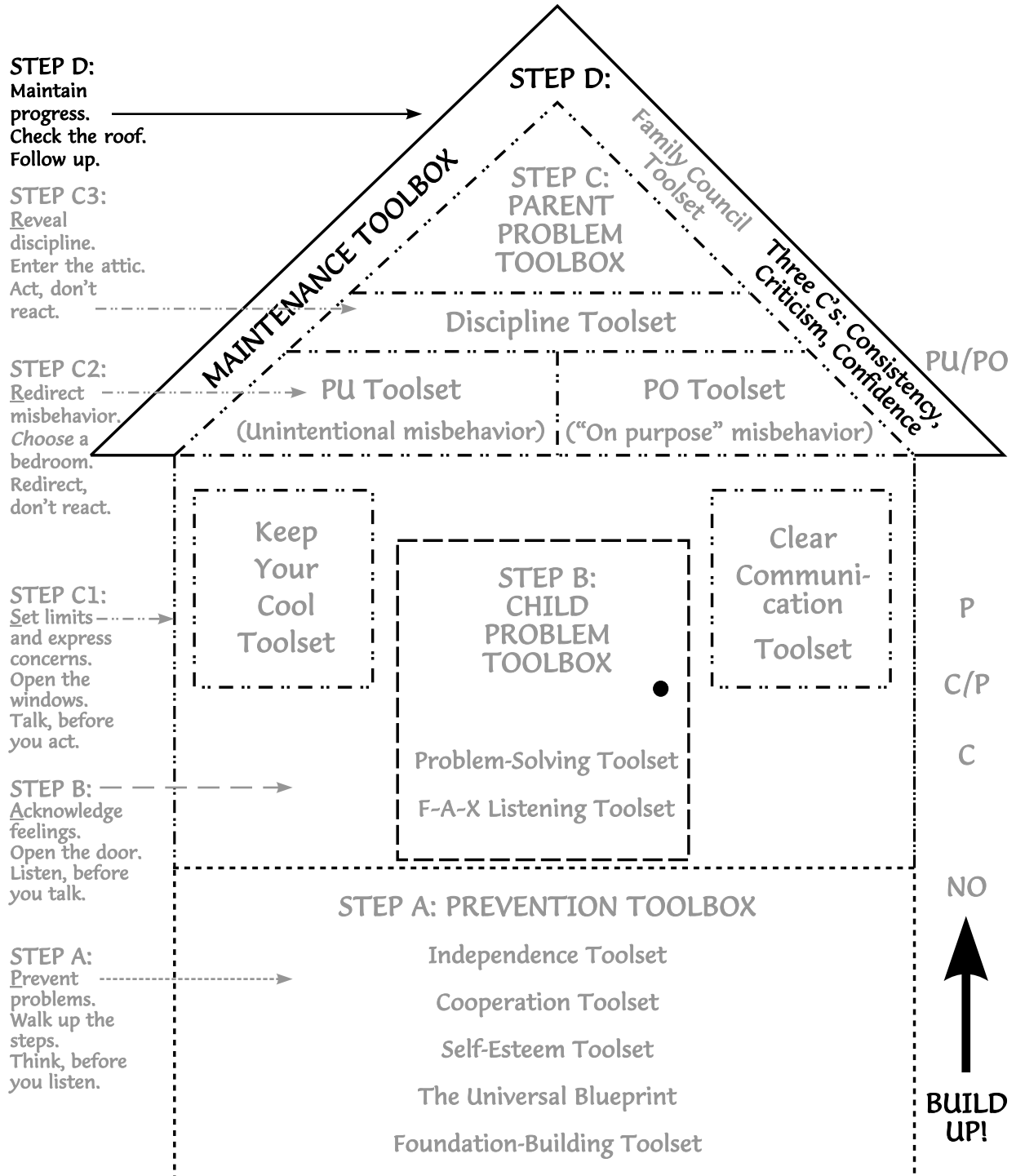


CHAPTER 15

THREE C's: Consistency, Criticism, Confidence



CHAPTER

15 THREE C's: Consistency, Criticism, Confidence

Once we learn how to build a house, we follow the same steps and use the same tools to build other houses. The type of house we build might be different, but the basic elements of the blueprint and the tools we use to build it are the same. If we make a mistake, we try to correct it, learn from it, and get back on track. Once we succeed in building different parts of our house, we have greater confidence as a builder. We have to work hard, however, to keep believing in our abilities when we make mistakes, something doesn't turn out right, or someone criticizes our work. At times like these, it is helpful to know how to respond without getting defensive and see if there is any value in the comment.

Once parents have a plan for their parenting, they want to follow the same basic steps using the same types of tools. The individual problems or specific tools they select, however, may vary. Mistakes and ineffective responses will naturally happen. Rather than trying to prove "I'm right," parents can correct the mistake, make amends, and learn from the mistake. The confident parent maintains consistency as much as humanly possible, getting back on track quickly, and handles criticism assertively and respectfully.

IN THIS CHAPTER

The Three C's help us maintain our personal progress with three important ideas:

1. True *consistency* means we stick with our parenting plan and get back on track when we stray. It also means we handle problems the same way in public and around others as we do at home.
2. When others *criticize* our parenting methods or we need to deal with adult "misbehavior," we can use our new tools to respond to adults, too.
3. It can be difficult to maintain our *confidence* as a parent and person, but there are specific attitudes and actions we can use to continue on the positive path we are now on.

WHEN TO USE THE THREE C'S

We use the tools in this chapter constantly, but especially when *we* feel discouraged or under pressure to stray from our parenting plan. The tools we've learned are helpful in *all* relationships, not just with children, so we can begin taking our skills to a higher level. We can return to this chapter (and the rest of the book) as a reference guide anytime in the future—for a quick review, an extra boost of confidence, or for help in solving a problem.

INCREASING OUR *CONSISTENCY*

Children need parents who are consistent. When parents have consistent responses, no matter where or when, children know what to expect if they misbehave. Effective parents work to increase their consistency, but also accept their limitations. It's not humanly possible to *always* be consistent.

