CHAPTER 10
CLEAR COMMUNICATION TOOLSET

STEP C:
PARENT
PROBLEM
TOOLBOX

STEP C1:
Set limits
and express
concerns.
Open the
windows.
Talk, before
you act.

Keep
Your
Cool
Toolset

STEP B:
CHILD
PROBLEM
TOOLBOX

Clear
Communi-
cation
Toolset

P

C/P

C

STEP B:
Acknowledge
feelings.
Open the door.
Listen, before
you talk.

Problem-Solving Toolset

F-A-X Listening Toolset

STEP A:
Prevent
problems.
Walk up the
steps.
Think, before
you listen.

NO

STEP A: PREVENTION TOOLBOX

Independence Toolset

Cooperation Toolset

Self-Esteem Toolset

The Universal Blueprint

Foundation-Building Toolset

BUILD
UP!

CHAPTER
10 CLEAR COMMUNICATION TOOLSET

If we want to send messages through the windows of our house, the windows must be clean enough to see through. We want the person we are communicating with to clearly see us and understand our message correctly.

When we talk with others, we sometimes send messages we don't mean to send. Our words are only the surface of our total message. Our tone of voice, choice of words, and even the order of our words affect the total message that others receive. We are usually unaware of these hidden messages, but others, including children, pick up on them. These hidden messages are caused by unclear communication and result in others shutting their doors (ears) to what we are saying. If we can send messages clearly, we can better solve problems that arise.

IN THIS CHAPTER

This chapter picks up where the Keep Your Cool Toolset ended, with the last step in anger/stress management, "Plan an assertive response." Together, these two toolsets supply us with the tools for the first step in responding to Parent problems, Step C1 of the Universal Blueprint.

Step C1: **S**et limits or express concerns.

a. *Become aware of your anger/stress cycle.* (The Keep Your Cool Toolset explained how beliefs about events and people actually cause our feelings.)
b. *Relieve the pressure of the anger/stress.* (The Keep Your Cool Toolset taught us about internal and external recharge styles, verbal and physical anger energy, and activities to help us regain our emotional balance.)

We complete our tour of Step C1 with the Clear Communication Toolset.

c. ***Plan an assertive response to the problem.*** The **Clear Communication Toolset** explains three important points:
   • The four styles of communication and the definition of "assertive."
   • How nonverbal cues send hidden messages that can open or shut down communication.
   • Nearly a dozen tools for communicating *our* feelings, concerns, values and limits.

WHEN TO USE THE CLEAR COMMUNICATION TOOLSET

In Step B, the Child Problem Toolbox, we learned about F-A-X communication when we were *receiving* messages. Step C1, the Clear Communication Toolset, teaches us how to *send* clear messages. We want to remove as many hidden codes as we can and reduce any "static" that can shut down the lines of communication. We can use the Clear Communication Toolset in *any* of the following situations:

• **No problems.** When we need a quick reminder to keep a problem from developing or worsening, we can choose tools from either the Cooperation *or* Clear Communication Toolsets. With these tools, children are less likely to react negatively to our requests.

• **Parent problems.** We can use quick one-word reminders from the Clear Communication Toolset as a first response, if we've taken other steps in the past. When Parent problems persist, we can choose firmer responses from the Clear Communication Toolset.

- **C/P problems.** When children also have a problem, disagree with us, or react negatively to our requests, we *only* use a clear communication statement *after* acknowledging their feelings. Depending on the intensity of children's feelings, we might use several listening responses before shifting to the Clear Communication Toolset.

- **Parent/child problem solving.** When we need to reach win/win agreements, we add a few steps to the problem-solving process we learned in the Problem-Solving Toolset, to account for the parent's part of the problem. Together, the F-A-X Listening, Problem-Solving, and Clear Communication Toolsets provide all the communication tools we need to do back-and-forth problem solving in *any* relationship or with any group of people, including professional and personal adult relationships.

When we are dealing with Parent problems, we don't want to say the same thing five different ways (or five times louder), hoping children will finally listen. If one step in the Universal Blueprint doesn't resolve the problem, we move to the next step. Just remember that as we move through the steps, we can use any of the skills at previous steps. This means we can use the F-A-X Listening Toolset to **A**cknowledge feelings or offer a word of encouragement when we are **S**etting limits or **R**edirecting misbehavior (the next step, which we learn in Chapters 11 and 12).

STYLES OF COMMUNICATION

To begin planning a response, we want to expand on the definitions we learned in the last chapter. There, we learned about the four styles of anger: aggressive, passive, passive-aggressive, and assertive. Communication styles build on these definitions, applying them to our verbal responses.

Aggressive Communication

Aggressive communication has any or all of the following qualities:

- **Aggressive communication is firm, but not kind.** Speakers say what they want, but hurt others in the process.

- **Speakers think they are superior to listeners.** They believe their rights are more important than the listener's rights (just like the over-controlling parenting style).

- **It is controlling and disrespectful.** Any of the following terms could describe aggressive communication: harsh, abrupt, hostile, arrogant, tactless, impatient, inconsiderate, loud, critical, continuous, and dominating.

- **It uses aggressive body language**, such as pointed fingers, pounding fists, hands on hips, and slamming objects.

- **Logical aggressive communication** uses orders, commands, judgments, blame, challenges, and critical remarks.

- **Emotional aggressive communication** is usually the result of stored up anger and involves childish tactics, such as tantrums, yelling, stubbornness, name calling, and arguing.

- **The goal of aggressive communication is to gain power over others**—to win by forcing others to lose. Aggressive speakers want listeners, through sheer intimidation, to give them what they want. In the short-term, aggressive communication can seem to work. In reality, it is a lose/lose outcome, because both people lose respect for each other and it damages the relationship. More problems usually occur, because listeners resent the aggressive speaker for ignoring their feelings and violating their rights. Listeners often become hostile, resistant, and argumentative. Then, aggressive speakers must use increased verbal or physical force to continue getting their way.

Passive Communication

Passive communication has any or all of the following qualities:

- **It is kind, but not firm.** Speakers use a meek, whiny, questioning, or pleading tone of voice. They use indirect hints, hoping listeners will guess their wishes and voluntarily grant them.

- **Passive speakers believe their own rights are less important than the other person's rights** (just like the under-controlling, permissive parenting style).

- **The passive speakers' goals are to please others and avoid conflict**.

- **It allows listeners to take advantage of the passive speakers.** This causes both parties to lose respect for each other. If passive speakers give in, they feel hurt or resentful and often pout or whine about their loss. Other times, passive speakers grow tired of others taking advantage of them and may snap, aggressively lashing out in revenge.

Passive-Aggressive Communication

Passive-aggressive communication has any or all of the following qualities:

- **It is *neither* kind nor firm.**

- **It doesn't assert the speaker's rights *and* violates the listener's rights.**

- **The goal is to hurt others without being obviously hurtful.**

- **Passive-aggressive communication uses passive body language** (silence, frowns, crossed arms) **to send aggressive messages** ("I'm mad").

Sarcasm is a form of passive-aggressive communication. It disguises anger, blame, and criticism with humor. Whether covering little digs with a smile or making someone the center of a joke, sarcastic people are not really being funny; they are attacking. When people see through their sarcasm and get offended by the attack, the sarcastic person often blames the person for being "a poor sport" with no sense of humor. "It was only a joke" is their way of covering up their inappropriate attack on the other person. And if others laugh, they are not only rewarded for attacking someone else, but can shift even more blame, "See, even they knew I was kidding. You're too sensitive, lighten up."

All forms of aggressive communication are destructive to personal relationships. They carry two implied messages, "You are dumb and you are wrong," which is criticism and blame. They shut down communication and make conflicts worse by stirring up more angry feelings. It makes the original problem even harder to resolve.

Assertive Communication

Assertive communication has all of the following qualities:

- **It is both kind *and* firm.**

- **Assertive communication upholds the speaker's rights in ways that respect others' rights.**

- **It uses attentive, responsive, and interested body language.** Speakers have direct eye contact, open arms and hands, a respectful, matter-of-fact tone of voice, and friendly facial expressions.

- **It uses *objective,* factual descriptions that focus on the *present* moment and *solutions* to the problem.**

- **Assertive communication is clear and direct.** Speakers say what they mean to say.

- **The goal of assertive communication is to reach win/win solutions.** Assertive speakers respectfully set limits (their win) while recognizing the feelings and needs of others (their win). Assertive speakers hope that even if the listeners aren't *happy* about their limits, they will consider the speakers' feelings and/or needs. Since assertive speakers address others respectfully, people listen better and are more cooperative. If others don't immediately cooperate, assertive speakers continue responding assertively and respectfully, but more firmly.

THE HUMAN "BILL OF RIGHTS"

A critical part of assertive communication is mutual respect for the rights of the people involved in the communication exchange. Briefly, *all* people have several basic rights in any discussion.

The Human "Bill of Rights"

- *All people have the right to have others treat them with respect*, because all people are unique, valuable, and important. People are no less deserving of respect if they are young or others judge their behavior as worse than others'.

- *All people have the right to have others treat their feelings as important and valid,* even if others *disagree* with those feelings.

- *All people have the right to have personal opinions and values.* With this right comes the responsibility to respect the needs and opinions of others who might disagree.

- *All people have the right to express their feelings*, *if* they do so without violating another person's right to be treated with respect.

- *All people have the right to make and refuse reasonable and unreasonable requests*, with the understanding that others also have this same right.

- *All people have the right to change their minds*, *if* they recognize their responsibility to accept the reactions of others and any negative effects that might result.

- *All people have the right to get what others have promised to give.* If the promise is the result of a *voluntary* agreement, people can assert this right *if* they do so without mistreating the promise-giver in the process.

- *All people have the right to make their own decisions*, with the understanding that they are accepting responsibility for fixing or living with any negative effects that might result from that decision.

NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

There is scientific proof behind the saying, "Actions speak louder than words." Studies have shown that only 7 percent of the meaning of communication comes from the spoken words. Facial expressions, posture, and gestures account for 55 percent. Thirty-eight percent of the interpretation comes from vocal qualities such as loudness of voice, rate of speech, and intonation[1]. The goal of clear communication is to have our nonverbal and spoken messages match. When verbal and nonverbal information contradict each other, the subconscious mind automatically uses the nonverbal signals to interpret the meaning. It is true that mere words can't hide feelings. So it is important that we not only learn *what* to say but *how* to say it. This prevents us from sending unhelpful hidden messages.

Negative statements can imply hidden messages.   *Positive statements send clear, respectful messages*

Helpful Attitudes

To avoid hidden messages, choose helpful words and present them with the following helpful attitudes:

Mutual respect. We have all been irritated, impatient, or troubled with another person's behavior. Yet, we often make more of an effort to listen and talk respectfully with *them* than we do with our own children, whose relationship we value even more!

> *A Graduate's Story. I was having a garage sale with a friend. She and her son came to our house to help us set up. My son came upstairs with an item that had just been broken. I jumped all over him! I said, "What have you been doing down there? What did you do?" He said, "I didn't break it, Jason did." Jason's mother was sitting right there. Immediately, I said, "Oh well, it's no problem." My son said, "Oh, it's not okay for me to break it but it's okay if Jason did?" The other mother apologized and I apologized to my son. He was right! It made me realize that I am much harder on my own kids when they do something wrong than I am with a friend's child. I love my kids more than anyone else in the world and will have a relationship with them for the rest of my life. So why do I treat them worse than I treat a friend or neighbor?*

We often get more upset with our own family members, because we are more emotionally involved with them. Because we have so much at stake, we let things upset us more. But it is precisely *because* we have so much at stake that we want to make every effort to take care of the relationship.

> **If we treated our friends as we do our children, we'd probably lose some friends. Likewise, if we treated our children as respectfully as we do our friends, our relationships would surely improve.**

Some people react to this statement saying, "But we *aren't* their friends. We are their parents!" This statement does not mean to be friends *instead of* parents. It means we simply conduct ourselves in friend*ly* ways with our children, just as we would with our friends. We may need to set limits, as we do with others who aren't our children. They may not *like* the limits, but at least we aren't being disrespectful in the process.

Another reaction might be, "But friends don't repeatedly do silly, stupid things!" Let's ask ourselves, "What if they did? How would we handle it?" Chances are, we would probably make an extra effort to be tactful and courteous to our friend. We might even overlook or ignore what the friend did, to spare a confrontation over a minor issue. When we are frustrated with our children, let's not throw away our manners, respectful attitude, and effective communication skills.

Allow differences of opinion or respectful disagreement. Differences of opinion don't have to lead to arguments. Discussions can become aggressive arguments, if we are bent on proving ourselves right and the other person wrong. When our attitude is forceful or arrogant, no one will value any opinion we want to share.

When we have a difference of opinion, we want to first listen carefully to the other person. Summarize and repeat the other person's perspective *before* stating our own. This not only shows our objectivity, but opens the door to sharing (Step B, Child Problem Toolbox). Once *we* have listened to others, *others* are usually more willing to listen to us.

We can accept different opinions, even if we disagree. We simply accept them as different views of the facts and respond accordingly. For example, "I see you don't want to lug an umbrella to school, since it doesn't look to you like it's going to rain. The paper said it was going to rain today." Then we wait, to give children a chance to make a voluntary decision. If they choose to assert their will and the effect won't be dangerous (here, the effect is getting wet) one option is to let them learn from their choice (Discipline Toolset). Another option is to suggest a compromise, "What if you take this small one in your backpack, just in case." We want to pick and choose our "battles" carefully. We can often accomplish more by offering choices within limits and backing off than forcefully demanding our way.

> *A Personal Story. One of my father's best qualities is his willingness to consider other viewpoints and respect others' opinions. I can remember him listening to our records, reading our school books, and watching our television shows to learn more about us and our interests. (Now that I'm a parent myself, I realize he might also have been "screening" them!)*
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> *One of our favorite family stories is "The Peanut Butter Taste Test." My dad and I bonded over peanut butter; we shared many heart-to-heart moments over a midnight snack of peanut butter on toast when we couldn't get to sleep.*
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> *One day, as I helped unload the groceries, I said I didn't like the generic brand of peanut butter my mother had bought. I liked a name brand better. My dad asked me why. I described how the other brands were too salty and coarse. He proposed the idea of a blind taste test. He said that if I could tell the difference without seeing the jar, he would be willing to switch. He blind-folded me and put three different peanut butters on three saltine crackers. (That's the way they did it in the TV commercials.) All it took was one bite and I named which cracker had which peanut butter on it and described the difference in taste and texture. My dad was amazed and we bought that brand from then on. To this day, as a choosy mother, I still only eat that brand of peanut butter.*

Avoid the "blame game." Focus on solutions, instead. The blame game starts when someone asks questions that put others on the defensive, such as "Who did this?" The predictable responses are "Not me," "I don't know," and "He did (pointing to someone else)." If we ask, "Did you do this?" most children answer "No." (This is a set-up question that encourages lying, which we cover in Chapter 12, "PO Toolset.") If we ask, "Why did you do this?" we get a list of excuses. When we go around in circles looking for a target to blame, children can use this to their advantage. If they can confuse us or never let us find out who is responsible, we can't hold anyone accountable. And if they're lucky, we will get so frustrated we'll take care of the problem ourselves. The real point to all these questions is, "There is a problem and the responsible person needs to take care of it." This statement holds others accountable and empowers them to be self-responsible.

The blame game is addictive. Once someone points out another's faults or mistakes, the blamed person waits for a chance to even the score. If a parent yells at a child for leaving dirty dishes in the sink, you can bet the child is just waiting for a chance to point out the *one* time the parent does the same thing! This attitude of "someone has to be blamed for everything that goes wrong" is destructive. People become edgy and defensive. Their self-esteem goes down and they feel incompetent and uncooperative. To avoid or stop the blame game, we want to word our statements in general nonblameful, nonjudgmental ways, using the Clear Communication tools. If we don't accuse or embarrass children, they are usually more willing to take responsibility for their mistakes or the problems that result.

If children don't voluntarily take care of the problem and there are siblings or peers around, peer pressure can work to the parent's advantage. The other children make sure *they* don't have to take care of a problem they didn't create. The key here is to describe the problem and that we expect *whoever* is responsible to take care of it—then walk away. When the parent leaves, the other children say, "I'm not going to clean up your mess!" Don't try to force a confession, since this only leads to power struggles. Don't punish *all* the children, since this breeds resentment and revenge towards the parent and guilty child. If one child repeatedly picks up the slack, notice their efforts to be nice, but explain that rescuing does not help others. People need to learn self-responsibility. The face-saving way out of the situation is for the responsible person to take care of the problem "anonymously." If we are more concerned with solutions than blame, this approach meets our bottom line, too.

Avoid shame and guilt trips. Shame is toxic. It takes a mistake or negative behavior and turns it into one's identity. Just because an action was irresponsible does not mean the person *is* irresponsible. This is how negative labels start.

Shame is also a powerful weapon that causes unhealthy guilt. Unhealthy guilt damages self-esteem with destructive self-talk, "I'm a bad person because I did a bad thing. I'll never amount to anything." Healthy guilt is a feeling of regret, without losing one's self-respect and self-worth in the process. "I'm sorry. I'll do . . . to take care of it." Healthy guilt is usually self-imposed, whereas harmful guilt is imposed by others—to manipulate or control. When people feel unhealthy shame, their motivation and learning stops and avoidance, resistance, denial, and anger take its place. Instead, we want to describe the problem and leave character assassinations out of our comments.

Focus on the present. It is infuriating (and incredibly unfair) when people bring up past failures or predict negative future behavior. For example, "You are always late! Two years ago you made me wait for an hour and a half! You'll never keep a job if you don't learn how to be on time." The real issue is not two years ago. Today, the child was late and the parent needs to count on the child coming home on time. Predictions and criticism have one sole purpose—to hurt and belittle others. They create negative labels and roles, which we learned to avoid and defuse in Chapter 4, "Self-Esteem Toolset."

Be clear and direct. We want to say exactly what we mean and mean what we say. Double messages send two different, inconsistent meanings. Usually, people say the conflicting statements at different times, so they don't realize they presented a no-win situation. For example, a parent says, "Help your sister with the computer. She doesn't know how to get into that program." Later, when the parent sees the helper taking over, the parent says, "Don't do it for her!" The helper gets upset and complains, "But you *told* me to help her!" What the parent really meant was, "*Teach* your sister how to get into the computer program by herself," but the parent wasn't clear and didn't explain the difference between helping and taking over.

"Contradictory" messages begin to say one thing, but end up saying the opposite. For example, "Sure, go to the party. I'll just stay awake worrying about you all night." This statement starts by saying "Yes," but ends with a guilt trip that says, "I don't really want you to go." Direct statements carry one message.

Appropriate Body Language

Sometimes our body language contradicts our words. If our teen asks to borrow the car and we say "Yes" in a hesitant or irritated **tone of voice**, we're implying we have a problem with the request. We can't expect others to read our minds or body language. We shouldn't be surprised or angry if the teen takes our words literally, "Thanks! See ya later!"

We need to pay attention to and control our body language, especially in the following ways:

- **Volume** has a great impact on how others interpret our messages. If our voice is too loud, others think we are being aggressive. Too soft a voice suggests a passive comment. We want our volume to be moderate, with proper changes that express our feelings honestly yet respectfully.

