents' nerves.
- \_\_\_\_\_ When misbehaving children need to "learn a lesson," parents should make sure they suffer a little, to drive home their point.
- \_\_\_\_\_ When parents want children to behave, they should threaten to punish the children.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Time-outs should be one minute for every year of age. Children should be isolated in an unpleasant or boring place and not allowed to play.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Parents should call a family meeting when there is a problem.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Every family member votes on decisions in family meetings.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Parents should be consistent. If they say they are going to punish their children, they need to follow through, even if they realize later they overreacted.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Inconsistent parenting is damaging. Effective parenting partners do things the same way.

## WHAT THE PARENT'S TOOLSHOP DOES

*The Parent's Toolshop* and its Universal Blueprint offers parents three major benefits:

1. A *universal plan* for effective parenting.
2. A way to apply this plan in ways that meet the *individual needs* of each individual family, even when these needs (such as personalities or backgrounds) differ from other families or among family members.
3. The freedom for parents to express their *unique personal style*, while using the Universal Blueprint and its tools.

### Universal Purpose

*Building a healthy family is similar to building a stable house. All houses need certain things, no matter where or by whom they are built: a sturdy balanced foundation, protective walls that are not imprisoning, doors and windows for healthy ventilation, repairs to problems in the structure or its contents, and a roof to protect the inhabitants from the harsh outside elements. These are the universal, common factors necessary for quality human shelter.*

Healthy families also have certain universal features:

- A stable foundation of love and respect.
- Flexible boundaries that are protective yet not imprisoning.
- Doorways that invite rather than inhibit helpful communication.
- Outlets for healthy ventilation of feelings and concerns.
- Effective responses to problems that affect the whole family or individual family members.
- A sense of security and togetherness that provides support in times of crisis.

The Universal Blueprint and its tools provide a universal plan for building a healthy family. They offer parents clear guidelines to follow and a means for knowing when they have stepped over the line into ineffective or unhealthy practices.

**You can use the Universal Blueprint and its tools with any age child—and even in adult relationships**—because they are consistent with the universal laws of human behavior, feelings, and thoughts. The tools are so valuable, we want to use them in every relationship and model and teach the skills to children and others.

### Individual Needs

*A house that meets the universal guidelines for quality shelter must also address the specific needs of the people living within. In swampy marshlands, the foundation of a house might be supported by stilts to protect the house from flooding. Still, the stilts must be balanced and sturdy. Many factors influence how a particular house is built. These individual needs must be met while meeting the universal qualities of stability and quality shelter.*

While our families are similar in some ways, they are different in even more. To build a stable family, we need to address these individual needs while following the universal process of effective parenting.

When you look at all the factors that could play out in a particular problem, there are an infinite number of individual problem combinations. Each of these combinations, however, will fit within one of six problem “types” identified with the Universal Blueprint. Once you know which type of problem you are dealing with, it narrows down which group of skills or toolsets you want to use. This is how you take the Universal Blueprint, the universal effective parenting plan, and tailor it to the individual needs of each person in a specific situation at any point in time.

**Within the Universal Blueprint, there are many options (tools) parents can use to meet the individual needs of each family member and each relationship.** In each situation, we use the Universal Blueprint to identify the steps we need to take. At each step, we choose specific tools based on the individual circumstances or people involved.

## Unique Personal Style

*A stable, quality house that meets an individual family's needs differs in one final way—personal style. Whether a simple hut or Tudor mansion, a house is a reflection of the builder's personal taste. Even the interior decorations, whether simple or ornate, reflect the creativity of its dwellers. It's the finishing touch that makes a house a home.*

Each of us has a unique personality; some of us are loud and goofy (like me), others are soft-spoken and reserved. We can each follow the Universal Blueprint's guidelines and still feel comfortable and genuine in our responses and expressions. **We can also use our imagination and resourcefulness to add to or adapt the tools to fit our unique style, while still remaining true to the universal principles.**

## THE UNIVERSAL BLUEPRINT

*Whether building a new house or remodeling an existing home, we start with a plan. What type of house or change do we need? What features are important? What steps do we need to take and in what order?*

When we build or remodel our family we need a plan with clear-cut guidelines. Otherwise, it is confusing to receive too many ideas. Many parents fly by the seat of their pants, learning as they go from trial and error. These parents are more likely to emotionally react to problems rather than follow a plan that gives them the results they want. ***The Parent's Toolshop is the only book available to parents that provides a decision-making guide, organized in a specific logical order that helps us respond effectively to any situation in any relationship.*** We can even add tools from other resources if they fit the universal guidelines in *The Parent's Toolshop*.

