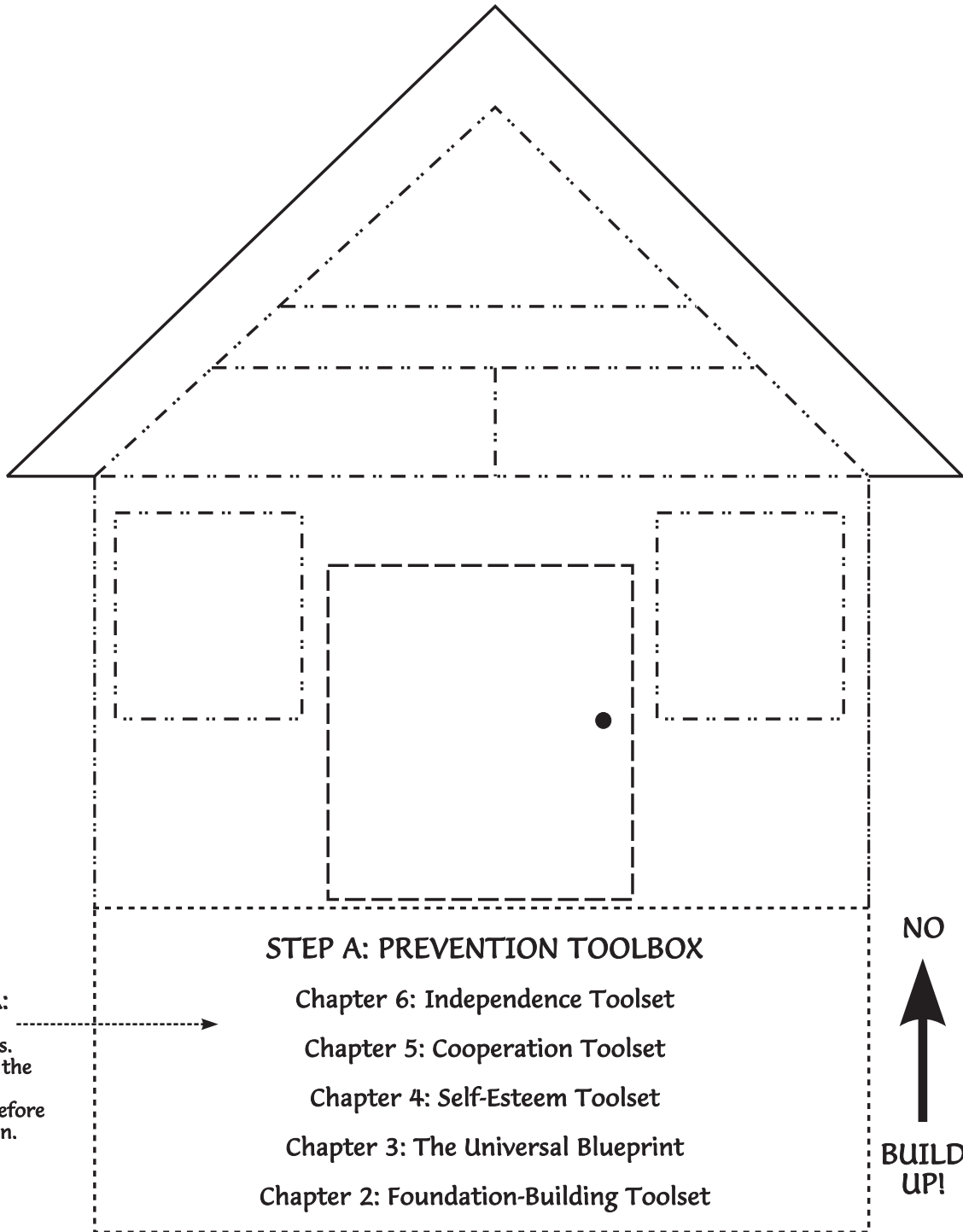


# STEP A PREVENTION TOOLBOX



## STEP

# A PREVENTION TOOLBOX

*Builders can use some sets of tools for almost any task, while other sets of tools have special uses. In parenting, the Prevention Toolbox contains the toolsets we can use any time. We can use them to prevent problems from occurring, worsening, or at any time in our response.*

## IN THIS SECTION

Step A of the Universal Blueprint is the Prevention Toolbox. In this section, we learn how to use five different toolsets:

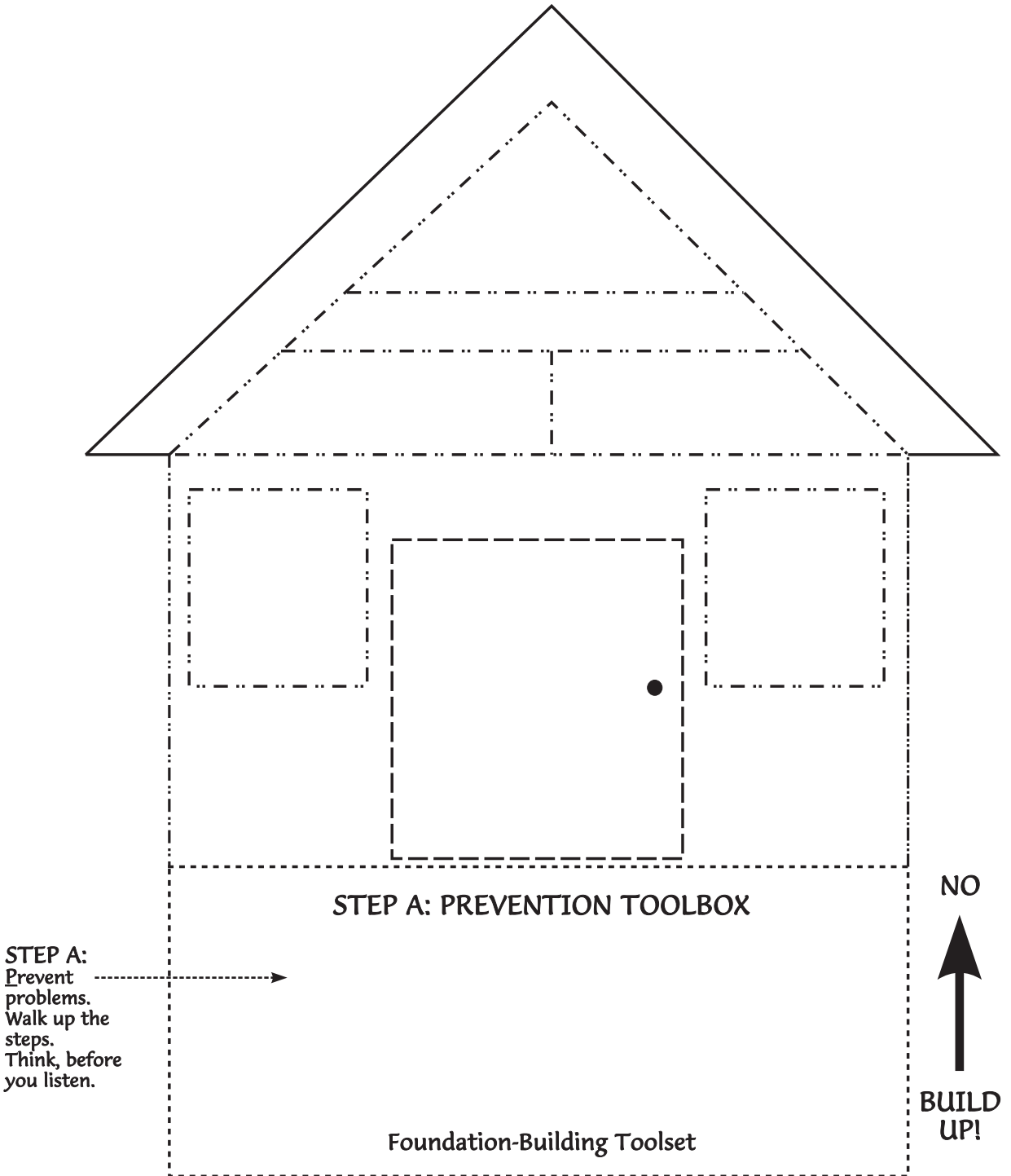
- Chapter 2, “Foundation-Building Toolset,” suggests several healthy long-term parenting goals and describes a balanced parenting style to help us reach them. In this chapter, we identify our current parenting style and consider replacing any negative beliefs and attitudes we might hold with positive, healthy alternatives.
- Chapter 3, “The Universal Blueprint,” explains the process of identifying the six general types of problems we encounter in human relationships and the universal response formula we can use for each.
- Chapter 4, “Self-Esteem Toolset,” describes the difference between self-image and self-esteem, and praise and encouragement. We learn a descriptive language that builds internal motivation and self-worth, without creating dependency on others’ opinions. We also learn how to avoid unhealthy competition and to free children from unhelpful roles and labels.
- Chapter 5, “Cooperation Toolset,” discusses the problems that result when we demand obedience or use rigid or negative commands. We learn how to foster internal motivation without bribes or incentives, offer flexible choices within clearly defined limits, and nearly a dozen tools that engage cooperation without starting power struggles. Many parents say this is their favorite chapter.
- Chapter 6, “Independence Toolset,” describes the balance between maintaining reasonable limits, teaching life skills, and letting go enough that children can grow and develop independence. We also learn how children develop responsibility and effective ways to use allowances.

## WHEN TO USE THE PREVENTION TOOLBOX

We can use the Prevention Toolbox anytime with anyone, to bring out the best in others, have a positive attitude, teach important life skills, and prevent problems from developing or worsening. These are the all-purpose parenting tools we want to use constantly—24 hours a day, 7 days a week—to develop and maintain positive, healthy relationships.