The Myth about Consistency ☆☆☆☆

Many people think, "If I said I was going to do this, I have to follow through," and follow this motto even when they make a poor choice or overreact. This is not true consistency. True consistency is

staying on the same path or getting back on it when we stray. When we realize we've made a mistake, we can get back on track and model for children how to handle mistakes with this four-step process:

1. Admit that we made a mistake.
2. Apologize for any hurt feelings that resulted from the mistake.
3. Learn what we can from the mistake. Make changes to correct the mistake or avoid it in the future.
4. Work with our children on a fairer solution.

Pressure Situations

When children are at school all day long, they often put a lot of effort into "being good." When they come home, they may not put as much effort into controlling their behavior. Parents often do the same thing. When we interact with other people's children, we have the patience and tact to handle their misbehavior respectfully. We might be yelling at our children, but if we run into someone we know, we immediately put on our smile and talk nicely to them and our children. This is proof that if we make a conscious choice, we *can* handle stressful, pressure situations. While we can't always be alone or have a constant audience, we can "trick" ourselves into behaving as though we do.

A Personal Story. Several years ago, there was a television news special about spanking. They took several sets of parents who believed in spanking and followed them around for a month with a video camera. They showed some very upsetting incidents that bordered on abuse. Tears came to my eyes for the children involved.

Next, they had an expert in family violence research (my focus area in college) sit with this group of parents to explain why spanking wasn't good. He knew his statistics well on what didn't work, but only told the parents, "Don't ever spank. Do something like time-out instead." He didn't even give them guidelines for effective time-outs!

Then they showed these families six months later. One or two of the families had stopped spanking and were being respectful. Several were using time-outs instead of spanking, but were using them in humiliating ways to exert their power. Several said nothing else worked and had returned to spanking. Considering the advice they got, I wasn't surprised! You can't take a tool (even an ineffective one) away from someone, without exchanging it for a more effective tool and giving specific directions for its use.

*Soon after that report, Amber had a really bad day. No matter what I did, she would whine, fuss, and begin to throw a tantrum. I stayed on track pretty well, but by dinner time I was pressured and hungry, and my brain cells were running on empty. Things escalated to the point that I was trying to make her sit in a time-out chair and she was trying to kick me. As I tried to grab her legs to stop her kicking, I had an almost uncontrollable urge to spank her. At that instant, I thought about the parents in the television report. I thought, "What would I do if the TV cameras were watching **me** right now?" I pulled myself together and started talking to Amber respectfully and calmly! I was amazed that I could do it! "If I can pull myself together for a camera (or a neighbor)," I thought, "I can do it at other times, too." Now, when I think I'm about to "lose it," I imagine a television camera is filming me, with all my students watching. It never fails to help me pull out that extra effort to do what I know I can do.*

If you are like me and having an audience helps you stay on track, just imagine "everyone is watching." If, on the other hand, you feel pressured thinking about people watching you and cave in, imagine that you have blinders on. You are the only person there and no one is watching or judging your performance. Neither of these has to be true. They are simply ways to bring out in ourselves what is already there—a competent parent with a helpful response.

MISBEHAVIOR IN PUBLIC

When other adults are watching our interaction with misbehaving children, we often think they are judging us on how well we handle the situation. We may use punishment to satisfy the spectators, since it appears to achieve the *quickest* results. It takes great courage to think clearly during these pressured times to achieve the most *effective* long-term results.

It's important to follow the same parenting plan away from home that we use at home.

If we use one method of parenting at home and another outside the home, children learn there are times when they can get away with misbehavior and test us more often. If we use the same parenting plan wherever we go, our children always know the limits and are better behaved.

If we are somewhere new or anticipate a problem, we can plan ahead (Prevention Toolbox). We explain what we will be doing, what behavior we expect, why that behavior is important, and reveal discipline. Then we follow through, ignoring others and staying on track. If we need to discipline in public, we can go to a private place or whisper in their ear if we can't leave. (Empty aisles and back corners of stores can offer a quiet, private place to talk.) We can avoid feelings of embarrassment by reminding ourselves, "The only person who can make me feel embarrassed is me."

FRIENDS AND EXTENDED FAMILY

Social gatherings and visits to other homes can be stressful. When children misbehave around friends or family, we often feel embarrassed and pressured to respond however *they* expect us to respond. We must remain firm to our long-term goals. If we give in, children learn they can get their way if they embarrass us in front of others. If we overreact and punish children, they feel confused and humiliated in front of a group. These are key motives for revenge, and further misbehavior is a good way to get that revenge. Consistently using effective parenting tools helps children learn *self-control* and *self-discipline*. When others criticize or interfere with our parenting, the best approach is to excuse ourselves and solve the problem with our children privately.

INCONSISTENT PARENTING PARTNERS

I often hear the comment, "When my husband (wife) is home, it's his (her) rules. When I'm there, it's my rules. When we are both there, the kids play us against each other. I've tried telling him (her) what I've learned, but he (she) just gets defensive. How can I make him (her) change?" The answer is, "You can't." That does not mean, however, that the two of you can't have a consistent parenting plan, even if the plan includes different styles of parenting. In addition to the suggestions in the "Parenting as a Team" section in Chapter 2, there are several options available to parents:

- **Agree on a plan for common problems that arise.** Use the problem-solving and decision-making worksheets. Decide what each of you wants to accomplish and find a way to meet both parents' concerns and needs. It is important to listen carefully to your partner and not immediately offer solutions or advice. You can offer information and observations, but don't sound like a know-it-all or criticize your partner's efforts. Offer encouragement and support to enlist your partner's involvement in the solution.
- **Agree not to sabotage each other.** Even if a partner's decision is imperfect, agree to either back up the partner or, at the least, not to interfere, even if you disagree. The parent who makes a decision is the one who has to follow through with the commitment and experience any consequences of that

decision. Part of this agreement is that if a parent makes a poor decision, the other parent agrees not to say "I told you so." Pointing out mistakes builds resentment and further divides parents. Simply allow the parent to learn from his or her mistake. This is still an imperfect plan, but one that is often workable until the parents iron out their differences.