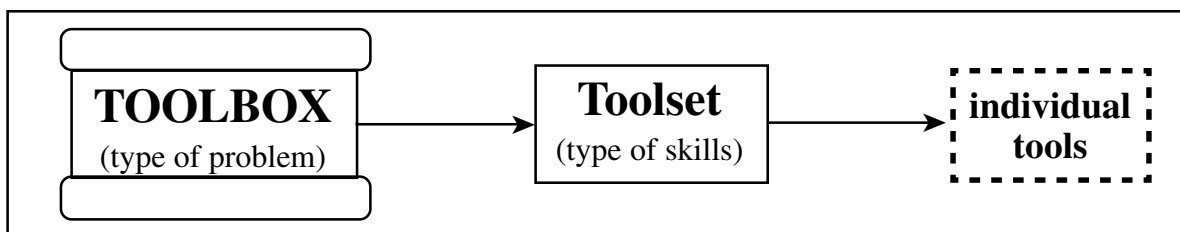
Just as there are four major steps to building houses, there are also four major steps to building healthy relationships and responding to problems. The bold italicized words below show how each step, called a *toolbox*, deals with a different type of problem. The bold and underlined letters show the universal response formula, called PASRR (pronounced "passer"), which we'll learn in Chapter 3, "The Universal Blueprint."

Step	Building a House	Building Healthy Relationships	Universal Blueprint
A	Lay the foundation.	<b><i>Prevent problems from starting or worsening</i></b> by developing positive qualities in self and others and teaching skills.	Prevention Toolbox
B	Build the external structure.	<b><i>When children (or other adults) have a problem, Acknowledge their feelings</i></b> and guide them through the process of finding their own solutions.	Child Problem Toolbox
C	Install the internal systems.	<b><i>When you have a problem, Set limits and express your concerns</i></b> assertively and respectfully. This may include <b><i>Redirecting misbehavior</i></b> and/or <b><i>Revealing discipline</i></b> .	Parent Problem Toolbox
D	Add the finishing touches.	<b><i>Maintain the progress you've made</i></b> in your personal growth and family relationships.	Maintenance Toolbox

Every *second*, each of us is at one of these steps in every relationship we have. The Universal Blueprint shows us the step we are on and which skills we can use. If we follow the steps of the Universal Blueprint, *in order*, it greatly improves the quality and effectiveness of our response. Since the blueprint is a step-by-step process, we start by setting a balanced foundation and work our way up to maintaining progress.

Most parents lack guidelines for choosing the best tool for a particular situation and using it correctly. When problems arise, we often use the first tool that comes to mind, even if it is not the most appropriate. This is like using carpentry tools to fix a plumbing problem, simply because the carpentry tools are the only tools we have or know how to use. *The Parent's Toolshop* is a common-sense, logical method of correctly identifying problem types and choosing an appropriate response. This sets *The Parent's Toolshop* apart from all other parenting resources. This problem-solving method is straight-forward and really quite simple, once we get used to stopping to think before we respond. The more difficult tasks are using the tools to their maximum potential and avoiding common misuses.

A home builder uses electrical tools to install wiring. Similarly, parents use specific groups of skills, called *toolsets*, located in the appropriate toolbox. To prevent problems, for example, we can use any of the toolsets in the Prevention Toolbox—the Cooperation Toolset and the Independence Toolset are just two possibilities. Since there are several ways to build cooperation or independence, each toolset contains about a dozen individual techniques that meet the toolset's special purpose. For example, the Cooperation Toolset houses the individual tools that promote cooperation. Offering children choices within limits is just one of nearly a dozen tools parents can use to build cooperation. Once we know the *type of problem* we are facing (the toolbox) and the *type of tools* we need (toolset), we can choose individual tools based on the needs of the people or situation involved.\*




In summary, the blueprint is the **universal** plan. We can solve certain types of problems (the toolboxes) by following specific steps (the universal PASRR response formula), using different groups of skills (the toolsets). We choose specific tools from these toolsets, based on the **individual needs** of the situation and people involved. If we follow the basic universal guidelines, we can apply the tools in ways that express our own **unique style**.

## The Toolboxes and Toolsets

The Universal Blueprint contains four toolboxes; each addresses four major problem “types.” Each toolbox houses the toolsets (types of tools) that can prevent or best resolve that type of problem. Each toolbox is one of the four major steps of our universal response formula:

- Step A. Prevention Toolbox
- Step B. Child Problem Toolbox
- Step C. Parent Problem Toolbox
- Step D. Maintenance Toolbox

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\*  This tool graphic appears next to individual tools.  
 ► Triangular bullets flag examples of the tools in use.



Together, these four toolboxes contain 12 toolsets. Each chapter (toolset) of *The Parent's Toolshop* describes the following:

- *Why* certain tools are more effective than others.
- *When* to use the tools.
- *How* to use the tools appropriately and avoid common misuses.
- *Which* tools to use when specific problems arise.
- We also *practice* using the tools in real-life situations.