# CHAPTER 2

## FOUNDATION-BUILDING TOOLSET



## CHAPTER

# 2 FOUNDATION-BUILDING TOOLSET

*The first step in building a house is to lay a foundation that is stable and balanced. If a house's foundation sits partly on rock and partly on sand, the house will eventually sink into the weak sand. The people in the house may not realize the foundation is imbalanced until problems start to develop, such as cracked or crooked walls. A beautiful house is worthless if the foundation is sinking and it's a difficult and expensive problem to fix.*

*Effective parenting tools won't work as well if parents' beliefs are unhealthy, imbalanced, or inconsistent. As the imbalances increase, more damage occurs and problems worsen. Unfortunately, some parents don't realize they have an imbalanced parenting style until they see problems. Fortunately, balancing our parenting style is much easier than fixing a sinking house's foundation. Ideally, we want to set and maintain a balanced parenting style **before** problems develop, to prevent problems.*

*One of our parenting goals is to provide a solid, balanced base from which children can get a firm launch into adulthood. Children of negative, over-controlling parents will try to launch before they are ready, to escape this restrictiveness. Children of overly permissive parents will not get a firm launch because the foundation is too unstable and soft. Children from balanced families get a solid, healthy launch.*

## IN THIS CHAPTER

The tools in the Universal Blueprint only work to their full potential if we also choose healthy beliefs and attitudes. Before we learn about the Universal Blueprint and how to use specific tools, we need to do three important tasks:

1. Set long-term parenting goals and then choose a parenting style that will best meet these goals.
2. Identify our current parenting style (from the five general parenting styles) and decide whether it is the most effective style for reaching our long-term parenting goals.
3. Balance our parenting style by replacing unhelpful beliefs and attitudes with positive alternatives.

## WHEN TO USE THE FOUNDATION-BUILDING TOOLSET

Our beliefs are the foundation of our parenting, so they *constantly* affect our responses—even if we are not aware of them. To have a balanced parenting style, we need to choose healthy, helpful beliefs. Therefore, we use this toolset constantly. At first, we need to examine beliefs carefully and consciously, to set a balanced foundation for our family. Then, we make a stronger effort to look at our beliefs when we are responding to problems, to maintain our balance. If our responses backfire, we review the six reasons the tools might not work (See the section entitled “Suggestions for Use” on page 13 in Chapter 1, “Touring The Parent’s Toolshop”), since unhelpful, inaccurate beliefs are one of those reasons.

## ESTABLISHING A COMMON LANGUAGE

To prevent misunderstandings caused by different advice we've heard, we will occasionally need to clarify words that might have more than one definition. When we work with other parenting partners, establishing a common language can be a major step in resolving what we *think* are our disagreements.

***A Graduate's Story.** After our first child was born, my husband and I often disagreed about the proper way to handle parenting situations. When we took the parenting class together, it gave us a common language. We realized we agreed on our parenting goals, but sometimes disagreed about how to accomplish them. The class taught us more effective parenting skills, which helped us work as a team toward our common goals. While we don't always agree, we first eliminate the possibility that we are using different definitions to say the same thing. Often, we actually agree, but are using different words to explain our beliefs. We then use the problem-solving skills we learned in the parenting class to resolve our differences and plan a consistent response.*

We want to be sure parenting advice will help us reach our long-term goals *before* we follow it. Some parenting resources make unhelpful, inaccurate advice sound appealing. Other resources use terms that some people consider negative to describe accurate, helpful advice. *The Parent's Toolshop* uses accurate, original definitions to explain and compare effective and ineffective parenting skills. These definitions describe the *qualities* of effective and ineffective parenting, so parents can easily recognize other sources of trustworthy, accurate advice, regardless of the terms they use. Chapter 15, "The Three C's: Consistency, Criticism, and Confidence," page 416, offers specific suggestions for screening parenting advice. (Remember, you can read the first two sections of that chapter out of order.)

## WHAT ARE OUR PARENTING GOALS?

Some parenting experts base their advice on what worked for their families. Others take a logical theory and test it, noticing the effects. These methods sometimes result in interesting findings, but the suggestions aren't reliable for most people. The most valuable information comes from studying adults who display the behaviors and qualities parents strive to develop in their own children. When researchers ask these adults questions about their upbringing, they discover what worked, why it worked, and develop guidelines for parents to follow.

Ask yourself, "What skills and qualities do I want my children to develop?" Your list may include:

- self-confidence
- emotional and social maturity
- self-motivation
- independence
- responsibility
- cooperation and helpfulness
- self-discipline
- assertiveness, conflict-resolution skills
- respect for self and others
- problem-solving and decision-making skills

Most parents are realistic; they don't expect perfect children who get straight A's and become famous super-achievers. They simply want their children to be well-adjusted, responsible adults. If you share the goals listed above, we can establish these as our *individual goals* for our children.