- **If the other parent's style is not abusive or does not grossly violate the child's rights, you can back off and not interfere.** If the child's feelings are hurt, acknowledge their feelings without taking sides or criticizing the other parent. (If your partner *does* physically, emotionally, or sexually abuse your child, you must have the courage to contact someone who can help: a counselor, child abuse prevention hotline, or in emergencies, the police.)
- **Agree to disagree respectfully.** If you disagree or argue in front of the children, do so respectfully and fairly. Screaming and yelling scares children. Do your part to calmly work out disagreements and model healthy problem solving. If you argue or disagree in front of children, it's important to show them that you've made up and how you got there (from disagreeing to working together).
- **If you choose to get involved, back up your partner with your skills.** If we can figure out what our partners are trying to accomplish, we can model the effective skills we've learned. If it works, the partner feels supported, without feeling criticized.

If your parenting partner has not learned the skills in this book, the best attitude to take is, "**Live it, don't preach it.**" No one likes to hear, "You're supposed to do this. You're not supposed to do that!" (And don't use *my* name in vain either! "Jody says to do . . .") Let your example speak for itself. Acknowledge your partner's frustration and be reassuring that you know he or she is trying to make the best choice. They may have old "tapes" that are at the core of *their* onion and resolving their own issues may take time.

GIVING ADVICE

Most parents are interested in doing the best they can, but feel defensive if others present new ideas in a judgmental way. The tools we've learned are to help us improve *ourselves* and our families. Don't use your knowledge to judge or impose advice when others haven't asked for it. Many parents are enthusiastic about their new skills and want to "help" other parents by correcting them, but this *isn't* helpful. The situation is *their* problem, not yours. We can support them with our skills or, if they are open to suggestions, ask helpful questions such as, "What do you want him to learn? Does he understand . . .? How do you think he'd react if you did . . .?" Never push your ideas on others.

Before you say anything, ask yourself, "What do I hope to accomplish by getting involved? Does the person seem open to discussing options?" Only say something if you can say it in a way that makes the person feel supported and better about themselves. Sandwich suggestions between compliments, "I noticed how well you . . . Have you ever considered . . . I'm sure you will . . ."

If you give information about child development or long-term consequences, use general non-judgmental words, "When children hear ____, they often think the parent means ____." Avoid the words "you," "right," and "wrong." Instead, use statements like "more effective" and "less effective" or "more respectful" and "less respectful." These terms are less judgmental. You want to be sensitive without sounding superior.

When you are in public and see another parent in distress, offer a reassuring look and smile. You can sometimes offer them an extra hand, but don't take over. Open the door or ask if they need help carrying packages, for example. If your motive is to be helpful, not critical (as though they can't manage on their own), most parents will appreciate the support and understanding.

A Personal Story. *I don't give parenting advice to others, unless they ask for it. It's hard to know a better way to handle a situation and watch someone use ineffective parenting skills. Once, when I was in a store, there was a young mother with a newborn on her shoulder and a toddler in tow. The toddler was going beyond where she could see him. I remembered how hard those first weeks of adjustment were, after having a second child—juggling a newborn again, forgetting to watch the older child, etc. I smiled at her and gave her an "I understand" look. She looked tired and overwhelmed. She kept calling to her toddler, "Dawana! Dawana! Get back here! Stay with me," but her toddler took advantage of his mother's inability to catch him.*

This mother and I ended up in the check-out line together. Her toddler was still running around. When she couldn't see him, I told her where he was and what he was doing. She thanked me. When the toddler was near his mother, I bent down and said, "You know, if you stand right here in front of your mommy and give that toy to the lady behind the desk, your mommy will buy that for you. But you need to stand in front of your mom if you want to take it home." This amazing bundle of energy stayed put! His mother thanked me as she left and I said, "Hey, I know what it's like. We mom's need to stick together."

If we interact with other people's children, make sure the parent is present and can see and hear us. Otherwise, the parent or child might worry that we are a "bad" stranger. We need to be cautious not to overstep our boundaries. Just be supportive and encouraging, modeling skills instead of preaching them.

A Graduate's Story. *I was at the playground when another mom come up to me and asked, "Where did you learn to talk like that?" This gave me a chance to tell her about the parenting class, without implying, "You aren't a good parent, you **need** a parenting class." The myth that parenting classes are for bad parents is so widespread, such a suggestion doesn't come off well unless someone asks for more information. I've had several people ask me, "Why did **you** take a parenting class?" It gives me a chance to reinforce the value of learning as much as we can about any commitment or responsibility we take on — and my kids are one of my highest priorities in life. Why **wouldn't** I learn as much as I can to be the best parent I can?*

HANDLING CRITICISM AND UNHELPFUL ADVICE ☆☆☆☆

We've learned how to be supportive of others, when they are experiencing problems with their children, but how do we handle people who are less than supportive to us?

Screening Advice

Not all advice is healthy or accurate, even when people tell us "it works." Whenever we hear or read advice, we want to screen it, to make sure it is consistent with our positive parenting plan and long-term goals. Here are a few guidelines for screening advice.

Don't blindly accept parenting advice without double-checking its accuracy. Consider the basis for the advice.

- ***Is it someone's personal opinion or is it based on research, broad experience, and methods that have been proven effective over time?*** Don't automatically trust advice just because someone believes "It worked for me and my children, therefore it will work for everyone." There could be other factors that led to the success—or the long-term negative effects are yet to be seen!
- ***Does it reflect personal power, control, or superiority issues?*** Don't blindly accept advice from people who think "I am an expert simply because I have a degree and work with families; therefore I know it all and everything I say is automatically accurate."

- **Is the advice based on fear or love?** Be careful if you hear a hidden message that says “If you don’t do what I say you’re a wimp and will lose control of your kids.” Avoid advice that offers unhealthy quick fixes or extreme reactions.

Compare the advice to the proper definitions and guidelines of healthy parenting philosophies and techniques you’ve learned on this tour. Don’t get hung-up on whether the person uses the same terms we use in this book. Look beyond the words to the *qualities* and *philosophy* of the technique. Especially consider the following questions:

- **Is the philosophy positive, balanced, and healthy?** Does an author promote a balanced approach or only see things in black and white; their way and the wrong way. Do they use the correct definitions for healthy parenting techniques? If the definition is incorrect, does the advice still fit the guidelines of healthy, balanced parenting?
- **What is the philosophy of discipline?** Is it really punishment? Does this style promote the parent’s power and superiority at the expense of the child’s rights and needs?
- **What does the technique teach children?** Are there unhealthy hidden messages?
- **Does the advice say this is the only way to handle a situation or that there are choices to pick from?** *The Parent’s Toolshop* outlines specific steps for responding to problems, but at each step there are several options we can choose and no one response is the only possible helpful response. We can even mix and match these tools, as long as we follow the basic guidelines.
- **Is the advice a commonly accepted idea, but inaccurate, unhealthy, or unhelpful?** Consciously choose advice based on how well it can help you reach your long-term parenting goals.