Here is an overview of what we learn on our detailed tour of *The Parent's Toolshop*.

## PREVENTION TOOLBOX

These are the themes of the Prevention Toolbox:

- Prevent problems from starting or worsening.
- Develop skills and positive qualities in self and others that enhance relationships.

**These practical tools are useful *anytime* so we want to use them 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.** First, we learn how to use these tools to prevent problems. In later chapters, we learn how to use these same tools to respond to problems.

We start our tour with Chapter 2, “**Foundation-Building Toolset.**” **The foundations of parenting are the beliefs and attitudes that influence our parenting choices.** First, we set healthy long-term parenting goals, so we know what we are seeking to achieve. Then we look at the different styles of parenting and how effective each is in reaching these goals. We will see that “balanced” parenting helps children develop the qualities and life skills they need to succeed in adulthood. Next, we get a few tips for working cooperatively with other parenting partners and how to avoid unhealthy seesawing between imbalanced approaches. Then, we examine some attitudes and beliefs that influence parenting. We can *choose* the beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions that lead to more positive responses and maintain a balanced approach.

Once we've laid the foundation, we need to review our blueprint, the general plan we'll follow. Chapter 3, “**The Universal Blueprint,**” is different from all the other chapters, because it is an overview of how *The Parent's Toolshop* is logically organized.

### Your Mission

When you experience a problem you will know how to . . .

**STOP** and

1. **THINK** for 1–10 seconds
2. **PLAN** a helpful response
3. **DELIVER** it effectively

**In this chapter, we learn two critical skills: how to identify the six general types of problems and how to apply the universal response formula to each.** These two skills help us arrive at the most appropriate response to *any* situation that arises in *any* relationship. This meets the first two mission goals. Each chapter thereafter takes us, step by step, through the Universal Blueprint, learning what tools we can use and how to use them to their maximum effectiveness. This meets the third mission goal of delivering our response effectively. Throughout our tour of the remaining chapters, we will refer often to the Universal Blueprint, as we build our comprehensive parenting plan step by step. We immediately use what we learn and begin to see rather quickly how all the pieces fit together.

The first toolset that details specific, practical tools is Chapter 4, **“Self-Esteem Toolset.”** This chapter teaches us how to use descriptive language to encourage positive behavior and stimulate *internal* motivation in others (not just children). We learn the difference between self-esteem and self-image, encouragement, and praise. We learn how to prevent discouragement, which is the root cause of most problem behaviors. These tools help others see themselves as unique and valuable, without feeling conceited, pressured to perform, or dependent on others' opinions for their self-worth.

The next chapter in the Prevention Toolbox is Chapter 5, **“Cooperation Toolset.”** This chapter teaches us how to build teamwork and cooperation, which helps avoid most power struggles, rather than demanding blind obedience, which causes rebellion and resentment. We learn how to word requests so others *want* to cooperate. The Cooperation Toolset is many parents' favorite because it contains many eye-opening and practical four-star skills.\* Most parents see immediate changes in their approach and their children's behavior, especially if their children are into testing and defiance.

*A Graduate's Comment. I like this book because it gives me power—not over my children, but over the situation and myself. It also empowers my children to be in control of themselves. I saw immediate results the first week! I'm spending less time being in power struggles and they're learning to make choices. I know, now, that there is going to be a solution to every problem. I especially like the fact that the book tells me what **to** do, instead of what not to do. — Bonnie Sessley*

The last stop in the Prevention Toolbox is Chapter 6, **“Independence Toolset.”** This chapter focuses on teaching children life skills so they can handle more freedom responsibly. We learn how to foster independence through every separation stage, from weaning to leaving home. As we teach children tasks, behavioral skills, and family values, children develop responsible behavior. Then, we can increasingly trust them with more freedom, instead of overprotecting or abandoning them. This healthy balance allows children room to grow and mature.

## CHILD PROBLEM TOOLBOX

These are the themes of the Child Problem Toolbox:

- Open the door of communication by acknowledging the other person's perspective first.
- When others have problems, keep the ball in their court and guide them through the process of discovering their own solutions.

Chapter 7, **“F-A-X Listening Toolset,”** helps us respond helpfully when someone else has a problem, without taking over and solving the problem *for* them. We cover the basics of effective communication, how misunderstandings occur, and how we can better understand our child's perspective. We learn how to listen effectively, which can peel off defensive layers and reveal the core of a problem. Often, this alone helps others figure out how they feel and what action they want to take.

If, after listening, someone is still unsure about a solution, we can move on to Chapter 8, **“Problem-Solving Toolset,”** to help the person explore possible options. **These tools teach children independent, responsible problem-solving and decision-making skills.** This chapter also offers specific suggestions for dealing with dozens of common problems that can arise between a child and siblings, peers, or people at school. The conflict mediation tools can help any group of people, adults or children, work toward a solution that is agreeable to all. By the end of this chapter, we know *when* to intervene in others' problems and *how* to help them resolve their *own* problems independently and responsibly.