Since *The Parent's Toolshop* teaches a "universal blueprint for building a healthy family," we must also define what a "healthy" family is. Dolores Curran, author of *Traits of a Healthy Family*,<sup>1</sup> studied hundreds of families who produced children with the skills and qualities we've listed as individual goals. She found these families had 15 common characteristics.

A healthy family . . .

1. communicates and listens.
2. affirms and supports one another.
3. teaches respect for others.
4. develops a sense of trust.
5. has a sense of play and humor.
6. exhibits a sense of shared responsibility.
7. teaches a sense of right and wrong.
8. has a strong sense of family in which rituals and traditions abound.
9. has a balance of interaction among members.
10. has a shared religious core.
11. respects the privacy of one another.
12. values service to others.
13. fosters family table time and conversation.
14. shares leisure time.
15. admits to and seeks help with problems.

Do these qualities describe your family? Would you like your children to have a family like this? If so, we can establish these as our **family goals**, the qualities we want our family to have.

Whether we grew up in a healthy family or not, we can establish one for our children. When parents want to be different from their own parents, some do the opposite of what their parents did. This approach, however, is usually just as unhealthy. Once we are parents, we can *choose* how to raise our children.

**Conscious parenting is the process of choosing our parenting style and responses. It differs from trial-and-error parenting or seeking quick fixes, which often create long-term problems.**

*A Graduate's Story.* My father was an abusive alcoholic. I knew I didn't want to raise my children the way my parents raised me, but didn't know any other way to parent, so I guessed and tried to learn from my mistakes. *The Parent's Toolshop* and the *Universal Blueprint* have given me a plan and specific tools that will help me reach my goals. There's little guess work, I'm making fewer mistakes, and I feel so confident about my parenting. I know now that I **will** reach my goals of raising a well-adjusted child and being a loving, effective father.

Next, we want to look at our long-term goal of preparing children for self-sufficient adulthood, which is our **societal goal**. Ask yourself, "What kinds of skills and qualities does my child need to succeed as an adult, work in the business world, and contribute something positive to our society and world?" Most people include the following traits and skills:

**Personal Traits or Qualities**

- Self-discipline
- Self-motivation
- Cooperation
- Honesty
- Reliability
- Confidence
- Willingness to take "healthy" risks
- Respectfulness toward self and others
- Commitment to community service

**Skills Needed in the Business World**

- Decision-making
- Effective communication
- Time and stress management
- Conflict-resolution and problem-solving
- Organization
- Cooperating as a team player
- Following rules, yet recognizing unethical requests
- Creative thinking, offering suggestions and ideas for improvement

Now that we have individual, family, and societal goals, we want to choose the parenting style and techniques that best accomplish these goals.

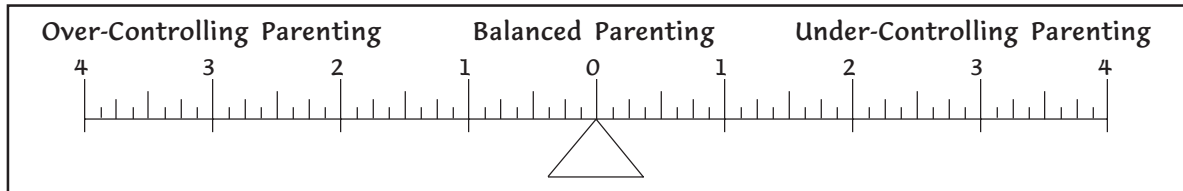
**We can tell if a particular parenting style or tool will help us reach our parenting goals by asking two questions:**

1. How well will this style or technique develop the skills and qualities I want my children to have?
2. How does this style or technique prepare my children for adulthood in the society in which they need to succeed? Does it develop the skills and qualities businesses look for in their employees and leaders?

*A Graduate's Comment.* At work, I have weekly, quarterly, and yearly goals. To achieve these goals, I develop a plan. I read books and attend workshops to learn better methods to work my plan. *The Parent's Toolshop* helps me do the same thing with my parenting plan.

## PARENTING STYLES

Family studies have identified three general types of parenting styles. Two are imbalanced and ineffective in the long-run: *over-controlling* and *under-controlling*. Only one general style is most effective in raising children who have the positive qualities and behaviors we identified as our goals. We will call this style *balanced* parenting.



Consider the laws of physics when you look at this scale. Where would you need to put a weight on the scale to balance the scale the quickest? The closer the weight is to the middle, the quicker the scale will balance. Moving the weight slightly, within the balanced area, creates only small imbalances. The farther the weight moves to either end, the more imbalanced the scale becomes. It is humanly impossible (and impractical) to always stay right at the zero. Balanced parenting is a *range*, between the two 1s. We can *choose* more flexible or more firm responses within that balanced range, based on the individual needs of the child, parent, or circumstances of the situation.