A Professional’s Comment. There’s so much about The Parent’s Toolshop that I like. As a parent, it is easy to react to problems; this offers many healthy alternatives. As a counselor, I like the way I can apply the process to all relationships. There were so many things that even as a therapist, with all the training I’ve had, that I didn’t realize—like the myths about time-outs. I’ve been giving the same kind of advice lots of other professionals give—and assumed it must be right, because so many people believed it. This was a real eye-opener.

You will find that you can trust the advice of the authors I’ve referenced in this book. Since *The Parent’s Toolshop* is so comprehensive and references many other books, it could take a lifetime just to master *these* ideas. We don’t need to confuse ourselves by reading books where we have to pick and choose ideas with a fine-toothed comb. We can be selective about our future reading, choosing those books and articles that explore balanced parenting techniques in more depth or those that deal with specific issues.

Our focus is on establishing a good relationship with our own children. We can ignore any advice that gets in the way of these goals or reduces communication and mutual respect in our family.

Why People Criticize

Adult behavior can be unintentional or intentional, just like children’s. Unintentional criticism usually comes from people who mean well, but express themselves poorly. Seek the value in what they say, instead of reacting to the *way* they say it. People often criticize parents because they are insecure about their own parenting (their upbringing, or how current methods compare to those they used when their children were young). If someone follows their advice, it confirms their way is “right” (PO, power).

Often, people offer advice because they assume others don't know any better, especially first-time parents. It often seems that everyone from the maternity nurse to the stranger in the grocery store thinks new parents need advice. Unfortunately, unsolicited advice is often inaccurate and confuses new parents. When a mother has her second child, the maternity nurse often says, "Oh well, I guess you know all this." Use this to your advantage. The more educated you become, the more confident you will be, and the less criticism and unwanted advice will sway you.

Other people criticize because pessimism and know-it-all-ism are part of their personality (PU). You probably can't change them, but you can learn to protect yourself from their toxic personalities. Refuse to believe their insults. Let comments "roll off your back." If you can do this, you'll reduce your stress and maintain the relationship (if you must, as with relatives). If this doesn't work, you may need to set limits for yourself or the other person. (See "When to Set Limits" later in this section.)

Some people intentionally criticize to get revenge or express jealousy (PO). They might feel guilty about mistakes they made and want to justify their decisions. They might also think that because you read a lot of parenting books or have taken a parenting class, you think you're perfect or your children are perfect. They thrill in pointing out your mistakes or shortcomings. "Did they teach you to do *that* in your parenting class?" "So when does the book tell you to finally give that kid a spanking?" Always try to present yourself humbly, "I'm not a perfect parent and neither are my kids. I don't know it all and still have a lot to learn." If you want to explain your methods, you can say, "This may not be the way for everyone, but from all I've seen, read, believe, and tried, this is the way I want to go. I believe it's worth the investment, but that's my choice. I don't expect everyone to agree with me."



Responding to Criticism

Use the Universal Blueprint. It is best to take the same approach with criticism as we do with parenting problems. Remember, the blueprint is "universal" because it applies to *all* relationships.

- A. **First, figure out whose problem it is, theirs or yours.** If it's their insecurity, just listen and be understanding. Is their behavior unintentional or intentional? If it is intentional, what is their goal. Power? Revenge?

If you are repeatedly criticized by someone you can't avoid, Prevent the problem from starting or worsening by planning ahead for the next "attack."

- Consider the criticizer's perspective, so you can acknowledge their feelings and reduce their defensiveness. If they feel understood, they might not attack as much. It can also help you better understand their motives.
- Imagine the situation and what the person usually says. Plan a respectful response and practice it in your mind or with a person who knows the criticizer and what he or she might say or do. Include in your plan the words you will say, staying calm, positive self-talk, tone of voice, body language, and when to walk away, if needed.

- B. **If or when you respond to criticism, start by Acknowledging the other person's feelings** or perspective, "I can understand how you might feel that way . . ." or ". . . how it might seem that . . ."

- C. 1. **Set limits or express your feelings respectfully**, "I feel . . ." or "I've decided to . . ." Just speak for yourself, without attacking what they're doing. That causes others to feel defensive or offended.
2. **Remain firm in your decision.** Don't defend or explain yourself, unless someone is truly interested in your opinion.

If people don't realize how critical they sound and are willing to change, set up a signal. When we use the Universal Blueprint, people who are unintentionally hurting us usually hear our concerns and don't want to hurt us again. They may agree to a hand signal, word, or phrase you can use whenever they blame or criticize, to help them change this habit.

Use a "one-liner." If you react to criticism like me, you stand there stunned with your jaw dropped to the floor. Over the next week, you think of a million things you "should have" said. At these times, it helps to have some are quick, assertive, respectful responses you can choose:

- **"We've researched this and discussed it and we've decided . . ."** Or "I know it might not work for everyone, but we've decided . . ." Once people realize you are making a conscious choice to handle a situation this way, they often back off, even if they disagree with your decision.
- **Say you'll consider their opinion** the next time you and your partner discuss it. You *can* choose to give the idea some thought . . . even if only for one second!
- **Accept your mistakes and faults, without apologizing.** "You're right; I made a mistake. I know better than to do that." Use this when you agree that the other person is right.
- **Calmly acknowledge that there is "probably some truth"** in what they said. You are agreeing in principle only, without making any commitment one way or another to change.
- When asked a "Why do you do ____?" question, respond with **"Why do you ask?"** instead of defending yourself. It may cause the person to think about their motives and whether they want to admit their reasons.
- **Agree to disagree.** Say you're not willing to discuss the issue and *change the subject*.
- **Ignore the cut.** Forgive and forget. If you're not ready for that, let the person know you heard the remark ("Umm-hmm") but don't respond further.
- **Use humor.** If someone says, "You still haven't lost your weight from the baby!" a woman can reply, "Yeah, I'm still trying to pass for pregnant so I can get special treatment." We can also simply agree with no excuse, "Yeah, I'm in no hurry to lose it." One graduate's mother-in-law asked her, "How long are you going to breastfeed him anyway?" Her reply was, "Well, what do you think they have recess for?" Her mother-in-law realized how ridiculous her question was and never brought it up again.