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\* Every tool is helpful or it would not be included in a toolset. **Four-star skills, however, are exceptionally effective.** We want to use four-star tools regularly, as part of our daily parenting style. A four-star skill has four open stars (☆☆☆☆) next to it when it is first introduced and on the summary page for that toolset. One solid black star (★) appears next to important points to remember.

## PARENT PROBLEM TOOLBOX

The Parent Problem Toolbox contains the largest number of toolsets. It provides parents with the tools they need to deal with problems they find the hardest to respond to—those that affect them.

The themes of the Parent Problem Toolbox are consistent with the Universal Blueprint's effective-response formula:

- Think before you speak.
- Speak before (or while) you act.
- Take action instead of reacting.

First, Chapter 9, “**Keep Your Cool Toolset,**” focuses on understanding *our* feelings and reactions. We learn what *really* causes anger and stress and how to manage it. We can use these tools to develop individualized anger/stress management plans for ourselves and our children. If we have emotional trigger buttons, this chapter teaches us how to reprogram them. **The Keep Your Cool Toolset is the first and most important step in responding to Parent Problems because we can turn all the other tools in this toolbox into weapons if we use them in anger.**

Next, Chapter 10, “**Clear Communication Toolset,**” helps us express our feelings and concerns without blame, criticism, lectures, nagging, or hidden messages that cause others to tune us out. We learn how to communicate in simple, clear, respectful, and assertive ways. Many parents are surprised how well their children listen when they use these tools. By combining the Communication, Listening, and Problem-Solving Toolsets, *any* relationship can improve, including those with spouses (or other partners), relatives, friends, colleagues, bosses, or employees.

The Keep Your Cool Toolset helps us *think* clearly and the Clear Communication Toolset helps us plan what to *say*. The last three toolsets in the Parent Problem Toolbox help us plan what to *do* when responding to problem behavior.

The first step in responding to misbehavior is recognizing the difference between *unintentional* and *intentional* misbehavior that serves a purpose. Chapter 11, “**PU Toolset (Parent problem, Unintentional misbehavior),**” redirects misbehavior resulting from children's lack of skills or maturity by teaching them appropriate behavior skills. Rather than excusing age-appropriate problem behavior, children can move through troublesome developmental stages in healthy ways while learning important life skills. This toolset also addresses other causes of unintentional misbehavior, such as personality traits and medical conditions such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

Chapter 12, “**PO Toolset (Parent problem, ‘On purpose’ misbehavior),**” deals with children who have mastered the skills to behave properly but *intentionally* misbehave. **We learn why children (and adults) misbehave and how to avoid common reactions that either give a payoff or make matters worse.** This information helps us choose the most appropriate tools (from previous toolsets) that help meet the child's purpose through positive behavior. When misbehavior no longer achieves its purpose, it usually stops.

Chapter 13, “**Discipline Toolset,**” is the final chapter in the Parent Problem Toolbox. It's the toolset you are probably most anxious to see, but don't jump ahead to this chapter. **This toolset is located farther into the Universal Blueprint for four specific reasons:**

1. **We need to reserve the discipline tools for serious situations or use them after or in combination with other tools.** By the time we get to this toolset, we have dozens of other tools that might resolve a problem before it gets to the point of discipline.

*A Graduate's Story. I don't need to discipline as often as I thought I did. Before the class, I used discipline this much (holding his arms wide apart) and the rest of the skills only this much (holding his hands in front of his chest). Now, I only need to use discipline this much (his hands in front of his chest) and I use the rest of the tools this much (holding his arms wide apart). — Bryan Belden*

2. **Discipline is most effective when we use it to teach children how to behave properly.** For this, we use the Prevention Toolbox, Clear Communication Toolset, and PU Toolset (Parent problem, Unintentional misbehavior) before or with the discipline tools.
3. **Discipline is only effective if we first break negative behavior patterns such as power struggles or revenge cycles.** This is what the PO Toolset (Parent problem, "On purpose" misbehavior) does. If we don't use the PO Toolset before discipline, there is a good chance the discipline will escalate the misbehavior or give it a payoff, which is ineffective or even harmful.
4. **It is easy to misuse the discipline tools.** To discipline effectively, we use everything we've learned up to this point *with* the discipline tools.

These are the three themes of the Discipline Toolset:

- Teach children self-discipline, by revealing the effects of their behavior choices and holding them accountable for poor behavior choices.
- Decide what *you* will do, not what you will make *others* do.
- Help children *learn* from their mistakes and be involved in solving the problems their mistakes caused (discipline), rather than making them *suffer* for their mistakes (punishment).