**If our general, daily parenting style and techniques are within the balanced range, the effects (short- and long-term) are healthy and balanced. The degree to which we experience negative and unhealthy effects (short- and long-term) depends on how frequently and extremely we use imbalanced styles or techniques.**

The following sections detail five styles of parenting—three general styles and two specific categories within each of the two imbalanced styles. For each style, we ask similar questions about parenting and show how the answers might differ based on the parenting style.

Each style has positive qualities, but if taken too far, the extremely imbalanced forms of these qualities become harmful. In the general descriptions, we might recognize traits we have, yet disagree that we have other traits common to that style. In truth, each of us might use a little of all three styles, but one is usually our main parenting style. We usually have an everyday parenting style and another style we fall back on when we are under pressure, frustrated, or angry. We also might use one style at work or with adults and another at home or with children. As you read the descriptions, consider how they can apply to adult relationships, such as those involving spouses, supervisors, leaders, or teachers.

Before we look more closely at the three major parenting styles and the subgroups within them, take the Parenting Styles Quiz on pages 26 and 27 to determine your current parenting style. This will help you focus throughout the rest of the chapter on those skills and beliefs you might choose to replace with healthier, more balanced alternatives.

## Parenting Styles Quiz

What type of parenting style do you use? Find out by taking this quiz. Answer the questions honestly, based on your beliefs and what you would really say or do, not how you *think* the questions "should" be answered:

1. What is the parent's job?
  - a. To make children behave and to obey authority and rules.
  - b. To provide constant supervision/structured rules so children will act/choose "right."
  - c. To teach children the life skills they need to be self-disciplined, responsible adults.
  - d. To make sure children have a happy, carefree childhood.
  - e. To let children learn the proper skills and behavior on their own.
2. Who is responsible for controlling the child's behavior?
  - a. Parents must stay in charge and children should obey their rules.
  - b. Children should do what the more experienced and knowledgeable parents say.
  - c. Parents are responsible for teaching children behaviors and skills they need for self-control.
  - d. Parents should explain to the children why they should behave and ask for their cooperation.
  - e. Children can figure out their own limits through trial and error.
3. Who has rights?
  - a. The parents have all the rights, just because they are adults; children have few or no rights.
  - b. Parents have superior knowledgeable and experience; therefore they have more rights.
  - c. Parents and children both have the right to be treated with dignity and respect.
  - d. Children's rights and needs are more important than the parents.
  - e. Children have rights as long as the parents aren't inconvenienced.
4. Who gets respect?
  - a. Children are expected to respect parents, but parents are not obligated to respect children.
  - b. Children have to earn their parents' respect before they will receive it.
  - c. All people deserve to be treated respectfully, regardless of age or position.
  - d. Parents should respect their children so the children will be happy.
  - e. Children act disrespectful now and then, it's no big deal.
5. How are mistakes handled?
  - a. Children must be punished if they break the rules. The punishment must either make the child feel bad or inconvenience the child somehow.
  - b. Parents can correct children's mistakes by expressing disappointment, offering constructive criticism, urging children to try harder, and telling them how to fix the mistake and prevent it later.
  - c. Children can learn lessons from mistakes and how to fix them or prevent them in the future.
  - d. It is a parent's responsibility to fix children's mistakes or protect children from the negative effects.
  - e. Others (besides the parents and children) are probably to blame for the children's mistakes.
6. How are problems solved and decisions made?
  - a. Choices are made within limits that respect the rights and needs of others.
  - b. The problems will go away on their own; if not, the parents can deal with it later.
  - c. Parents have the right answers, so the children should follow their advice.
  - d. Parents should monitor their children's activities, set goals for the child, and offer rewards or incentives for reaching the goals.
  - e. Parents should try to find out what the children want and make them happy.



7. How are negative feelings handled?
  - a. Parents shouldn't try to change their children's negative feelings but can teach them how to express them appropriately.
  - b. Everything will go smoother if children keep their negative feelings to themselves.
  - c. Children should not express negative feelings because it shows defiance and disrespect.
  - d. Children should think and feel what their parents think and feel is "right."
  - e. Parents should protect or rescue children from negative feelings.
8. Who decides how children should behave, which interests they pursue and the goals they set?
  - a. Parents can teach children positive behavior skills so children can set and reach healthy goals.
  - b. Children can figure out how to behave and what interests/goals to pursue through trial and error.
  - c. Parents should tell children what to do and the goals to pursue and make them follow through.
  - d. Parents should set high standards for children and choose interests/goals that will help the children succeed as adults.
  - e. Children should be allowed to do whatever interests/goals they want so they'll be happy.
9. Who makes the rules and how are they enforced?
  - a. Children can have choices, within reasonable limits, and understand the value of the rules.
  - b. If parents set and enforce limits, their children will feel too constricted and rebel.
  - c. Parents should tell their children what to do, and children should obey without question.
  - d. Parents can set structured rules and correct children with constructive criticism and advice.
  - e. If parents politely remind children to behave, they eventually will.
10. How can parents motivate children?
  - a. Parents can teach their children the value of tasks so they are self-motivated to do them.
  - b. Children should be responsible for motivating themselves.
  - c. Children can be motivated through commands and threats.
  - d. Children can be motivated by rewards and incentives, acceptance and praise.
  - e. If parents do enough for their children, the children will be happy and motivated.
11. How do parents discipline?
  - a. Parents can explain children's behavior choices and hold them accountable for their decisions.
  - b. Children can monitor their own behavior.
  - c. Punishment should be uncomfortable or inconvenient so misbehavior will stop.
  - d. Parents should make their children feel bad for misbehaving and take away special privileges.
  - e. Parents shouldn't punish their children too often or they will lose their children's love.