  > *A Personal Story. My voice is loud, even when I try to whisper. As a child, my loud voice was irritating and got me in trouble at school. Today, as a public speaker, my voice is an asset. When I get excited, I sound like I'm yelling, even if I'm not angry. My kids also have loud voices, so my husband often thinks we are arguing, even if we are simply excited or disagreeing. Because of our own loud voices, we tend to listen more to content than volume.*

  > *A mother, whose child was in my daughter's first-grade class, called me during the first two weeks of school. She is a **very** soft-spoken woman and I've never heard her raise her voice, not even among a group of wild kids. She said her son was coming home from school upset, because the teacher "yelled" at him all day. Knowing this teacher, I knew she had a loud voice and spoke her mind, but not in disrespectful ways. I thought Amber would have commented if her teacher yelled a lot. I asked this mother whom her son had for a kindergarten teacher. This teacher was a soft-spoken, warm, huggy teacher. I told the mother I suspected that her son wasn't used to being with an adult who had a loud voice. I told her I would check with my daughter and call her back if I found the case was any different. Amber, who had a soft-spoken kindergarten teacher, said this first-grade teacher was nice and didn't yell. Loud voices can intimidate people and seem to be aggressive, even if the person's intentions are warm and friendly.*

- **Rate of speech** is how fast we talk. If we talk too fast, it sends the message we are nervous or aggressive. It is also difficult to understand people who talk too fast. (When I'm nervous, I do this, too!) If we talk too slowly, people think we don't care or are unsure of our feelings.

- **Intonation** refers to the words we emphasize. Remember the example of "I didn't say your dress looked silly" in the F-A-X Listening Toolset? Emphasizing different words can change the meaning of the same sentence.

- **Facial expressions** need to match our verbal statements. If we smile and say "I'm furious," people think we are joking. Likewise, if we frown and say, "I'm okay," others will ask, "Are you sure?" Controlling our facial reactions is an important part of keeping our message respectful. We want to keep our faces relaxed, with appropriate facial expressions. We can use our words and a stern tone of voice to emphasize "I'm *furious* right now," rather than screaming it with veins bulging. Mostly, we want our face and tone of voice to be friendly and matter-of-fact. This is how we are both firm *and* kind.

- **Eye contact** is important if we want to "get through." A curious "Are you listening?" look as we seek eye contact is most desirable. Cold glaring stares scare people and cause them to avoid eye contact.

- **Hand motions** also speak volumes. Pointing fingers and pounding fists convey aggression and cause defensiveness. We want to keep our hands open and move them in relaxed flowing ways.

- **Standing** over someone with our hands on our hips is a position of authority and dominance. We are likely to get defiance in return. The ideal stance is to move toward others calmly, while speaking in a controlled way. With young children or someone sitting, it is preferable to kneel or sit at eye level. Just this position, alone, helps them be more open to what we are saying.

- **Timing** is also important to get our message through. Avoid confronting or criticizing others in front of a group. It is embarrassing and humiliating. They will not only react negatively, but will probably seek revenge later for their humiliation. Ask the person to step into a private place. If we can't leave, we can get their attention with a gentle hand on the shoulder as we whisper something in one ear. When we respect others' privacy and confidentiality, they are more likely to respect us by listening and cooperating.

CLEAR COMMUNICATION TOOLS

Notice that when we use the following communication tools, we don't usually tell people what to do. This is not passive communication, because we assertively describe the problem and, sometimes, the solution we prefer. We then wait to see if people will voluntarily cooperate with our request or figure out an equally acceptable solution on their own. When we add an order or command to the end of an assertive statement, it sends a hidden message of "do what I say—now—or else" and can start a power struggle. Instead, simply focus on the problem, and give the person time to respond or act. Our hidden message implies, "I have confidence in your ability to resolve this problem." If we make these statements in a friendly, matter-of-fact way, children usually respond quicker. If they don't, we can select a firmer statement from this toolset before moving to the next level—redirecting misbehavior with the PU or PO Toolset.

Describe What You *See* ☆☆☆☆

Use objective words that create a picture. Instead of labeling ("You're messy"), judging ("You always leave your messes for me to clean") or assuming why children are misbehaving ("You just love making my job harder"), we simply describe the problem as we *see* it. "*I see* books, coats, and papers on the living room floor." If children know where the objects belong, we don't have to give this information again. Without tacking on an order, our description says, "You know where they go and I trust you to put them there, now."

Avoid the word "you"; say "I" instead. Saying "you" is like pointing a finger of blame. People take it personally and defend themselves. Instead of *"You* need to take out the trash," say "The trash needs to be taken out." Try to use "I" whenever you can. Say, *"I see* wet towels laying on the bathroom floor," instead of blaming, *"You* left wet towels . . ." or ordering, "Pick up the wet towels *you* left . . ." Follow the "Don't Say 'Don't'" rule when using this tool. Describe what needs doing ("*I see* the dog needs food") or what you see ("The dog's bowl is empty").

> **When dealing with Child problems, use "you" and avoid "I."** Child problems belong to others, so we talk about how *they* think and feel. Using "I" shifts the focus to us, which causes others to feel we interrupted them, so they stop talking.
>
> **When dealing with Parent problems, use "I" and avoid "you."** Parent problems belong to us, so we talk about how *we* think and feel. Using "you" shifts the focus to others and sounds blameful, which causes others to feel defensive and stop listening.

Use "someone" or "people" when describing behavior, because it would probably bother us if *anybody* acted this way. Instead of saying, "I saw *you* throw sand," say "I see *someone* throwing sand."

The appropriate children know we are referring to them without pointing any fingers. If we say, "I'm sick of *your* smart-aleck attitude," we're not only blaming by using "you," but labeling the behavior as "smart-alecky." We can be just as assertive and more tactful if we say, "I understand you are angry (we can use "you" when noticing *their* feelings), but it's easier to listen to feelings and concerns if they are worded respectfully." This says what we *are* willing to do, within limits. We can also say, "In this family, we treat each other with respect even when we are angry," which teaches a family value.

Use "sometimes" or "when," instead of "always" or "never." ("You *never* return my stuff.") People usually deny or debate exaggerations and blame, "No, I don't do it *all* the time!" Instead, say "Sometimes my _____ is missing when I need it" or "When I go to use my _____, I expect it to be in the _____."

⚒ Describe How You *Feel*

We can combine this tool with the previous one to express our feelings about a particular behavior or problem. The description focuses on our feelings about the *behavior*, not the person. "I feel _____ when (describe the problem)." For example, "It's frustrating to say something three times and get no response."

Own your feelings, saying "I feel," instead of, "*You make* me feel . . ." Remember what we learned in the Keep Your Cool Toolset—no matter what another person does, we *choose* how we are going to interpret the event. If we say, "You make me feel . . ." we are *giving away* our personal power. We might as well say, "Look how powerful you are. You *made me* lose my temper." With children, this statement can reinforce the belief that being in power is important, which increases manipulative or rebellious behavior. When we own our feelings, *we* are in control—of *ourselves*.

Avoid overusing *angry* or *upset.* Remember that anger is a secondary emotion. We want to express the emotion we felt *before* the anger. This helps children learn about the emotional effects of their behavior. Also, if we overuse "angry," children simply conclude, "Everything makes you mad!" There are many shades of anger and many words to describe it:

Alternatives to "I'm angry (or upset)."			
I am/feel . . . irritated	exasperated	seeing red	stewing
livid frustrated	provoked	uncomfortable	boiling over
fuming furious	enraged	displeased	ticked off
annoyed aggravated	outraged	smoldering	
I'm ready to. . . explode	have a cow	fly off the handle	I can't see straight.
blow my top	blow my stack	hit the ceiling	My blood's boiling.

So, what can we do if we keep our cool and respectfully assert our concerns, only to have children reply, "Tough. I don't care. If you're upset, that's your problem."? We can say, "Well, I *do* care—about you. That's why I try to show respect for other people's feelings, even when I disagree. And I do have a problem if others don't treat me respectfully in return."

Express feelings authentically. If it is difficult to control our volume, we can try instead to emphasize certain words to get our point across. For example, we would stress the word "furious" more strongly than we would stress the word "annoyed." We always want to be respectful, even when we're angry. If we do take our feelings out on our children, we can restate ourselves in a more controlled way or say, "I'm sorry I yelled. I (describe the problem or your feelings) . . ." This conditional apology says, "I have a valid reason for being upset, but I regret the way I expressed it." Doing this can help rebuild trust and salvage something good out of the situation.

Avoid the word "embarrassed." "I'm embarrassed" is often misinterpreted as "*You are an* embarrassment." Embarrassment is based on the belief that we must care about what others think or how they will judge us. Therefore, no one *makes* us feel embarrassed, it is a self-imposed emotion. Naturally, things happen that are embarrassing (especially if we have children), but we can choose whether to accept that feeling and let it cause us to lose our self-control. If we cannot avoid the word, use it in a way that takes ownership of our feelings. "When I have to walk through a store with a child hanging on my pants, it's hard not to feel embarrassed." A good way to deal with embarrassment is to use humor. "It would be much easier for me to walk if my pants stayed on my body and your feet stayed on the floor!"

Avoid the word "disappointed." It turns statements into guilt trips. It sends the hidden message, "You *are* a disappointment" or "You could have done better." These comments cause others to feel like failures. Disappointment is usually caused by unrealistic expectations. When parents use guilt trips, children might change their behavior to please others. There is value in every good behavior and a positive sense of self-worth when it's practiced. *This* is the healthy motive for changing behavior.