These changes in attitude prevent us from misusing effective discipline tools as weapons that destroy relationships. There are many commonly accepted myths and inaccurate information about discipline. In this chapter, we dispel each myth so we can respectfully, helpfully, and effectively discipline. It might be hard to wait, but trust the experience of other parents who learned about discipline too early and became more confused and ineffective as a result. By using the other tools, many problems will have already improved by the time we get to this chapter. With the tougher problems that remain, it is especially important to make sure we use the discipline tools appropriately.

## MAINTENANCE TOOLBOX

The Maintenance Toolbox builds on and uses almost every tool in *The Parent's Toolshop*. These are the two themes of the Maintenance Toolbox:

- Prevent new situations from becoming problems.
- Maintain progress in personal growth and family relationships.

Chapter 14, "**Family Council Toolset,**" teaches us how to effectively consult the entire family when decisions or problems affect the family. Effective family councils develop each family member's communication skills and leadership qualities. They help each person feel like an important, contributing member of the family team. **Family councils enrich family relationships and help us make decisions and resolve conflicts in ways that meet everyone's needs.** This chapter presents several council formats we can use, based on the ages of the children and what we want to accomplish. There are several myths about conducting family councils and many ways family councils can turn sour. This chapter has a troubleshooting guide that can keep our family councils a sweet experience.

Finally, Chapter 15, "**Three C's: Consistency, handling Criticism, and Confidence,**" details the reasons we can stray from our parenting plan and offers suggestions for maintaining the progress we've made. We learn how to be the kind of parent we want to be, without feeling the need to bend or sway to the demands of well-meaning, but unhelpful, advice-givers. We learn how to apply the Universal Blueprint and its tools in non-parenting relationships, when others criticize us or exhibit troublesome behavior. We also learn how to recognize inaccurate advice and use the universal guidelines to select tools from other resources. By the end of this chapter, we realize how far we have come in our growth and establish a positive vision for our future.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR USE

Before we begin our full tour of *The Parent's Toolshop*, a few suggestions will help you know what to expect and what *not* to expect from your tour. These tips will help you get the maximum benefit from your tour and remember all you learn.

- 1. The first time you read the book, read each chapter *in order*.** Each chapter builds on information and skills from earlier chapters and follows the Universal Blueprint step by step. You need to understand the tools from the Prevention Toolbox to use the more difficult tools, later in the book, to their full potential. If you are dealing with a tough problem, you might be tempted to jump ahead to whatever chapter you think will solve it best, such as the Discipline Toolset. This approach skips over skills that could prevent the problem or resolve it without a last resort response. The only exceptions are Chapter 9, "Keep Your Cool Toolset," Chapter 11, "PU Toolset," and the consistency and criticism sections of Chapter 15, "Three C's." You can read these chapters anytime.

Don't worry if you don't remember everything you learn the first time you read the book. There is *so* much information it can realistically take us a lifetime to master all the skills in all our relationships. Each time you read *The Parent's Toolshop*, you will get what you need at that time.

*A Graduate's Comment. I can't wait to read the book again—and again. There's so much in it, I want to digest it all. Every time I read it, new things jump out at me that I didn't notice the first time. There were some sentences and sections that were so profound that I just had to think about what was said for awhile. That's how awesome some of the concepts are. This book and class have changed my life, every area of it, for the better. — Rita James*

It is best to read no more than two toolsets (chapters) at a time and reflect on the ideas. After practicing those skills for a week, you are ready to build on that knowledge. Schedule a time each week to read, so you can keep moving forward through the book. Many parents read the book several times or every few years, as their children reach new developmental stages. Use the detailed house diagram (a summary of the entire book that is on the last page of this book and on the color poster you can order), summary sheets and index as quick refreshers or to deal with a particular problem.

- 2. Use *all* the tools and steps in the Universal Blueprint.** They are interrelated and reach their full potential only when we use them together. Discarding tools or foundational beliefs weakens the effectiveness of *all* the tools, because each toolset is dependent on the others.
- 3. Do the practice exercises in the book.** Simply thinking about a behavioral technique is not as effective as actually doing it. People learn by *hearing* or discussing the information, *seeing* the information, and *using* the information. Reading this book or attending a class led by a certified Parent's Toolshop Tour Guide are ways to *hear* the ideas explained. The house diagram and examples are ways to *see* the information. The practice exercises help you *use* the tools you are learning. The more ways you learn and process the information, the better you will remember it.

Since you are learning a new parenting language, it is important to practice forming effective responses. Written practice lets you think about and *plan* the most effective response. This helps you later when you need to respond quickly to real-life situations. After giving your answers, read the answer key; it offers additional insights and suggestions for common problems. Remember that the answer key usually lists *possible* answers, not the *only* correct answers.