**Scoring:**

You will have five totals—one for each of the five parenting styles. Your highest score shows your dominant parenting style.

- **Power Patrol:** Add 1 point for every (a.) answer on questions 1 through 5, and 1 point for every (c.) answer on questions 6 through 11.
- **Perfectionistic Supervisor:** Add 1 point for every (b.) answer on questions 1 through 5, and 1 point for every (d.) answer on questions 6 through 11.
- **Balanced:** Add 1 point for every (c.) answer on questions 1 through 5, and 1 point for every (a.) answer on questions 6 through 11.
- **Overindulger:** Add 1 point for every (d.) answer on questions 1 through 5, and 1 point for every (e.) answer on questions 6 through 11.
- **Avoider:** Add 1 point for every (e.) answer on questions 1 through 5, and 1 point for every (b.) answer on questions 6 through 11.

## The Over-Controlling Parenting Style (Autocratic)

Over-controlling parents are also called autocratic parents. The over-controlling parenting style seems the most extreme and negative. There are two types of over-controlling parenting styles, Power Patrols and Perfectionistic Supervisors. One is more extreme and negative than the other, but there are some traits that are common to almost all over-controlling parenting styles.

### ANSWERS TO COMMON QUESTIONS

#### *What is the parent's job?*

Over-controlling parents believe a parent's job is to control their children. (We detail, later, *what* they want to control and *how* they try to control.)

#### *Who has rights?*

Over-controlling parents stand up for their rights, but often at the expense of their children's rights. Winning is important, even if it means the children "lose." The family revolves around the parents' needs or wants, without considering their children's feelings or needs.

Over-controlling families have a pecking order: parents are superior to children, older children are superior to younger children, and younger children are at the bottom of the ranks. If there are two parents present, both are superior to children or one parent is considered superior to the other.

#### *Who gets respect?*

Children are expected to treat their parents with respect, but parents are not obligated to treat children with respect.

#### *How are mistakes handled?*

Because parents are adults, they are always right. When someone points out their mistakes or offers a different opinion, over-controlling parents feel defensive, rather than admitting to and learning from their mistakes or considering other points of view.

#### *How are problems solved and decisions made?*

Over-controlling parents make the decisions and solve the problems that arise in the family, even problems or decisions that don't directly affect them. They believe they have the right answers and want their children to do the right thing, so they do what they can to *make* their children follow their advice.

#### *Who decides how children should behave, which interests they pursue, and the goals they set?*

Over-controlling parents want their children to have the behaviors, opinions, personality traits, feelings, goals, and values the *parents* think their children should have.

#### *Who is responsible for controlling the child's behavior?*

It is the parents' responsibility to do whatever it takes to *make* children behave the way *they* think children should behave.

#### *Who makes the rules and how are they enforced?*

Over-controlling parents want their children to unquestioningly obey all authority figures and their rules. They tell children what to do and how to do it. Sometimes, parents expect children to obey their commands even when they are unreasonable or beyond their children's ability.

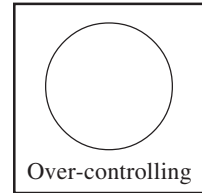
Over-controlling parents use "power tools" to control their children. It *is* important for children to follow rules, but over-controlling parents emphasize the superiority or power of the enforcer, rather than the *value* of the rule. Instead of fostering respect for *all* people, over-controlling parents emphasize adults' authority. Children behave and do what *others* tell them to do so they can *avoid* harsh punishment or criticism.

***How do parents discipline?***

Over-controlling parents use punishment that imposes suffering of various degrees and types—mental, emotional (shame), or physical suffering. If something goes wrong, it is somehow the child's fault.

**SYMBOL FOR OVER-CONTROLLING PARENTING**

In the book, *Active Parenting*, author Michael Popkin calls over-controlling parenting “autocratic.” He uses the symbol of an empty circle to represent limits with no choices. We use his symbol to represent the over-controlling parenting style.

**LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF OVER-CONTROLLING PARENTING**

- When children are denied all power and control, they miss important opportunities to make decisions and learn valuable life skills. They take little initiative because they lack confidence and are afraid of making mistakes or not being perfect.
- Children from over-controlling families usually wait for others to set limits for them, rather than setting limits for themselves. If they do something wrong, they are more inclined to lie, to avoid harsh punishment. When they are punished, they either seek revenge or give in out of fear and become blindly submissive to any authority figure. Hence, they don't learn to think for themselves.
- Children and young adults from over-controlling families function well in controlled, structured settings, unless they are rebelling against authority. They have difficulty, however, functioning in permissive settings where no one sets limits for them. When they have excessive freedom, they take advantage of it or can't decide what to do. When they are away from the controlling parent, they frequently engage in excessive behavior (eating, drinking, sex, television-watching, or partying).
- Over-controlling parenting poorly prepares children for today's business world, where employers need adults who can take initiative, think for themselves, and perform independently, with little outside guidance. Adults who were reared in over-controlling families often have difficulty in these areas because they rely on others to tell them what to do and are afraid of making mistakes.

**TYPES OF OVER-CONTROLLING PARENTS**

The two types of over-controlling parents are Power Patrols and Perfectionistic Supervisors. The following descriptions detail the ways these two parenting types expand on the general traits of the over-controlling parenting style.

**Power Patrols**

The Power Patrol parenting style, in its most extreme form, is physically or emotionally abusive. Power Patrols are not, however, always abusive. They are simply more concerned with the love of power than the power of love. They want to be in control of situations and the people in them.

***Personality Traits of Power Patrols***

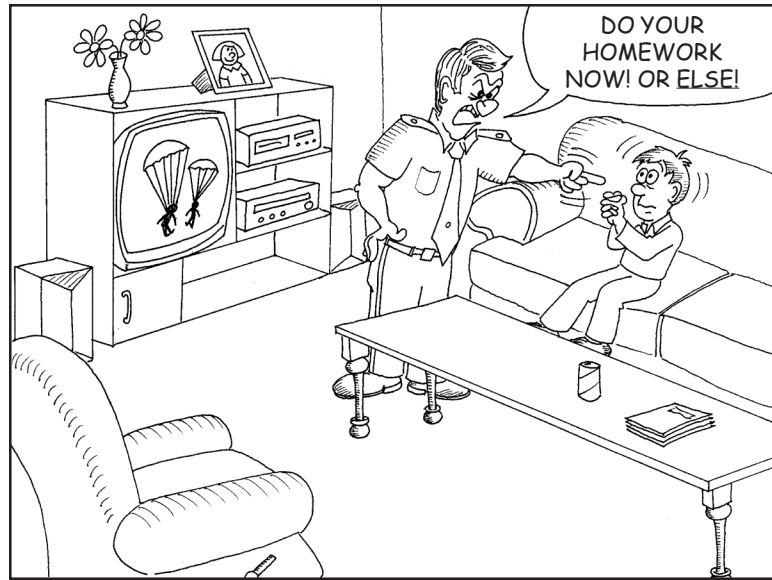
Power Patrols make strong leaders, but can be bossy, have little patience or flexibility, and want to see immediate results. They expect unquestioning obedience and want things done their way, because it is the *right* way. They view compromising as losing or giving in, and often get into power struggles with their children and other adults.

Power Patrols often have difficulty establishing warmth and closeness in their relationships. They often appear angry and resent anyone who tries to control them. Their insensitivity to others' feelings usually shuts down communication. Power Patrols are often argumentative and take

different viewpoints just to stay in control. They don't realize (or don't care) what it's like to be on the receiving end of their demands, orders, and criticisms.

#### ***What Power Patrols Believe***

A parent's job is to make sure children always follow the rules and to punish them if they break the rules. Children must obey all rules and authority figures or they will grow up to be delinquents. (Studies of delinquent teens have found, however, that angry, aggressive children are often from families where at least one parent is rejecting, hostile, critical, controlling, or revengeful.)



#### ***How Power Patrols Handle Negative Feelings***

Power Patrols usually think in black and white, right and wrong, my way and the wrong way. They don't allow children to express negative feelings, because they fear they won't be able to control the situation, the child, or themselves. They usually think their children's opinions and negative feelings are wrong so they should not express them. When children speak their minds, Power Patrols usually think they are being disrespectful and defiant.

#### ***The Power Patrol's Tools***

Power Patrols use commands and threats to motivate children. When children misbehave or challenge their authority, Power Patrols fear they are losing the battle for control. If verbal threats, shame, or blame don't work, they might resort to physical punishment. They believe that if negative behavior brings emotional or physical suffering, children will stop.

#### ***Long-Term Effects of Power-Patrol Parenting***

- Children of Power Patrols often feel discouraged, have little self-respect, and have a poor relationship with that parent. It is difficult to trust someone you fear, so children build walls to protect themselves from being hurt by the Power Patrol's rejection, criticism, judgment, and harshness. Power Patrols are often unaware of how hurt others are by their actions and words or the unhealthy lessons they are teaching.
- Children don't respect the Power Patrol's authority; they fear it. Children obey rules so they won't get punished, not because they respect the parent's judgement, see value in the rule, and *choose* to follow it. Children of Power Patrols are *other-disciplined*; they often behave only when adults are watching. They wait for the next command, taking little initiative, since they fear mistakes.
- Children of Power Patrols are often impressed with the power their parents have over them and seek ways to have power over others. When they are in positions of power, they often try to control others, get their way, and prove they are right. Since children don't learn assertive, respectful communication skills, they often have negative relationships with others.
- If children (and adult children) don't rebel or strive to be in control, they are likely to blindly follow orders from those they perceive as superior (including bossy peers).