When to Set Limits

If you have consistently used respectful communication skills and the person is intentionally trying to hurt you or undermine your parenting, you may need to set limits. Try setting less restrictive limits first, in the following order:

1. **Remind the person that you need support more than you need criticism.** Reveal that you will not respond to criticism. If your children are the targets of criticism and it hurts their feelings, try to explain to them in nonjudgmental, understanding words that some people don't know nicer ways to say how they feel. Teach your children how to let the comments "roll off their backs."
2. **Set guidelines for your visits with this person,** such as what you are willing to discuss, how you plan to handle situations, or how you expect others to treat you or your children. Set time limits for the visits. If difficult people from out-of-town want to visit, limit the visit to a few days or arrange to have them stay at a nearby hotel. (I know, this is an expensive option, but the alternative—having a nervous breakdown or major blow-up—would make it worth seriously considering.)

3. **If they are unwilling to respect your bottom-line limits, you may need to leave or keep visits on “your turf,”** where your family rules are in effect. If you’ve revealed your expectations and they criticize you again, say “We need to be going now” and leave (even if it’s abrupt). This emphasizes your willingness to follow through with your intentions. If the criticizer wants to visit you, say, “You can come to visit if . . .” Use the assertive communication skills you learned to keep the blame out of your statements. If they violate your family rules, you have every right to say, “I think it’s time for you to go.”

Even within our own families we sometimes need to set these kinds of limits. The bottom line is to do what you can to resolve these conflicts peacefully and assertively, but be willing to do what is best for you and your children’s mental and emotional health. To decide whether you should compromise your rights, ask yourself the following questions:

- How important is this issue to me?
- If I compromise my rights, will I violate my values, principles, or feelings of self-worth?
- How will I feel later if I compromise?
- How much will it cost me if I compromise? (time, energy, self-respect, money.)

Let’s practice a few examples of responding to criticism and unhelpful advice. The practice exercises and the answers are in the middle of the chapter this time, so we can end our tour with a final booster shot of confidence.

PRACTICE EXERCISES

A. Correcting Myths about Parenting

Remember the true/false quiz you took in the beginning of the book? Every answer was totally or partially “false.” The following exercise lists these myths again. Recall all that you’ve learned on this tour and rewrite the myths so they are true statements. Possible revisions follow the exercise.

- Myth 1 Parents should attend parenting classes when having problems with their children.
- Myth 2 Parent educators tell parents what they are doing wrong and how to raise children the right way.
- Myth 3 Whenever parents use an effective parenting skill, they should see it work right away.
- Myth 4 Children should not be the center of the family; the parent should.
- Myth 5 Democratic parenting is too permissive and only works with certain kinds of children.
- Myth 6 It is the parent’s job to control children’s behavior.
- Myth 7 Parents need to immediately react to a problem to effectively resolve it.
- Myth 8 When parents stop children’s misbehavior, the problem usually goes away.
- Myth 9 Parents can encourage children by giving them lots of praise and rewards.
- Myth 10 When parents let children know they are proud of them, children feel parents are giving them credit for their accomplishments.
- Myth 11 Sometimes it’s helpful to offer constructive criticism to help children improve.
- Myth 12 Children should obey their parents because they are adults in authority. When children ask “Why should I?” parents only need to say, “Because I said so.”
- Myth 13 Behavior charts with stars or rewards foster internal motivation.

- Myth 14 When parents give children choices, children think they should have a choice about everything.
- Myth 15 All toddlers go through a “no” stage; it’s a normal part of childhood.
- Myth 16 Parents should give children more independence when they show they can handle it.
- Myth 17 When children struggle with simple tasks, it helps to say, “You can do it if you try harder.”
- Myth 18 When children have problems, parents should help solve them.
- Myth 19 When children aren’t doing their homework, parents should set up a homework schedule, make sure they stick to it, supervise their work, and sign off on it every day.
- Myth 20 People get angry because other people and events are out of their control.
- Myth 21 Children know how to push their parents’ buttons because they program and control them.
- Myth 22 When children misbehave, parents should show their disappointment so the children will want to change.
- Myth 23 When parents repeatedly tell children to stop misbehaving and they don’t stop, parents can assume their children know how to behave better.
- Myth 24 Children misbehave to get what they want or sometimes just to get on their parents’ nerves.
- Myth 25 When misbehaving children need to “learn a lesson,” parents should make sure they suffer a little, to drive home their point.
- Myth 26 When parents want children to behave, they should threaten to punish the children.
- Myth 27 Timeouts should be one minute for every year of age. Children should be isolated in an unpleasant or boring place and not allowed to play.
- Myth 28 Parents should call a family meeting when there is a problem.
- Myth 29 Every family member votes on decisions in family meetings.
- Myth 30 Parents should be consistent. If they say they are going to punish their children, they need to follow through, even if they realize later they overreacted.
- Myth 31 Inconsistent parenting is damaging. Effective parenting partners do things the same way.

B. Responding to Criticism

1. The Greer’s are visiting friends. Five-year-old Jason begins misbehaving at the dinner table. Mrs. Greer, who has learned balanced parenting techniques, disregards those approaches and sternly scolds Jason, “You need to obey me. Now settle down!” The child stops for a few minutes, but begins again. This time, Mrs. Greer excuses herself, takes Jason to another room, and closes the door. She returns to the table and apologizes to Mrs. Payne. Mrs. Payne says, “You ought to just spank him. That would teach him to behave!”
 - a. Why might Mrs. Greer have violated her child-rearing principles?
 - b. Why was she embarrassed?
 - c. What other alternatives, consistent with balanced principles, were available?
 - d. How can she respond to Mrs. Payne’s advice?
2. Mr. Trent is at a park with a friend and the friend’s child, Tony, 7. Mr. Trent’s child, Melissa, 7, gets into a tug of war with Tony over the only remaining swing. Although they are having a conflict, no one is really getting hurt. Mr. Trent wants to wait and see if the children will work out the problem

without his interference. Tony's father says, "Aren't you going to do something about Melissa? She's trying to take that swing away from Tony?" What can Mr. Trent say or do?