*A Graduate's Comment. I'm so glad you gave us practice exercises. The first time I skipped the practice exercises I had a harder time using the tools that week. When I used the practice exercises, I realized how helpful it was to actually think of the words on my own. I especially like the detailed answers you give. Your answers helped me realize where I was on track and where I still needed to improve. — Kathy Bellar*

**THE BIGGEST SECRET ABOUT *THE PARENT'S TOOLSHOP*:**

The most common real-life parenting problems are posed in the practice exercises. In the answer key, there are specific suggestions about exactly what to say and do. If you see a problem in the practice exercises you are dealing with at home, think about your answers first, then **read the answer key**.

- 4. Use the tools in an individualized way.** At each step of the Universal Blueprint and its effective-response formula, we can choose many options. We use the guidelines and our knowledge of the person and situation to choose the most appropriate response. There is no one right way to respond to a situation. If one response doesn't seem to work, don't abandon the blueprint. Instead, select a different tool from the toolsets available at that step or reexamine the situation to make sure you have correctly identified the type of problem.

*The Parent's Toolshop* describes the tools in general ways, the way we apply them to most children most of the time. **Sometimes, certain tools need to be applied in special ways if children are very young or much older. The chapters explain these exceptions in a special *Tips for Tots and Teens* section or in separate paragraphs with the age range in bold type. If you don't have a child of that age, feel free to skip over these sections.** You can benefit, however, from doing all the exercises, even if they don't apply to your child's age.

- 5. Practice the skills in all your relationships.** The tools in *The Parent's Toolshop* work to the extent we practice them. Since the tools are *human* relationship skills, they are useful in any setting—at work, with friends, relatives, strangers, a spouse or other partner. Instead of shifting from one approach in one setting, to another in other settings, choose particular tools based on the individual circumstances of the relationship or situation. You will be more consistent and effective in *all* your relationships and will see just how effective the tools are. *The Parent's Toolshop* uses terms that fit parenting relationships, but you can change the words *parent* and *child* to make the Universal Blueprint fit any relationship.

*Two Graduates' Comments. I learned some of these communication and listening skills in training programs at work. I can't believe it didn't occur to me to modify them for use at home with my kids! — Bill Stanley*

*I started using the F-A-X Listening process with my employees and was amazed how well it works! I kept the ball in their court and asked questions that helped them solve their own problems. My employees are showing increased self-confidence, motivation, and self-reliance. These skills are G-R-E-A-T! — Bryan Belden*

- 6. Be willing to change first.** This course stresses *your* self-improvement, but you must be willing to change. Don't say, "When my child (or someone else) does \_\_\_\_\_, then I will change." The only person you can really control or change is *you*. Take responsibility for your own growth and start using the skills. This will set the wheels of change in motion. If you control *your* emotions, actions, perceptions, and words, others often respond in more positive ways. This is called the ripple effect. When you drop a pebble into a pond, ripples start at the middle, expanding outward. **Any time one person in a family changes, it is like dropping a pebble in the family pond. There is always some change; it's the natural law of cause and effect.**

*A Graduate's Story. The first night of a parenting class, a mother was upset that **she** had to come to a class, because it was her **son** who was misbehaving. She stayed for the class and tried to have an open-minded attitude. The following week, she arrived for class with a personal letter for me:*

*Dear Jody,*

*When I left class last week, I felt rather discouraged. Andrew and I had been having communication problems for the last couple of years and they seemed to be escalating. I wanted **him** to take the class so he could see that I was not the "bad" person and that my point-of-view was for his own best interests. What a surprise! I was the one who had to adjust!*

*After I arrived home, Andrew started asking me about the class, which somehow got on to a discussion of curfew and other rules. Rather than get angry and tell him what he had to do (my normal response), I listened to him and asked a few pertinent questions. All week long I did this, rather than argue with him and try to win. Amazing! He not only started opening up to me, but also did chores around the house that I never told him to do! My son is a good kid and is very capable. I just needed to trust him more and give him the chance to show me just how capable he is. Thanks.*

*Two weeks later she gave me another letter:*

*For the past three weeks, my son and I have had the most peaceful times in years! I was the one that needed changing! But it hasn't been as great an adjustment or as hard as I thought it would be. I know that I basically am teaching myself the concepts, but if you hadn't had the forethought or the ideas to begin with, I wouldn't be this much further ahead. Thanks for all your efforts, from the bottom of my heart. — Mary K.*