> ***A Parent Group Discussion.*** *In class, a parent asked a valid question about feeling disappointed. Here is our conversation:*
>
> *Parent: If my child is normally a straight "A" student, can't I expect her to get good grades and be disappointed when she doesn't do her best? Can't I just tell her "You have a choice, you can put forth the effort and get good grades or keep sloughing off and fail"?*
>
> *Me: You can **hope** she will do her best and get good grades. But realistically, you can **expect** that there will be times when she feels bored, unmotivated, wants to take a break, or doesn't do her best. Usually these are normal cycles we all experience. It might be premature, however, to present a natural consequence. Remember, that's climbing into the attic of discipline. The truth is that we can never really **make** our children get good grades or do their best. If children feel encouraged, they naturally try harder. If we point out mistakes, children feel **more** discouraged and often give up.*
>
> *Since school problems are mostly Child problems, you want to use the F-A-X Listening and Problem-Solving Toolsets. Detach yourself from **your** disappointment and expectations and find out how your **daughter** feels and what she expects from **herself.** Use the Parent Problem Toolbox only when the problem interferes with the "SHARP RV" issues. Limit your opinions to these issues and quickly refocus on your daughter's feelings and perspective.*

Put them in your shoes. Use this tool when others can't relate to your perspective or how it feels to be in your shoes. This tool uses a point of reference that is familiar to the listener. It puts them in a similar situation in that area of *their* life so they see how they would feel. Then you make a comparison between *that* situation and their feelings and *your* feelings in *this* situation. Here are a few examples to illustrate this tool:

> *Situation:* Your young child runs away from you in a crowded place. You are afraid he'll get lost, but he has no fear.
>
> *Similar situation:* This child has a special stuffed animal, named Scruffy, that he wants to carry everywhere. (It could be *any* toy or object the child deeply loves.) Say, "Imagine that we went to the carnival and you and Scruffy went for a ride on the merry-go-round. When the ride is over, Scruffy is gone and you don't see him anywhere! Imagine how you would feel." If he doesn't use feeling words, continue the description, pausing between questions. "Would you look and look and look? Would you worry you might not ever find him? Would you wonder if someone took Scruffy? Do you think you should wait for Scruffy to find you? When you find him, what would you do when you rode the next ride?" If he doesn't volunteer an answer, add "Would you hold onto him even tighter?" When it seems he is experiencing the feelings in this situation, say, "That's how *I* feel when I can't find you. I love you so much and don't want you to get hurt or have someone else take you home! I look all over and worry I might not be able to find you. When I do, I want you to hold my hand so I can make sure I don't lose you again."

Situation: Your teenager wants to stay out extra late. She knows you will say "no" if she asks you privately, so she asks you in front of her friends, hoping their presence will pressure you to agree. She doesn't understand why it matters *where* she asks you this question.

Similar situation: "Imagine that you are at a party and your friends are in another room. One of them comes to you privately and wants you to play a cruel practical joke on a boy at the party. What would you say?" Wait for her response. Hopefully, she says she won't do it. Then say, "Now, imagine they call you into the other room and ask you in front of your friends. Now what would you say?" If she says she would still refuse to participate, add, "Now, as a group, they try to pressure you to change your mind. How do you feel toward your friends and the way they are using the group to pressure you to make a decision you know is wrong?" After she responds, make the connection to *your* feelings. "When I need to deny people's requests in front of their friends, I feel pressured and resentful, too. I might have even said 'yes,' *if* the person asked me in private!"

Share your values. Although we learned tips for teaching values in the Independence Toolset, many Parent problems are value conflicts. When we try to express our concerns, we often end up preaching and lecturing. Here are some additional suggestions we can follow when we want to share our values:

- *Talk about values before conflicts arise.* Values are best taught when children are young and more easily influenced. Use teachable moments to bring up the subject. Discussing news events, television shows, or advertisements, and telling stories about others' experiences are all ways we can share our values without a sermon.

- *Live by the values you want children to adopt.* Children, especially teens, can easily identify hypocrites. If we simply practice what we are tempted to preach, our children are more likely to imitate and adopt our values.

- *Don't force values on others.* When children raise moral questions, we can state *our* opinions and values, emphasizing that not everyone believes the same way. We can explain the basis for our conclusions and the effects of believing otherwise, but not impose our beliefs on others. Force is usually met with force. A relaxed attitude more often results in children considering and voluntarily adopting our values.

- *Be willing to consider other points of view.* We can admit when our children have a valuable point to consider. We can even change our beliefs, if their values have merit for our lives. If we find their values are right for their lives, but not necessarily right for ours, we can acknowledge their right to choose their own values. Here, we are not compromising our own values nor are we forcing them on others. Value conflicts arise mostly in the teen years. (There are some additional comments about values in the "Tips for Teens" section at the end of this chapter.)

Describe the Negative Effect of the Behavior

This tool combines the description of behavior ("When milk is left out . . .") with a description of the effect that behavior has (. . . it spoils.") We are giving information so the person understands the reason for our concern. To be most effective, use measurable or visual terms, such as time, money, energy, or emotions. We can use this tool in any of the following circumstances:

- If we aren't sure if children know this information.
- If children might have forgotten the information.
- Before we expect children to follow through with a request.
- Before we assume children's behavior is "on purpose."

Often, once we give information, children figure out what action they want or need to take. We don't usually need to add an order or command, it is implied. For example, if we say, "When someone eats on the couch and food falls under the cushions, it attracts bugs," it implies two things: (1) "We don't want

bugs" and (2) "don't leave crumbs in the couch." We want to keep our tone of voice matter-of-fact and avoid blameful statements like, "If you do __, you're going to *make__* happen." If we simply give information, most children prefer to feel responsible and mature by doing something about it. If we nag and order, they resist even more.

Emotional consequences are often less obvious to children. We can help them understand why certain behaviors, such as politeness or tactfulness, are important. For example, avoid saying, "Quit being so bossy" or "If you don't quit bossing your friends around they won't be your friends anymore." Instead, we can say, "When people don't get a turn now and then, they may not want to play anymore." Or "People don't like being told what to do. They stop having fun and might leave."

If we can't find a way to make a connection between the behavior and the negative effect, children can conclude that we want them to do it for no valid reason. If they see no value in the request, they are less likely to take action.

Keep it brief and simple, avoiding long explanations or lectures. The more we say, the less others will want to listen. It is nagging and blameful to say, "Someone didn't hang up the towels. They're all over the floor. They're going to get the carpet moldy." Instead, we can simply say, "Wet towels make carpets moldy."

Describe What You Want, Expect, or What Needs to Be Done

If we have used the previous tools in the past and the behavior occurs again, we want to make a firmer statement. We can also use this tool when children can't figure out a remedy. Rather than telling someone what to do with an order or command, try these firm, but respectful options:

- When (describe the problem), I expect (action we want done).
- I would like (describe positive behavior).
- I want _____ .
- I prefer _____ .

- I expect _____ .
- I need _____ .
- I plan to _____ .
- I'm willing to _____ .
- I'm not willing to _____ .

Be careful about turning this tool into a command or order. We are better off stating *our* limits, what we are and aren't willing to do, than telling children what *they* will or won't do (since we usually start power struggles when we do this). Here are some examples:

➤ "*When* people borrow my tools, *I expect* them returned to the toolbox right away."
➤ "*I want* everyone to rinse their own dishes and put them in the dishwasher."
➤ "*I expect* people to come home when they agree to be home."
➤ "*I plan to* take a nap, so *I would like* everyone to do something quiet for half an hour."
➤ "*I'm willing to* take someone to the library *when* I can schedule the time in advance. *I'm not willing to* take someone the night before a project is due."

*A Personal Story. When Chris was in kindergarten, he decided he wanted to wear ten shirts to school—all at once! (Don't ask me why! To this day I don't know!) As he stood before me, looking like the Incredible Hulk, he proudly showed me his layers. I briefly commented that he might get hot and that others might think him strange. He insisted and I decided not to make a big issue out of this. He'd had strange, but innocent, ideas before and they usually didn't last long. I said, "You can wear ten shirts if you want, but **I'm only willing** to wash the top shirt and the one that touches your skin. **I expect** the other shirts to be folded and put back in the drawer. **I want to see** zero shirts on the floor." He agreed. He wore ten shirts—and folded eight each night—for a couple of weeks and then went back to the traditional one-shirt style.*

⌇ State the Rules or Limits

There are short but effective rules that have stood the test of time. We can call them "Grandma's Rules":

- "Work before play."
- "Say it nicely."
- "Safety first!"
- "Make amends for mistakes."
- "There is always an effect, positive or negative, for every action."

Rules need to be bottom-line statements, not detailed descriptions. (Remember the "Rules for Setting Rules" in the Cooperation Toolset.) Once we state the bottom line, we can then shift the focus to the choices children have within those boundaries. Instead of threatening ("If you don't pick up these dirty clothes, I won't do your laundry), state the bottom line, "I only wash clothes that are in the hampers on laundry day." We state the rule with an implied expectation that dirty clothes are put in hampers. We have also revealed the effect of not putting clothes in the hamper.

Use helpful questions to decide rules. For example, "What would happen if . . . ? (Wait for the response.) What could you do to prevent this?" Use a curious tone of voice, not an angry one.

Don't assume people know the rules, especially those that could vary from family to family. Some examples are "Please remove your shoes at the door" and "We ask permission to be excused from the table." It is unrealistic and unreasonable to expect others to follow unspoken family rules. It is especially important to clarify rules when blending two families after divorce and remarriage.