3. Mrs. Salyer's parents are visiting when the ice cream truck comes down the street. Holly, 8, comes to get money from her mother. Mrs. Salyer reminds Holly that she already chose to spend her allowance on a toy and refuses to give her more money. Mrs. Salyer's father says, "Oh, come on, let her have some ice cream." The mother tells him that she and Holly have an agreement that she is to use her allowance for things such as ice cream. The grandfather pulls a dollar bill from his wallet and gives it to Holly, who hurries out the door to catch the ice cream truck. What can Mrs. Salyer do or say to the grandfather and/or to Holly later?
4. Mr. White and Jesse, 4, are in the grocery store. While Mr. White puts the food on the conveyor belt, Jesse tries repeatedly to climb out of the cart. When Mr. White tries to get him to stay in the cart, Jesse throws a tantrum at the check-out line. Everyone is looking at Mr. White disapprovingly because his child is being so loud and disruptive. What can Mr. White do or say?
5. Mrs. Carson's son, Tommy, 3, isn't potty-trained. When Mrs. Carson's mother-in-law sees her changing his diaper, she says, "You know, if you had been trying to teach him to go on the potty when he was younger, he would be potty-trained by now. All my kids were potty-trained by the time they were two year's old!" What can Mrs. Carson do or say?
6. Mr. and Mrs. Rose and Mark, 6, are having dinner with Mrs. Rose's parents. Mark is a very skinny boy who doesn't eat much. He also doesn't like many foods, but what he eats is nutritious. During dinner, his grandparents tell Mark he doesn't eat enough and tell his parents they are concerned about him. Mrs. Rose explains that she has discussed his weight and eating habits with his doctor, who agrees that there is nothing to worry about. The grandmother says to Mrs. Rose, "*You* are the parent here, it is *your* responsibility to make sure he eats well. If you don't do something soon, Mark's going to be malnourished!" What can Mrs. Rose do or say?

Possible Answers

A. Correcting Myths about Parenting

These are possible "true" revisions and the chapters in which you can find them.

- Truth 1 Parenting classes can benefit *anyone*. Ideally, parents take parenting classes *before* serious problems develop. (Chapters 1 and 15)
- Truth 2 A parenting instructor points out what parents are doing *right*, the options they have, and information about the positive or negative effects of *all* their choices. (Chapter 1)
- Truth 3 Certain parenting skills are most effective *if* parents use them for certain types of problems and present them in specific, effective ways. It may take time to see results. (Chapter 1)
- Truth 4 No individual family member or relationship should be the center of the family. Each relationship's needs are equally important, but different. (Chapter 2)
- Truth 5 Democratic parenting is a *balance* between choices and limits. Parents set limits, but offer the child choices within those limits. Democratic parenting benefits all children, despite their personality or behavior traits. (Chapter 2)
- Truth 6 A parent's job is to teach their children how to be *self*-controlled. (Chapter 2)
- Truth 7 It is better to stop and think first, before responding to a problem. (Chapter 3)
- Truth 8 Misbehavior is a symptom of a deeper problem; *that* issue needs to be resolved or misbehavior will reappear. (Chapter 3)

- Truth 9 Descriptive encouragement is more effective than praise and stimulates *internal* motivation. (Chapter 4)
- Truth 10 Parents want to focus on the *child's* feeling by saying, "I bet *you* feel proud of *yourself*" or "I bet it feels good to know you could (describe accomplishment)." (Chapter 4)
- Truth 11 Parents want to describe what children do right and ask *them* how or if they could improve. Pointing out faults or mistakes is not encouraging, it is discouraging. (Chapter 4)
- Truth 12 Children need to respect *all* people, not just adults and parents. They need to understand the *value* of the rules so they will voluntarily follow them. (Chapter 5)
- Truth 13 Behavior charts foster *external* motivation, unhealthy competition and further discourage those who struggle to succeed. (Chapters 4 and 5)
- Truth 14 Parents can give choices *within* limits, so children know they do not have a choice about *everything*. (Chapter 5)
- Truth 15 *Not* all children go through a "no" stage. It depends on the child's personality and how parents use "no." (Chapter 5)
- Truth 16 Parents will see whether children can handle more independence *if* given more freedom—not all at once, but staying one step ahead of their skills.
- Truth 17 Parents want to acknowledge the difficulty so children feel excited if they do it and not so bad if they can't. (Chapter 6)
- Truth 18 When children have problems, parents can *guide* children to a solution, with F-A-X Listening, without taking over. (Chapter 7)
- Truth 19 If children aren't doing their homework, parents can use the Child Problem Toolbox to "keep the ball in their court," brainstorm solutions, and hold children responsible for following through. (Chapter 8)
- Truth 20 My *beliefs* and *interpretations* about people and events determines whether I get angry. I have a choice about my beliefs and emotions. (Chapter 9)
- Truth 21 Children don't program parents' trigger buttons, they just discover them. I can reprogram my buttons and control my reactions. (Chapter 9)
- Truth 22 When we tell children we are disappointed in them, they feel discouraged and *less* motivated to improve themselves. (Chapter 10)
- Truth 23 Just because we tell children "a million times" doesn't mean they fully understand and have mastered the skills to behave appropriately. (Chapter 11)
- Truth 24 Children misbehave because they are discouraged and confused about a positive way to meet their goals. (Chapter 12)
- Truth 25 Children won't learn *if* parents make them suffer. They can learn from discipline, without physical or emotional punishment. (Chapter 13)
- Truth 26 If parents want children to behave and follow rules, they can explain the value of the rule, the child's options, and the positive and negative effect of the child's choices. Respectful discipline is the result of the child's negative behavior *choices*. (Chapter 13)
- Truth 27 Effective time-outs teach self-control and healthy anger management skills. They are logically related to out-of-control behavior. The location is based on the child's recharge style and the activities they engage in are decided by the type of anger energy they experience. The time-out lasts until the child has regained control. (Chapter 13)