**7. Have realistic expectations.** To prevent discouragement, there are several things you can expect and not expect:

- a. **Expect temporary setbacks.** Human growth and development involves testing and mistakes. Whether children learn from their mistakes and correct their behavior often depends on the reaction they get. The tools in *The Parent's Toolshop* help us prevent or quickly redirect these normal problem behaviors. Don't be surprised, however, if you think you've stopped a particular behavior, only to have it reappear later. Children often forget what they've learned, especially when they are busy learning other skills at a new developmental stage. These regressions are normal and usually temporary if handled appropriately.
- b. **Expect to develop more patience.** Patience is not something we can buy off a shelf, nor is it a skill that can be taught. However, after learning the tools in *The Parent's Toolshop*, most parents feel they have more patience. Why? When we understand *why* a problem exists and we have more tools to use, it takes longer to run out of patience.
- c. **Expect to develop "healthy paranoia."** I often joke that I have a contagious virus that people catch once they start learning the language of effective parenting. They become infected with a condition I call healthy paranoia. They are more aware of their words, attitudes, thoughts, and actions. They start catching their mistakes when they make them, or even before the words get out of their mouths! This awareness is a positive sign that we are becoming *conscious* parents. Healthy paranoia not only reveals negative habits; it also shows us the many positive habits we already have. This, too, is important to know because it provides us with a foundation on which we can build.
- d. **Expect to develop response-ability.** Being a conscious parent also means responding in a planned or thought-out way. Reactions allow children to control situations and the parent's emotions. Then, parents feel justified in blaming children for causing their emotions. Response-ability means we consider our options and *choose* a response.
- e. **Don't expect perfection.** Once healthy paranoia sets in, you become aware of mistakes you made in the past and in the present. Don't be too hard on yourself. Remind yourself that you did the best you could at the time, with the knowledge and skills you had. Use your past mistakes to increase your present effectiveness. Ask yourself, "What did I learn from this?" and "What would I do if it happened again today?" At whatever point you catch yourself, put the Universal Blueprint to work. Eliminate the discouraging words *right*, *wrong*, *good*, and *bad* from your vocabulary. Instead, view choices as *more effective* and *less effective*. Remember, mistakes are a natural part of any learning process, and everyone makes them when learning new skills, including you and your children.

Accept the fact that you are not a perfect parent, will never be a perfect parent, and don't want to be a perfect parent. Perfect parents believe they have nothing new to learn. Children don't want perfect parents. They want human parents who are honest about their mistakes and can model what to do to correct them. What we do *after* a mistake often makes a greater impression on others than the mistake itself. If you tend to expect perfection of yourself, read the following affirmation. If you are alone, read it out loud. The spoken word is far more powerful than a thought.

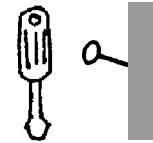
### Declaration of Imperfection

*I, now, allow myself to be an imperfect parent; one who makes mistakes and is sometimes wrong. I know I have made mistakes in the past and am sure to make more in the future. That's okay. While I am not happy about my mistakes, I am not afraid of them. Instead, I strive to learn what I can from the experience to improve myself in the future. When I catch a mistake, I correct myself respectfully. I pick myself up and don't put myself down. As I become a better and better parent, I won't make the same mistakes too often—but, I still won't be a perfect parent. That's okay, because my goal is continual improvement, not perfection.*

- ★ **8. If at first you don't succeed, figure out why and try again.** Parents often see immediate results when they use the Universal Blueprint and its tools, but there are never any guarantees when human behavior is involved. Most of the tools in *The Parent's Toolshop* have been used by parents, recommended by professionals, and have proven their long-term effectiveness for several decades. **If you don't see results, consider the six reasons a tool might not work immediately. Apply the following suggestions and try again.**

**a. *Choose the best tool for the job.***

*It's important to have more than one tool at our disposal. A hammer and screwdriver are both effective, useful tools. If we want to put a nail in a wall, a hammer is the best tool to use. If we use a screwdriver, we are choosing an ineffective tool for the job.\**



Some parents only have one tool and use it for every problem. Parents of toddlers tend to use spanking or timeout for every misbehavior. When a child spills milk, the parents says, "Go into timeout" instead of handing the child a towel to clean up the mess. Parents of teens tend to use restrictions or grounding for every misbehavior. Whatever happens, the parent declares, "That's it! You're grounded for a week!" This may not resolve the problems the misbehavior caused and having a teen stuck in the house for a week may be punishment for the *parent*!

Each tool in *The Parent's Toolshop* accomplishes a certain goal. To achieve the best results, we use the tool in situations where we are trying to accomplish that goal. The Universal Blueprint is a decision-making process for identifying the type of problem we are facing so we can choose the most appropriate tool. If a tool doesn't work, we refer to the Universal Blueprint to make sure we have properly identified the type of problem and chosen the best tool for the situation.

**b. *Use the tools in the proper order.***

*If we choose a hammer for this job but don't put the nail on the wall **first**, we will only hit the wall, since the nail isn't even there! The proper order of the steps is to put the nail on the wall, **then** hit it with the hammer.*



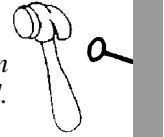
\* This analogy refers to hitting a nail with a hammer to illustrate similar mistakes parents may make. It in no way implies that we hit children.