> *A Personal Story. My parents divorced my first year in college. When I came home to visit, I naturally operated by the family rules and routines we had always followed. For example, each evening I'd check everyone's schedules and move the cars so they could pull out in order. One weekend, I arrived before my mother and parked in the driveway, where I had always parked. My future stepfather came to visit. When he arrived, he scolded me for "taking my mother's parking space." He said it was "disrespectful to park in the garage or driveway. Children are supposed to park on the street."*
>
> *Surprised by this new rule, I explained that we had never had designated parking spaces. I said I could see the value of his point and explained my parking plan. He insisted that I had "disrespectful disregard" for my mother's needs. Knowing how much I respect my mother and try to consider her needs, I was very offended. We got into a heated argument and I stormed out of the house. (Our first and only big argument.)*
>
> *From then on, I was careful not to park in their driveway and asked permission first before parking there. I discovered other "hidden" rules over the years, but didn't argue or try to explain myself. I simply memorized them and revealed them to my family.*

"Hidden rules" cause resentment. If we expect others to follow our *preferences* as though they are universal rules we are being unfair and unreasonable. People are not mind-readers and resent it when others accuse them of violating rules they don't know about. Here's the bottom line: ***If we expect it, we need to make the expectation realistic, respectful, and clear. Otherwise, we can't expect others to know or comply with our rules.***

⌇ Get Eye-to-Eye Agreements ✫✫✫✫

When we want to confirm that someone heard and understood us, eye contact is *vital.* If we ask someone to do something and we hear, "Okay" or "I will," we can add one final word, "When?" If we want to avoid getting a simple, "Later" or "Soon," we need to be specific. "*What time can I expect to see _____?*" Most children (and adults) will choose the latest time possible. When they do, we confirm our expectation. "So at six o'clock, I can expect to see _____, right?"

When we have a commitment, we want to maintain eye contact until we see some form of agreement. This could be as simple as a nod "yes" or something more. Here are some other ways to confirm agreements:

- "Do we have a deal?" (*Shake hands.*)
- "So you will do (task) by (time), right?" *Get eye contact*, so you avoid a "Yeah, whatever" response and later an "Oh, I forgot." People are less likely to forget when they look at our eyes and then agree.
- *Confirm your expectations*, "So when you tell me you're done, I can expect to see the floor clean, with everything where it belongs. Right?"
- *Confirm the agreement.* "So when Saturday night comes and you're tired, I can still count on you to go to the party and not cancel, right?" (This is the one I use with my husband! ☺)

When the agreed time arrives, if the other person forgets or tries to back out of the agreement, we can still avoid a power struggle. Set limits by emphasizing the agreement. "We had an agreement that the leaves would be raked *before* you left for the mall. You can go *after* the leaves are finished." Then don't add any extra nagging or reminders. Instead, use nonverbal cues, such as pointing to or looking at a watch, smile knowingly, or giving a hug. They may not be happy, but they will probably cooperate. Don't make a big deal about under-the-breath grumbling. Shift gears to listening, "I know you don't really feel like doing this. Thank you for keeping your agreement." If the comment is really out-of-line, the child *and* parent need to calm down before discussing the behavior. Otherwise, it's like two volcanoes ready to erupt.

If children have broken agreements in the past, we can add a statement that reveals discipline. Although we haven't learned the specifics of the Discipline Toolset, an example could be, "If the dishwasher isn't running by 6:30, I'll know you've decided to turn off the TV and do the dishes then." Then say nothing, wait for the agreed time to arrive, and follow through.

Mix and Match Tools

We can use all these tools by themselves or with other communication tools. This does not mean we repeat ourselves. We combine the tools to make *one* statement, as in the following examples.

INSTEAD OF SAYING:	SAY:
Don't interrupt me. It's rude.	*I feel* frustrated *when I'm* interrupted. (Describes the feelings and behavior.)
Turn off that TV and listen to me.	*When* I'm talking, *I expect* others to listen. (Describes the behavior and our expectations.)
Stop driving so fast!	*It* scares me *to* go 75 miles an hour. *We could* have an accident. (Describes feelings, the behavior, and the negative effect.)
You're giving me a headache!	*I get* a headache *when* there's so much noise. (Describes the negative effect of the behavior and the behavior itself.)

Shift Gears

When we are talking, we need to remember to shift back to the listening tools if we encounter resistance or an emotional reaction from others. We may need to go back and forth several times to get a clear understanding. Then we can move onto problem solving or redirect problem behavior.

> *A Parent Group Discussion. A mother shared the following story and we discussed how she could use a combination of the skills she had already learned to respond more helpfully.*
>
> *My four-year-old son fell asleep in the car after shopping. When we got home, his sister woke him up. He was mad at her for waking him (he wanted me to wake him) and started being mean to her. I said, "I'm not going to wake you up when I'm tired from carrying in stuff from the car and she's right there." He kept saying, "But . . ." I yelled, "If you won't listen I'll yell even louder until you do!" I know he was tired and wanted me to carry him in, but . . ." I interrupted the mother's story, "Wait a minute. Did you tell **him** you understood he was tired and wanted **you** to wake him up, even though you weren't willing to do it?" "Well, no," she replied. I said, "Let's reword this so you can move beyond his emotions and the power struggle, without violating your rights. Let's use the universal PASRR formula. Fill in the blanks: 'I can tell you feel _____.' **Then** say what you're feeling or thinking." She said, "Okay, I know you don't like your sister waking you up, but I'm not willing to carry you in when I'm already tired and you can walk." "Now," I said, "offer him some choices." She thought a few seconds and replied, "You can either keep sleeping in the car or have your sister wake you up." She added, "But what if he fusses at those ideas, too?" I said, "Then you can move into problem solving. This is a problem for him, too! Set your bottom line, 'I'm not willing to carry you in and you don't want your sister to wake you.' Then ask him, 'How else can you wake up?' Put the ball in his court."*
>
> *She did some brainstorming with her son before their next shopping trip. He whined a bit, but followed through with his agreement to have his mother wake him, but walk inside by himself.*

Quick Reminders ✰✰✰✰

We want to avoid nagging and constant reminders. When we have used longer descriptive statements in the past, sometimes we only need a quick reminder.

Human behavior is consistent, despite age. When we tell children something in one or few words, it gets their attention. They don't have time to tune us out. Then, because they are so appreciative that we didn't lecture them or embarrass them in front of others, they *reward our* behavior by cooperating.

Short, clear statements can help us avoid lectures, which cause eyes to roll and ears to close. Here are four short and clear reminders.

NONVERBAL SIGNALS

We have all used nonverbal signals at some time or another, such as putting a finger to our lips to say "Shh." Another is "the look," that knowing glance with a smile that says, "Okay, that's enough!" This look differs from the "evil eye," which conveys a threat or spite. A firm but matter-of-fact look that says "I heard that" or "You know better" is often all that's necessary to get children thinking twice about what they are saying or doing.

These nonverbal signs are fairly obvious, but we can invent more to suit our needs and the situation. These are nonverbal codes that we explain ahead of time. Children like nonverbal codes, because they are fun and spare them embarrassment. Here are a few signals that other graduates and I have used:

➤ Twisting my nose means, "turn down the volume" on your voice.
➤ Using the American Sign Language sign for "thank you" to remind children to show appreciation, instead of saying, "What do you tell the nice lady?"

➤ A teenage son and his father came up with the code, "8-3-1," which means "It has eight letters, three words, and means one thing, 'I love you.'"

➤ One mother sent her dog into the family room with his bowl hanging from his neck. The kids got the message to "feed the dog."

USE ONE WORD

When children forget something we've explained in the past, we can use one or two words to remind them of the longer explanation we once gave. *Do not* use a child's name as the one word. It sends no information and can cause the child to equate his name with being in trouble. (I always knew when the boy down the street was in *big* trouble. His mother would yell his full name from the front door.) If we use children's names, we only want to use them to get their attention and then add the one word reminder. Also, follow the "Don't say 'Don't'" rule and make the word state what you want the child *to do*.

| INSTEAD OF SAYING	USE ONE WORD
Turn off the light.	Light!
Flush the toilet.	Flush.
Pick up your shoes.	Shoes.
You know you're not allowed on the wood pile!	Wood pile or Off!
Don't run.	Walk.
Get out of the street.	Sidewalk.

LEAVE A NOTE

When children have a case of "parent deafness," notes are particularly effective. Notes visually say something without actually talking, so children have no chance to tune us out. We can use notes anytime, with children of all ages. Here are some ideas for using notes:

• Notes can be simple, friendly, or even humorous reminders. For example, I saw this sign hung over a toilet, "We aim to please. You aim too, please."

• We can get creative, giving inanimate objects a voice. For example, attach a note to a laundry basket that says "I'm hungry, please feed me dirty clothes."

• Even if children can't read, they can understand pictures. Just the sight of a note gets their interest and they will probably ask what the note says.

A Personal Story. A friend has little signs posted in her bathroom. They have pictures she and her son cut out of magazines of different tasks in his morning and bedtime routines. All he has to do is look at the pictures and he can remember what to do next. This has prevented a lot of reminding and nagging.

When my son was old enough to take responsibility for feeding the dog, but wasn't old enough to read, I hung this note (to the right) on our family room door.

FEED ME   BEFORE TV
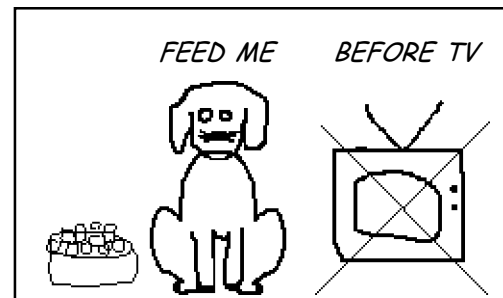
We can also write notes when we are too upset to trust ourselves to keep our cool. Just the process of writing a note helps diffuse our anger. If our first effort comes off too strong, we can rewrite it, until we say what we want, the way we want to say it. When we put apologies or words of encouragement in writing, they can have a lasting effect:

> *A Personal Story. When I was a teen, my brother's behavior had really deteriorated, so our home was always a high-stress zone. My dad would often take a nap after work. One evening, I didn't know he was sleeping and was being loud and silly. He flew out of bed, thinking there was an argument. He was scared and upset and yelled at me. I felt bad, but was hurt by what he said, and gave him the silent treatment the rest of the night. The next evening, on my desk, was a letter of apology. He told me he appreciated my sense of humor and how much I meant to him. He shared his reasons for getting angry and told me how much he loved me. To this day, I still have his letter, although there is a big tear stain on the words.*

When someone writes a letter, whether to apologize or encourage, it often means more than an in-person talk. We know the person took the time to sit and write and it's something we can save for later, to rekindle the warm feelings it brought. Notes are so effective, our children often start using them to communicate with us.