- Truth 28 Family councils need to occur weekly, before problems arise. (Chapter 14)
- Truth 29 Healthy families use consensus decision-making, because voting has a win/lose solution. "Losers" usually feel discouraged and often resist or sabotage the decision. Consensus decisions are win/win, because everyone agrees to the decision, even if they do not "get their way." (Chapter 14)
- Truth 30 If parents are truly consistent, they will "get back on track" when they realize they have overreacted. Rather than just giving in, parents need to admit their mistake and restate the appropriate discipline, making sure it fits the "Four R's." (Chapter 15)
- Truth 31 Each parent can have a different, unique personal style of parenting within the balanced range. Only when inconsistencies are harmful, sabotage the other parent, or children can use them to manipulate, do the differences become more damaging to relationships. (Chapters 2 and 15)

B. Responding to Criticism

1.
 - a. Mrs. Greer might have temporarily abandoned her effective parenting because she felt embarrassed and pressured by her son misbehaving in someone's home.
 - b. If she believes her son's behavior is a reflection of her abilities as a parent, she will be more likely to react negatively.
 - c. She could have used quick reminders or talked to Jason privately before she lost her cool.
 - d. Mrs. Greer can either give Mrs. Payne a disapproving, but respectful, look or she can explain her beliefs (which she is not obligated to do). If she chooses to do this, she can be clear that these are *her* beliefs and Mrs. Payne does not have to agree.
2. Mr. Trent can explain that he's been teaching Melissa how to resolve problems and wants to see if she remembers what she's learned. He can assure the other father that if Melissa chooses not to handle the problem respectfully, he *will* say something. If this happens, Mr. Trent can do brief peer mediation, which will model positive skills to the other parent.
3. Mrs. Salyer has two opposite response choices, depending on how important this issue is to her. She can acknowledge her father's desire to "spoil" Holly and set limits, making it clear that she has already given Holly an answer and she expects him to abide by it. If he disagrees with what she is doing, she would appreciate him telling her privately. She can also make it clear to Holly that their agreements and rules apply even when grandparents are there. This is the most likely approach if the grandfather visits regularly and his actions are regularly sabotaging Mrs. Salyer's agreements with Holly. Another possibility would be to let Holly's grandfather enjoy spoiling her. This option would most likely be appropriate if the grandfather rarely visits.
4. Mr. White can ignore the other customers, offer choices within limits, and get Jesse involved in putting the groceries on the conveyor belt. If all his best efforts seem to fail, he can realize Jesse is probably tired from shopping and make the quickest exit he can after paying for his groceries. He may or may not choose to reveal discipline, shopping alone next time, depending on how often this has happened before.
5. Mrs. Carson can say to her mother-in-law, "I know parents were told to do things differently when we were young. Although Tommy isn't completely potty-trained, he's making a lot of progress. He and I both feel better when he accomplishes things independently."
6. Mrs. Rose can change the subject away from Mark's weight. She can also make encouraging comments to Mark. After dinner, she can thank her mother for her concern and make it clear to her mother that Mark's weight and eating habits are not an acceptable dinner topic. She can even point out that Mark eats less when he is upset and that her comments might upset him. If her mother is not willing to agree to curb her comments, Mrs. Rose can suggest that she visit another time, besides dinner, for a while. This, however, would be a last resort measure.

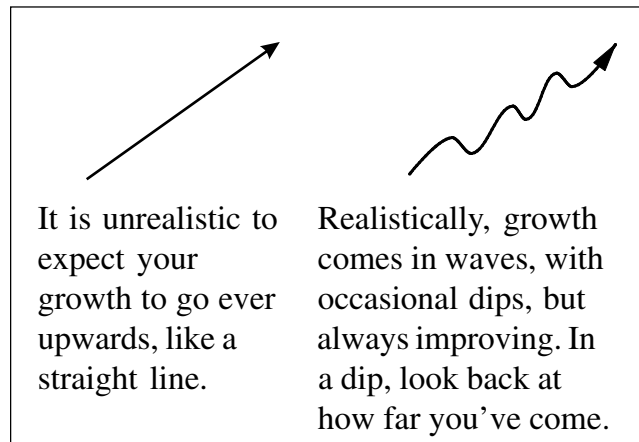
MAINTAINING YOUR CONFIDENCE

Throughout *The Parent's Toolshop*, we have learned about children's behavior and effective techniques for improving our relationships with our children. I hope this training has helped you grow as a person and as a parent. By now, after learning so many effective tools, you are probably feeling more confident as a parent. Some people feel discouraged because they realize they are still making mistakes or aren't improving fast enough. "After all I put into this," you may think, "I deserve fewer problems with my children!" Here are some suggestions for maintaining your confidence.

- **Have realistic expectations.** In times of stress, when you're discouraged, or when you are tempted to be hard on yourself for a mistake, look at how far you've come. Learn from your mistakes, make a commitment to your future, and move on.

***A Personal Story.** The Keep-Your-Cool tools have always been the hardest for me to practice consistently. Once, after I had been doing so well, I was under a lot of stress and getting increasingly irritable. Finally, I blew my stack and yelled. I felt bad and started to put myself down. Then I stopped myself. I realized I lasted a lot longer this time, before finally yelling. What I yelled was different. I was yelling "I" messages, instead of blaming and criticizing. "At least my words were more respectful," I thought, "even though I yelled them." I calmed down, got my brain back on track and apologized to the kids. We worked out a solution to the problem. It's taken years for me to improve my anger management to a level I feel good about, but I still have to keep working at it. At least I can give myself credit for the positive changes I **have** made.*

- **Set realistic goals.** Do not expect the beds to be made perfectly, the dishes to be spotless, or things to run smoothly all the time. Children may choose new behaviors to test you. You are dealing with human beings who are constantly learning (including yourself), and they will make mistakes. Most of all, if many of the tools in this book were new to you, don't expect to master them all at once.
- **Believe in yourself and your children.** Children can change and so can you. When you believe in the value of a tool, you'll try it. When you use it long enough, you'll see results. Don't give up if you don't see immediate results. Make a commitment to the future. With time and practice, you *will* see results and improvement.
- **Take it one step at a time.** Don't expect perfection out of yourself or your children. If your expectations are too high, you and your children will feel more discouraged. If you take small steps, you will move forward and you'll all feel more confident.
- **Trust your intuition.** When logic fails you, get in touch with your heart. Intuition is often confused with emotions. Emotions cause us to react with blame and judgment, but intuitive ideas result in inner peace and responses that leave us feeling better about ourselves.