While this tool analogy seems ridiculous (who would ever forget to put the nail against the wall first?), this is a common mistake in parenting responses. Some tools work best if parents use them *after* other tools. For example, if we express our concerns without acknowledging the other person's perspective first, we often get defensive reactions. Before we discipline, we must break any power or revenge cycles, or the discipline will escalate the cycle.

**c. Use the tool properly.**

*If we try to use the claw side of the hammer, it will be harder to get the nail in quickly and straight. The proper way to use the hammer is to use the flat head.*



Many parenting tools are easy to misuse, so every tool has instructions for its most effective use. If we select the most appropriate tool for a situation but it doesn't seem to work, we consider *how* we used it. Our attitude, body language, and tone of voice all influence the effectiveness of a tool. Look at your behavior and listen to your words the way the other person would.

**d. Use the tools consistently, long enough for change to occur.**

*To hammer a nail into a wall, we must hit it several times before it is completely in the wall. If the nail doesn't go in after the first strike, it doesn't mean the hammer doesn't work or the nail is defective. Our first attempts made progress, but it takes time to reach our final goal.*

While people often see results from using these tools, change is not always quick. Usually, small changes come before more obvious changes, just as the small ripples in a pond occur before the larger ones. Change can take place on the inside, without any obvious change on the outside. If it has taken some time for a problem to develop, it is realistic to expect it to take some time to resolve. Be patient and consistent. The other person may need time to rebuild trust, break old habits, and learn proper behavior. If this approach makes sense to you and you believe in the value of the skills, give the tools a chance to work. Look for small changes to reassure yourself that you're on the right track.

**e. Examine your beliefs; they can change the effectiveness of the tool.**

*It is harder to hammer a nail into wood than plasterboard. If we believe the nail is being stubborn, we might feel angry or frustrated and pound the hammer more wildly. In reality, wood is more difficult to penetrate. Knowing this, we make more firm, controlled impacts.*

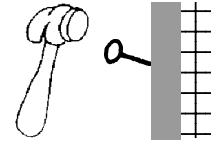
Many of us have commonly accepted, but inaccurate, beliefs. Here are three examples:

- If parents believe discipline has to make children feel bad, their tone of voice and behavior will be hurtful. This will turn the discipline into punishment, which is ineffective and causes resentment.
- If parents believe all toddlers' misbehavior is intentional, they may angrily punish children who display age-appropriate misbehavior. Since the parents didn't teach the children better skills, the children don't improve their behavior as quickly and the parents get more frustrated and angry—a negative behavior cycle continues.
- If parents believe all teens are rebellious, they may be impatient and critical of the teens' efforts to become their own persons. Teens sense this distrust and feel more discouraged and resentful, which can lead to rebellion—a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Expect to have some of your current beliefs about parenting challenged. Once we are more conscious of our beliefs, it's easier to tell if they are interfering with our effectiveness.

**f. Look for a deeper problem.**

*If we are trying to hammer a nail into a surface that is hiding a brick wall, we might not understand, at first, why the nail won't go in. Until we look for the reason the nail won't go in, we won't know the brick wall even exists! Once we know the brick wall is there, we can change the type of nail we are using.*



Immediate change is unlikely when a problem behavior is severe, has lasted a long time, or is the result of a medical condition or deep emotional hurt. (My brother's problems are a good example.) Ineffective parenting methods only make matters worse. Effective parenting skills can prevent the problem from getting worse and help the child slowly work through the real issues causing the problem. This process takes time, but it is the only way any true, final healing can take place. In these cases, you may want to seek professional help. Therapy is helpful for issues such as deep emotional hurts, violent or self-destructive behavior, or problems that seem to persist despite your efforts to use these skills consistently for a significant period of time.

Keeping these suggestions in mind, we are ready to begin our detailed tour of *The Parent's Toolshop*. Take things one step at a time and enjoy the tour!

## ANSWER KEY

**Myth/Truth quiz:** Each statement is a common myth about parenting, so each is either totally or partially false. By the end of the book you will know why each statement is false and how to change it into a true statement. You will have a chance to rewrite each statement in the last chapter.

## WHAT'S NEXT?

If you are ready to begin the full tour, turn the page to "Step A: Prevention Toolbox" and begin reading Chapter 2, "Foundation-Building Toolset." There, we discuss our parenting goals, different parenting styles, and which parenting approach will best meet our long-term goals. Here we can make an attitude adjustment: from negative to positive, from controlling children to teaching children self-control, from doing too much for children to fostering children's independence. We consider our own upbringing and the advice we get from others. Once we have accurate definitions, clear goals, and consciously choose our parenting style, we have a stable, positive, balanced foundation on which we can build a healthy family using the effective parenting tools throughout the rest of the book.