> *A Personal Story. When I came home from an evening class, I found a note on the door. Chris, then age 8, must have run out of his favorite clothes. His note said, "Please wash blacks tonight. I'll dry them in the morning. P.S. Good night. Love, Chris."*

FLASH CODES

Flash codes are one-word reminders that parents and children agree on privately before a problem arises. The word means a sentence or idea. The word has special meaning to both of you, but can mean nothing to others. For example, the word "banana" can mean "Quit picking your nose." In public, we can say, "Tommy, do you smell *bananas*?" This spares children from nagging and embarrassment. (I invented flash codes when Chris was three and we did parent/child problem solving. I'll share the whole story in the next section.)

Two-Party Problem-Solving ☆☆☆☆

We learned how to do one-party problem solving with Child problems, "keeping the ball in their court." When a problem also affects us, we both need to be involved in the problem-solving process and agree on a solution that meets both our needs. To do this we add one step, defining the problem from both viewpoints, and expand another step, detailing who will do what to achieve the plan. Although we can use two-party problem solving in any relationship, we will apply it to parent/child relationships. We can do problem solving on the spur of the moment in a condensed form or, if a problem keeps occurring, we can arrange a time to follow the process step-by-step in writing.

The goal of two-party problem solving is to reach a "win/win" agreement. "Win/win" does *not* mean both people get *everything* they want. Usually, it means both people get *some* of what they want, their "bottom line" needs. Both or neither may be happy about doing what they agreed to do, but they know it is a fair agreement and are therefore willing to follow through with it.

These are the basic steps of two-party problem solving:

a. Define the problem.
  i. Introduce the problem topic in one sentence.
  ii. Invite the other person to share his/her perspective.
  iii. Ask if the other person is willing to listen to your concerns.
  iv. Share your perspective.
  v. Summarize the problem for each person.
b. Brainstorm ideas.
c. Evaluate the options.
d. Choose, define, and commit to the solution.
e. Follow-up.

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a. Define the Problem

Since we use two-party problem solving when *we* have a problem, we usually need to bring the problem to the attention of the other person. Even if the problem is not a C/P problem, we still want to listen to other people's feelings and perspectives. To get off on the right foot, define the problem by following these steps:

i. ***Introduce the problem topic.*** We *briefly* introduce the topic (without opinions) using one of the Clear Communication tools. For example, "We have been having a lot of arguments about curfew lately."

ii. ***Invite the other person to share his/her perspective.*** We stress that we *want* to see the situation from the other person's point-of-view and quickly shift to listening mode. "I'd like to hear your thoughts about curfew and any ideas you have for an agreement we can both live with. What are your concerns about the way we currently handle curfew?" To avoid arguments, *stick to the issue*. Keep asking, "What else do you think or feel?" We don't defend our position or disagree. (This can be difficult if we hear blameful statements. If others criticize or blame us, we can use a quick "I" message, "I'm willing to listen to your perspective, but it's hard if I feel criticized. Can you tell me what you don't like with respectful words?") Write their feelings, opinions, and other comments on the "Problem Solving Worksheet" at the end of the Problem-Solving Toolset. Now and then, we clarify and summarize their opinions, "Let me get this straight, you feel _____, because _____."

iii. ***Ask if the other person is willing to listen to our concerns.*** If we have been listening with respect and ask permission before speaking, most people are willing to listen to us without interrupting. In the remote chance that the other person says, "No, I'm not willing to listen to you," reveal the result. "Well, we can keep arguing about this or we can come up with an agreement that meets both our needs. I'd like to *try* to resolve this. Will you give it a try, too?"

iv. ***We share our concerns,*** using the Clear Communication Toolset. *Do not* try to *agree* on the same viewpoints or issues. We can agree that we *both* have different concerns. We look for truth on both sides and simply try to understand each other. Then we ask them to tell us what they just heard us say, so we know they understand, even if they don't agree. (This teaches them reflective listening skills.) If, at any point in our sharing, they interrupt us, we can calmly say, "I listened without interrupting. I'd like to have my ideas and opinions heard, too, even if we disagree."

v. ***Summarize the problem for each person.*** Once we both state our opinions, we summarize the problem in a nutshell, "So for you it's like this . . . and for me it's like this . . ." Or "You'd like _____ and I want _____."

b.   Brainstorm Possible Solutions

Introduce brainstorming with a comment such as, "Can you think of some ways that you could <u>(their biggest issue)</u> and I could <u>(your biggest issue)</u>?" In the curfew example, we might say, "Can you think of a way that you could be with your friends longer and I could know where you are and that you're safe?" ***We want to summarize the problem in a way that gives us a win/win goal to focus on.*** This helps us move beyond differences of opinions and needs to focusing on solutions.

We allow the other person to come up with ideas first. This emphasizes that we are not trying to impose *our* solutions. Allowing someone to state an idea is entirely different from accepting that idea for the final agreement. Be patient. Just keep asking, "What else?" and write down every possibility. If we offer an idea, we want to word it as a suggestion, "One possibility is . . ." or "We could . . ." Avoid "We should . . ." ***Do not evaluate any ideas at this point.*** If others criticize *our* ideas, we remind them, "It's just an idea. We don't have to use it."

c. Evaluate the Options

Consider the possible outcome of each idea. Unacceptable options can be altered to make them acceptable to both parties. Use phrases such as, "What would happen if we did this?" And "How do you feel about this one?" Or "Are you willing to . . . ?" If we don't like an idea, we express our concerns without blame or criticism. "I would be concerned about doing that because . . ." Or "I'm not willing to do this because . . ." We want to keep the word "you" out of our comments if possible. Cross off ideas or parts of suggestions one or both parties are unwilling to agree to.

d. Choose, Define, and Commit to the Solution

Choose the solution both parties favor most. It may be a combination of more than one idea. Make sure both parties understand what that plan would involve. Define who will do what and when it needs to be done. Agree not to nag or remind. If it seems appropriate to the situation, also define what will happen if the agreement is broken. This last part may involve revealing discipline (Chapter 13, "Discipline Toolset"). Agree to try the solution for a trial period. Set a time to discuss how the agreement is working—or isn't working. During the trial period, if we notice others aren't following through with their agreements, we can say, "Remember our agreement?" Use a friendly attitude of respect, keeping *our* agreement not to nag.

e. Follow-up

See what happens during the trial period and bring up any problems at the follow-up meeting. Be willing to adjust or change the agreement if it seems unworkable or new information is available. We want to check to see how the solution is working for others, even if it's working for us.

> *A Personal Story. When Chris was three-and-a-half years old, he would whine and complain about how long it took to clean his room and got distracted by the toys he was picking up. I knew Chris' behavior was age-appropriate and tried keeping realistic expectations. I had taught him how to pick up items and organize them, but found myself nagging him to stay on task.*
>
> *We sat over a cup of hot chocolate and did problem solving. I started by asking him how he felt about cleaning. He said it was no fun and was afraid he would die of starvation and thirst before he was done. I held back my laughter and remembered how different his sense of time was. I wrote his concerns on paper. I acknowledged how hard it is to get motivated to clean and how easy it is to get distracted (his part of the problem). I told him I was frustrated about how long it took him to clean even a small part of his room (my part of the problem.) I said I was tired of nagging and was sure he didn't like feeling pressured, either. Then I summarized the problem, "So it sounds like we need to find a way to make cleaning more fun, make sure your body is taken care of, and keep you focused on cleaning without me nagging."*
>
> *Then, I moved into brainstorming, "Let's take these one at a time. What could we do to make cleaning more fun?" I was surprised how many ideas he suggested. He suggested roller skating around the room to deliver his toys and playing "Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious" to help him work faster. So far, I didn't have a problem with any of the ideas. He wanted potty and snack breaks. I was concerned he'd use these as excuses not to clean, so I set some conditional limits, ". . . when you finish cleaning one group of toys or one section of the room." These agreements dealt with his boredom and my concern about how long it took to clean. Now I needed suggestions to deal with my part, the nagging. I asked him to suggest a word that, when I said it, would mean "Get back to work." He saw his Flash superhero character on the floor and suggested the word "flash." "Okay," I said, " Whenever you hear the word 'flash,' it means 'Get back to work.' (When I told this story to my class, they named the skill "flash code.")*
>
> *Our problem-solving session was a big turning point. For years he skated to Mary Poppins music. Eventually, Chris didn't need the songs, skates, or "flash" code to complete his tasks. On those occasions when he didn't finish, I didn't nag. The next day, when he asked to play, I'd ask if his room was clean. When he said, "No," I simply said, "You can play as soon as your room is clean." It only took a few times of following through (which I occasionally still need to do) for better cleaning habits to develop.*

PROBLEM SOLVING "ON THE RUN"

"Who has time to sit and figure all this out?" some people ask. If we find we are spending a lot of time reminding, nagging, or arguing, our time is better spent problem solving. We may find that we only do the sit-and-write-it-down version under the following circumstances:

- When we are dealing with recurring problems.
- When we are negotiating ongoing rules and agreements.
- When we and our children have strong differences of opinions or needs.
- When children have seriously violated a rule.

Many times, we can do a quick version of two-party problem-solving. We follow the same steps, except we combine the brainstorming and evaluation steps. Here is a sample conversation with the steps highlighted.

Dad: (*Introduce the problem topic.*) I was expecting you home at six o'clock. *(Invite the other person to share his/her perspective.)* What   happened?

Son: I just forgot the time. I'm only half an hour late! What's the big deal?