- **Stop worrying and feeling guilty.** Unproductive guilt causes us to focus on the past—an action that no amount of reliving can change. If we condemn ourselves for being less than perfect in the past, we become unproductive and unable to take action in the present.

- **Educate yourself.** Periodically read this book again, taking one toolset or toolbox at a time and working with it at a slower pace. Read complementary books, such as those I've mentioned throughout the book. Attend seminars and support groups that teach healthy, effective parenting skills. As you learn and practice the skills, you will be more consistent and feel more confident. (These don't however, replace the need for counseling for severe behavior problems, troubled relationships, or issues from your childhood you have become aware of. Even healthy individuals may need therapy at a challenging time. It can be a valuable part of the healing process.)
- **Surround yourself with supportive people** who think like you do about parenting. Select people or resources whose opinions and values you respect when seeking advice or information. Join a support group if you are dealing with a special issue like separation, divorce, death, special-needs children, teens, or young children.
- **Balance** fun, work, and rest. Enjoy yourself and your children. Treat yourself with respect and don't allow others to treat you disrespectfully.
- **Have the courage to be imperfect** and grant this right to your children. Say to yourself, "What can I learn from this mistake?" Sometimes we have to learn the same lesson repeatedly (this applies to us *and* our children).
- **Be optimistic.** Instead of assuming children want to be difficult, assume they want positive results and are simply confused about how to achieve them. Try to see the positive in everything. Get into the children's world and understand things from their perspective.
- **Encourage yourself.** Consciously choose how you interpret events and find constructive ways of looking at situations. Have a sense of humor and keep things in perspective. Focus on your strengths and realize that it's not necessary to compare yourself to others. Use affirmations and positive self-talk. Here are two final exercises to keep your confidence soaring.

Practice Exercise

- A. List 10 things you do well, positive qualities you have (as a person and/or parent), goals you have, or accomplishments you've reached.
- B. Write affirmations for yourself. The rules are to make them positive statements that use words like "I can" or "I will." Periodically read them out loud, especially when you are feeling discouraged. Here are some affirmations to start with, but feel free to add or substitute more.

AFFIRMATIONS

- ▶ I have many personal strengths. I strive to be the best parent—and person—I can be.
- ▶ My sense of personal worth and identity goes beyond my role as a parent. I will look at *all* my positive qualities to feel good about myself.
- ▶ I respect myself and am worthy of respect from others.
- ▶ I like being a parent and find ways to enjoy my children every day.
- ▶ I am honest with myself about areas I want to improve. I am willing to learn from my mistakes.
- ▶ I see my children's positive qualities and show them how much I appreciate them.
- ▶ I am willing to let go of caring about what other people think I should do and make decisions based on what's best for my family.
- ▶ I am ready to let go of controlling others and will focus, instead, on controlling myself.
- ▶ I am more interested in improving my relationships than I am in being a perfect parent or having perfect children.
- ▶ When my children misbehave or things don't turn out the way I'd like, I can change my approach if I need to and accept the things and people I can't change.

- ▶ I want to find ways to improve my relationship with my children and respond so they *want* to cooperate more.

IN CLOSING

You are probably more aware of how you parent, your strengths, and areas you want to improve. You have a conscious plan, supported by new tools, to respond helpfully and effectively to just about any issue that arises in any relationship. When you make mistakes, you may no longer berate yourself, having developed the courage to be imperfect. You can look at the choices you made, learn from them, and choose to handle things differently next time, using the many techniques you've learned.

As you practice what you've learned, your children's behavior will improve, and you will strengthen *all* your relationships. When this happens, you won't have to put as much thought and emotional control into what you do—your new style will be second nature to you.

Completing this book is a priceless gift from you to your children. Not only will you be a better (but imperfect) parent, but you will be teaching and modeling valuable life skills to your children and others. These skills are like a precious heirloom you can pass from one generation to the next. All it takes is one person to break a negative cycle. That one person is you.

I hope, as you reflect back on the day you first started your tour of *The Parent's Toolshop*, you realize how much you've grown. The poem that follows the Three C's Summary Sheet is one we read at the end of the parenting class, because it illustrates the growth process we all go through.

Keep up your hard work. You and your children are worth your investment of time and energy.

SUMMARY SHEET

CONSISTENCY, CRITICISM, CONFIDENCE

Maintaining CONSISTENCY ☆☆☆☆

- True consistency is staying on the same path or getting back on it when we stray.
- It's important to follow the same parenting plan away from home that we use at home.
- Support your partner with your skills.
- Live the skills, don't preach about them.
- Only give advice in a way that makes other people feel supported and better about themselves.

Responding to CRITICISM and Unhelpful Advice ☆☆☆☆

- Screen other parenting resources for advice that is accurate, consistent with your philosophy, and compatible with your long-term goals. Ignore any advice that gets in the way of these goals or reduces communication and mutual respect in your family.
- Adult behavior can be unintentional or intentional, just like children's. Use the Universal Blueprint to respond to problems in *all* your relationships.
- Seek the value in criticism, instead of reacting to the way someone said it.
- If you have consistently tried to use effective communication skills to respond to toxic people, it may be time to set limits.

Maintaining Your CONFIDENCE

- Look at how far you've come. Educate yourself. Surround yourself with supportive people. Encourage yourself.

Autobiography in Five Short Chapters

by Portia Nelson

I

*I walk down the street.
there is a deep hole in the sidewalk,
I fall in.
I am lost . . . I am helpless.
It isn't my fault.
It takes forever to find a way out.*

II

*I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk,
I pretend I don't see it.
I fall in again.
I can't believe I am in the same place.
But it isn't my fault.
It still takes a long time to get out.*

III

*I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk,
I see it is there.
I still fall in . . . it's a habit.
My eyes are open.
I know where I am.
It is my fault.
I get out immediately.*

IV

*I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk,
I walk around it.*

V

I walk down a different street.