Dad: (*Acknowledging his perspective.*) I know it's hard to keep track of time when you are having fun, (*Now share your perspective using the Clear Communication Toolset*) . . . but I worry when you are more than ten minutes late and haven't called. I called your friend's house, but the line was busy and I had dinner waiting. *(Summarize the problem in a way that focuses on the solution*.) How could you remember to be on time, even when you are play-ing? *(Invite brainstorming.)*

Son: You could quit worrying. I can take care of myself.

Dad: (*In quick brainstorming, we can acknowledge their perspective while evaluating the idea.*) You're right, you *can* handle a lot of problems, but I still sometimes worry. My real concern is that I expect to see you walk in the door when you've agree to come home. *(Keep the focus on finding a solution.)* How can you remember what time it is when you are busy?

Son: If I had a watch with an alarm, I could set it.

Dad: *(Evaluate the options.)* Well, the alarm would go off even if you were distracted. (*Choose a solution. Define the details and roles.*) I would be willing to buy a watch if it is less than twenty dollars. If I do that, will you agree to set the alarm each time you leave?

Son: Yeah.

Dad: (*Confirm the agreement and the effects of breaking it.*) And what will happen if you don't set the alarm as you agreed and are late for dinner?

Son: I'll just heat up the food.

Dad: And clean up your dishes and put away the food?

Son: Okay.

Dad: (*Parents can make a value statement if it hasn't already been stated.*) I *really* want to eat together as a family, so I want to know you will make every effort to keep our agreement.

Son: I'll try.

Dad: (*Get a commitment.*) Try?

Son: Okay, I *will* remember.

Dad: All right, I'm holding you to that (Dad pats son on back.)

TIPS FOR TOTS AND TEENS

Be patient during difficult developmental stages, such as the toddler and teen years. We never want to give up or stop showing unconditional love for our children, even when we cannot condone their behavior. Our future relationship is often riding on how we handle these difficult periods.

Tots

Young children *can understand* what we are saying long before they can actually speak themselves. They especially pick up on our tone of voice, attitude, and body language. If we express our feelings and needs assertively, young children learn the value of respecting others' feelings and rights. This helps prevent rude speaking habits.

Young children may have a harder time thinking of ideas during problem solving, but don't jump in and tell them what to do. Be patient and encouraging. Focus on the bottom line and allow any ideas that fit within that limit. Offer simple suggestions and teach skills for carrying them out. If we use problem solving when children are young, they better resolve problems as they grow older.

Teens

Teens are often quite opinionated, outspoken, and question values and rules. (Remember the backpack analogy in Chapter 6, "Independence Toolset"?) These are all positive signs that our teens are maturing. Nevertheless, it can be surprising and difficult when once-quiet, compliant children suddenly speak out strongly and emotionally. We need to work extra hard not to take what they say personally and not to get hooked into arguing over differences of opinions or values. It is vital that we keep the lines of communication open during the teen years. We want to talk less and use F-A-X Listening more.

Many parents worry about teens abandoning family values. Usually, teens only temporarily test values and rules they have not learned firsthand or observed in action. If parents aren't trying to control their teens, teens won't feel such strong needs to push away from their parents' values. When teens are testing and acting out, we want to be careful not to blow things out of proportion. Teens usually need to experience temporary imbalances before they settle into their own unique values and opinions. We need to keep long-term goals (ours and theirs) in mind for teens to become well-balanced independent adults.

> **The way our teens act, think, and feel on a bad day is not usually what they will be like as adults. If we observe them on a good day, when everyone is in the No problem zone, we can predict more accurately what they will be like as adults.**

Parent/child conflicts often increase during the teen years, because of all the above reasons. There are also dangerous safety issues facing our teens and we are no longer with them constantly to protect and guide them. It's tempting to lecture or restrict their independence, but both tactics only result in greater rebellion. If our teens haven't yet learned responsible decision-making skills, we need to use problem solving to teach these skills. We also need to understand teens' points-of-view and be willing to negotiate win/win solutions to problems. When discussion and negotiation have no impact, consider whether the teen's behavior will harm anyone. If so, we can listen first to the teen's perspective and hold firm to our bottom line. We can allow teens to have as much choice or control as the situation allows. If this doesn't work, we can reveal the positive and negative effects of their choices. Our goal is to be a "consultant," listening, offering advice when they ask, or making it clear something is *our* opinion and letting teens choose and experience the lessons. It's more important that we are assertive about our concerns and "keep the ball in their court" as much as possible. They may be testing us or planning to change their behavior later, when we aren't pressing the issue, to "save face."

At times, we need to accept what we cannot change. If our teens have not given us valid reasons to distrust them, we need to demonstrate our trust and have faith—faith in our teens' ability to make responsible decisions and learn from their mistakes, faith in our long-term parenting plan, and faith in a higher power who can protect them when we aren't around.

Most of these suggestions for communicating with teens apply to teens who are not severely troubled or into extremely dangerous behavior. When these factors apply, parents need to access community resources to protect and redirect teens until they can learn better decision-making skills and work through the *real* issues causing their behavior.

CONCLUSION

Many parents keep trying to get through to their children until they tire of nagging and then blow up. If we follow the Universal Blueprint, we usually only need to make our point once or twice, before moving to the next step. We always start at the lowest step and intensity as possible (using prevention tools, for example). We only move to the next step to make firmer statements if children ignore or resist our first attempts. We want to make sure we and our children understand the problem and each other's feelings. It is important to remain assertive, even if we get firmer, and not resort to passive or aggressive tactics.

> *A **Personal Story**. On vacation, we went grocery shopping for two weeks of supplies. In the first aisle, my kids asked me to buy an extra item. I calmly said, "We are only buying what we'll use while we are here, the items on this list. Maybe when we get home we can get that."*

> *The next time they asked, I moved up a level, saying, "I know you really want that. I'd like it, too, if we had enough room in the cooler to bring home the leftovers. Besides, whatever extra money we spend on groceries cuts into our fun money."*

> *I was sure that last point would curb their demands, but they asked again! I decided to make it short but clear. I said, "Today, we are only getting what's on the list—period!" I couldn't believe they asked yet again! This was very unusual for them and I was getting angry.*

> *I knew I needed to be firm enough to prevent things from getting worse. I said, "I've heard three requests for extras that are not on this list. I'm getting annoyed and feel like I'm being nagged. I don't want to hear that question again, is that clear?" I even revealed my intentions, "I will ignore any further requests for extras." We were all quiet for a few minutes, which gave me time to cool down.*

> *We finished our shopping without any further requests. Although my tone of voice and body language increased in intensity, I had to try very hard not to become aggressive.*

It is difficult for everyone, at first, to filter their words. As we practice assertive communication, we do a quick double check before we speak. We ask ourselves, "If someone said this to me, how would I take it?" Soon, it only takes a couple of seconds to think about our response and remove the judging, blaming, and criticism. We want our communication to open doors, not put up walls and close doors.

> *A **Graduate's Story**. I was tired of blaming and criticizing my young son so often. My negative comments reminded me of the fairy tale "Toads and Diamonds." In this tale, two sisters, one kind and generous and one selfish and critical, are put under an enchanted spell. The kind daughter drops diamonds and other jewels from her lips whenever she speaks. The critical daughter spews toads and snakes whenever she speaks.*

> *I thought my comments sounded more like toads than jewels—and I couldn't stand listening to myself any longer. I told myself, "If I can't say something respectfully, I won't say anything at all." Still, I found little "digs" slipping from my lips. I read the story to my son and explained how I felt. I told him I had decided to tape my mouth shut for a day, to enforce my commitment to myself. And I did!*

> *As silly as it sounds, this was a profound learning experience. I learned that I talked more than I needed to and **was** capable of thinking about what I wanted to say. I also found new ways to communicate, without words. When my day was over, I was less talkative and more thoughtful about what I said. My son learned much, too. When he is having a bad day and I comment on it,*

he sometimes replies, "Maybe I could put tape on my mouth." (Author's note: I don't think it's necessary to tape our mouths shut, although I had a similar learning experience when my jaw was reconstructed and wired shut for seven weeks.)

A woman listening to one of my presentations leaned over to a friend and whispered, loud enough for me to hear, "Right. Like I have the time to plan all my words!" If you share her sentiments, add up the time you spend repeating yourself, yelling, or saying "no" and "don't." Also think about the long-term messages your present communication style might be teaching. I admit, the language of effective parenting seems awkward and initially takes more time to think of and say. However, in the long run, we find our children become more cooperative and self-disciplined, instead of relying on our constant reminders.

Interestingly, children often learn effective communication skills even quicker than adults. We can get caught off guard when our children give *us* "I-messages." If we assume children are being defiant, just because they are speaking out, we've missed the point! These are the emotional paychecks that let us know we are on the right track. If children are verbal enough to express themselves assertively, we can definitely use problem solving to reach win/win solutions.

Childhood is Like a Long Car Ride

The car trip starts when we become adults. When children are born, our new passengers go everywhere with us. They depend on us and need to be with us constantly. They need to be protected from the dangers of even short car rides, so we make them ride in car seats. They build trust and security in knowing they are safe and we are trustworthy drivers. We experience irritating behaviors that are natural when traveling with infants. They usually spit up or fill their diaper when we're running late.

As our passengers become toddlers we become aware of their individual personalities. They don't understand the limits of a car ride. They want to explore everything! They try to eat the dried french fries that fell into their car seat. They get cranky while we try to find a restaurant. They want to play at rest stops and resist getting back into their restrictive car seat. They seem to fall asleep the last five minutes, after screaming and crying the first hour. They have no sense of time and every five minutes they ask "When will we get there?" They constantly ask "Why," and point to objects we can't see and ask, "What's that?"

As children enter the early school years, they are more used to structured activities and are developing their intellectual and social skills. They better understand the rules of riding in a car and how to behave. They watch how we drive, the decisions we make, how we find directions, and whether we obey the speed limit. They see how we handle conflicts with others, such as rude drivers that cut us off. From the back seat, they have a special vantage point. We aren't always aware of what we are doing, but they surely are! While they can better tolerate close spaces with others, this becomes a challenge if the other person is their sibling. Children still haven't learned how to live with someone who thinks and acts differently than them and often don't use good problem-solving skills when they have conflicts.

By the time our passengers reach their teens, they've seen and done it all. (Or so they think!) They would rather stay home with their friends than be stuck in a car with grownups and siblings. If they have to ride along, they want more say about where we go, who goes, and when we go. They want to take their own side trips, before they are legally old enough to drive. In preparation for that day, they need to build the skills that will be necessary for their solo trips: how to plan ahead for a trip, make a budget and stick to it, read a map, keep the gas tank full, handle unexpected delays and detours, and make split-second decisions that could affect their lives. We know the day is coming when they will begin their own car trip—and we can't always control what exit ramp they get off to explore. The most we can do, is help them learn the skills they need to survive in the car, with other people, and on the road. Then we need to trust, and let go.

SUMMARY SHEET
CLEAR COMMUNICATION TOOLSET

DESCRIBE WHAT YOU *SEE* ☆☆☆☆

Take out the word *you*. Use *sometimes* and *someone*.

DESCRIBE HOW YOU *FEEL*

Own your feelings. Avoid shaming.

DESCRIBE THE NEGATIVE EFFECT OF THE BEHAVIOR

DESCRIBE WHAT YOU WANT, EXPECT, OR WHAT NEEDS DONE

STATE THE RULES OR LIMITS

State the bottom line. Don't assume people know your rules.

GET EYE-TO-EYE AGREEMENTS ☆☆☆☆

QUICK REMINDERS ☆☆☆☆

Use nonverbal signals, one word, flash codes, or notes.

TWO-PARTY PROBLEM SOLVING ☆☆☆☆

a. Define the problem.
    i.   Introduce the problem topic.
    ii. Invite the other person to share his/her perspective.
    iii. Ask if the other person is willing to listen to your concerns.
    iv. Share your perspective.
    v. Summarize the problem for each person.
b. Brainstorm ideas.
c. Evaluate the options.
d. Choose, define, and commit to the solution.
e. Follow-up.

PRACTICE EXERCISES

A. Identifying Communication Styles. Each of the following statements is an example of one of the four communication styles: Passive (P), Aggressive (Ag), Passive-Aggressive (P/A), or Assertive (As). Match each statement with the type of communication style it represents (P, Ag, P/A, As). If the sentence is not an assertive statement, rewrite it, using the Clear Communication Toolset (or any other appropriate tools you've learned.)

P = Passive   Ag = Aggressive   P/A = Passive-aggressive   As = Assertive

_____ 1. The parent says, "You kids just go ahead and watch TV while I break my back cleaning up your messes." Rewrite, if not assertive:

_____ 2. Your child is cracking her gum loudly. Parent says aloud to self, "Gee, I wish I could concentrate on my reading." Rewrite, if not assertive:

_____ 3. "I'm willing to share the chips, but I'm not willing to let someone eat the whole bag!" Rewrite, if not assertive:

_____ 4. "Don't interrupt me when I'm talking to you! You said your piece, so you *will* listen to mine!" Rewrite, if not assertive:

B. Use the Clear Communication Toolset. Plan an assertive response to the following situations, using the suggested tool.

1. You just mopped the kitchen floor and see muddy shoe prints on it. (Describe what you *see.)*

2. You were ready to leave on time for a wedding, but your children took so long that now you will all be late. (Describe how you *feel.)*

3. Tony, 10, voluntarily did a load of laundry. When you take the laundry out of the washer to put into the dryer, you find one of your white dress shirts has black dye stains on it because one tiny black sock got mixed in with the whites. (Describe the negative effect of the behavior.)

4. You walk out of the kitchen into the living room and almost trip over a coat and backpack left on the floor in the doorway. (Describe what you want, expect, or what needs to be done.)

5. You start to sit at the family computer. You find diskettes, empty pop cans and chip bags strewn around the area. (State the rules or limits.)

6. Tammy, 7, left her training-wheel bike on the sidewalk while she was playing next door. It was stolen in broad daylight. She wants another bike. (Get an agreement.)

7. It is Kevin's, 9, responsibility to take out the trash. It's trash night, he's about to go to bed, and still hasn't taken the cans to the street. (Use a quick reminder: a nonverbal signal, one word, or flash code.)

C. Mix and match tools. Use any combination of the Clear Communication Tools or any of the other skills you have already learned to respond to these situations.

1. Jack, 9, says he's finished cleaning the bathroom. The next time you go in, it doesn't look like he cleaned it at all! There's soap scum and water spots all over the faucet and there's still a ring in the toilet. You've already taught him the proper way to clean the bathroom.

2. Chrissy, 6, and his mother are shopping for a birthday present for another child. Chrissy keeps pointing out toys he wants you to buy *her*. (Offer *three* responses you could give, assuming Chrissy persists after your first and second response.)

3. Emily, 14, wants to sit with her friends during her younger brother's choir performance at a festival and then walk around the festival with them. Your parents have traveled from out-of-town for this event and you want Emily to spend time with the family.

D. Teach Values. How would you teach values (without preaching) and use problem solving in these situations?

1. John, 4, received from relatives a hat and scarf set he didn't like. He said it was "ugly" in front them. You tried to smooth things over with both him and your relatives, but John just keeps getting louder and ruder.

2. Charlie, 6, read several stories to you last night, to practice his new reading skills. The next day, as he cleans out his backpack before school, you find a book and note from the teacher. It says he was supposed to read a certain story to you last night. You are to sign a paper verifying that he read it to you. Charlie suggests you sign the paper since he did read to you, although it wasn't the exact story he was supposed to read.

3. Bridgette, 13, says she doesn't want to go to church anymore. She says she isn't sure if she believes in God anymore, because science hasn't proven God exists.

Possible Answers

A. Identifying Communication Styles.

1. Passive-aggressive. Possible rewrite: "How can we work together to get this house clean?"

2. Passive. Possible rewrite: "I have a hard time concentrating when I hear gum cracking."

3. Assertive. No rewrite needed.

4. Aggressive. Possible rewrite: "I try to listen to others without interrupting and want to be treated with the same courtesy."

B. Use the Clear Communication Toolset. (These are just possible responses.)

1. "I just finished mopping the floor and now I see muddy shoe prints on it."

2. "I feel frustrated when I'm ready to leave on time but we end up being late anyway. This is a special wedding to me and I want to see *all* of it.

3. "Tony, thanks for taking the initiative to do a load of laundry." (Remember to notice the positive and offer encouragement.) "A black sock accidentally got in with the whites and left black stains on my white dress shirt. Since the shirt is still wet, let me show you how to get the stain out. (Teach skills.) In the future, what can you do as you are putting clothes in the washer to prevent this from happening again?"

4. "I expect coats and backpacks to be put away as soon as people come home."

5. "People who use the computer are responsible for cleaning up the area when they are done." Or "Food and drinks belong in the kitchen, away from the computer."

6. "You really didn't do anything wrong to cause your bike to get stolen. But I am worried about getting another bike if it can get stolen that easily. If we buy another one, we need to have an agreement for where you will park it. Where will you keep it when you are home? Where will you park it when you visit a friend's house?"

7. "Trash!" or sit a trash bag outside his bedroom door or by the outside door as a nonverbal reminder.

C. Mix and Match Tools.

1. In a friendly tone of voice, "Jack, come here. Can you show me exactly what you cleaned?" (Wait.) "I know it's tough to get off soap scum and toilet rings, but they need to be gone before the bathroom is 'finished.'"

2. "It's hard to shop for gifts and not get a toy for yourself, isn't it?" If it happens again, "Today, we are shopping for Susan's gift. If you want to make a list for gifts you want, here are a paper and pen."

3. "I'm sure it would be fun for you to explore the festival with your friends. Grandma and Grandpa can only stay for the festival and I want them to spend some time with you. If you sit with us during the choir performance, I'd be willing to let you walk around the festival with your friends for an hour."

D. Teach Values.

1. Excuse yourself from the relatives. In private say, "I know you're disappointed, but it hurts people's feelings when others criticize their gifts. It's important for us to say "thank you," even if we don't like the gift. Later, you can tell me, *in private*, that you don't like it. We'll figure out what to do then." (Give opportunities to share feelings and listen.) "I want you to apologize to them for saying it's ugly and thank them for picking out something they thought you would like."

2. "I wish I had known about this assignment last night when you read to me. This paper says you read *this* book to me. If I sign it, I'd be lying. I can either write a note telling the teacher what you did read or you can bring the book home again tonight and I'll sign the paper tomorrow. What do you think?"

3. "I'm glad you are thinking seriously about your religious beliefs. That's an important part of being an adult. Having faith in something without proof is a hard thing to do." (Wait for response and listen.) "We don't have to agree about all our religious beliefs, but it means a lot to me to attend church as a family. Can we find a way to meet both of our spiritual needs? Is there something in particular about our church you don't like?" (Wait.) "Would you like to try a different church?" (Wait.) "What about finding information about scientific proof of God?"

WHAT'S NEXT?

Whether we use no words, one word, or several sentences, we want to practice assertive, clear communication daily—in all areas of our lives. Once others know there is a problem, they may voluntarily take action to change or resolve the problem. If not, we can use two-party problem-solving, alternating between the listening, problem solving, and communication skills.

If the problem continues, despite these efforts, and problem behavior is involved, we are ready to use the behavior management tools. The next chapter, Chapter 11: "PU Toolset (Unintentional misbehavior)" describes in more detail how to tell the difference between PU and PO behavior. If the behavior is unintentional, this chapter reviews the tools we've already learned that can redirect misbehavior and offers a few new options we can choose.

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