- If Power Patrols tell their children they are controlling or hurting them because they love them, the effects can last a lifetime. As adults, they may equate love with pain, physical or emotional, and stay in abusive relationships. They often believe they deserve to be abused and that the abuse is somehow their fault. As adults, children can make a choice to repeat the errors of their upbringing or break the cycle of physical, verbal, or emotional abuse.

## Perfectionistic Supervisors

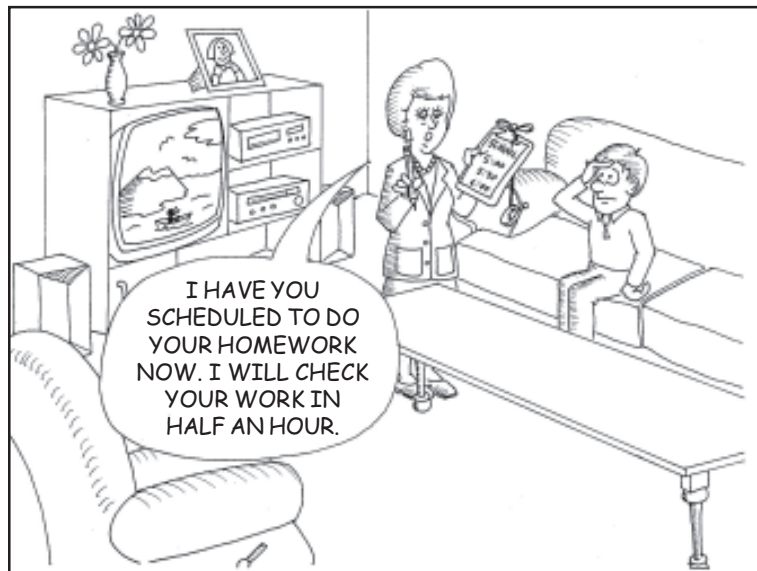
Perfectionistic Supervisors are the more positive but still imbalanced, type of over-controlling parent.

### *Personality Traits of Perfectionistic Supervisors*

Perfectionistic Supervisors are usually highly capable adults—self-disciplined, organized, scheduled, and responsible—and they expect children to be that way, too. Perfectionistic Supervisors are the ultimate super-achievers—they hold down a job, volunteer at school or the family’s religious group, coach a team, assume most household responsibilities, and write a book in their spare time. (Have you guessed that this is the way I become imbalanced?) People admire their accomplishments, so they pressure themselves to achieve more and never disappoint others.

Some professions, such as teaching or management, require qualities that come naturally to Perfectionistic Supervisors. They must be organized, manage large groups, point out mistakes, and keep to a schedule. These qualities, if not extreme or critical, can be helpful. At home,

however, children can feel pressured or controlled and believe their efforts are never good enough.



### *What Perfectionistic Supervisors Believe*

Constant supervision and structure will prevent children from misbehaving. They also believe their children’s behavior is a reflection of whether they are good parents, which influences some of their parenting decisions.

### *How Perfectionistic Supervisors Handle Negative Feelings*

Perfectionistic Supervisors overuse the word *should*. When they listen, they often judge feelings and opinions as right or wrong and try to make their children fit the mold of what *they* think people or children should think, feel, believe, or be like.

### *The Perfectionistic Supervisor’s Tools*

Perfectionistic Supervisors often go beyond taking an active interest in their children’s activities and identities. They take responsibility for scheduling and monitoring the child’s responsibilities. They try to *improve* their children through rewards, incentives, and goal-setting. They reward their children for their compliance by telling them they are proud and happy to have such “good” children. They try to correct their children’s mistakes and weaknesses through suggestions, nagging, criticizing, lecturing, and guilt trips (“I’m disappointed in you”). If these techniques don’t work, Perfectionistic Supervisors increase their control by taking away special privileges, even if they have no logical relation to what the child did.

### ***Long-Term Effects of Perfectionistic Supervisor Parenting***

Children of Perfectionistic Supervisors are usually on time, perfectly dressed, well-mannered, and finish their school work promptly—because the *parent* makes sure of it. Their parents are often unaware, however, that their short-term successes have many negative long-term effects and unhealthy hidden messages:

- Children of Perfectionistic Supervisors often express resentment, frustration, and discouragement because their parents have unrealistic expectations. They usually lack self-confidence and think they are a disappointment to their parents, because nothing they do is ever good enough. They try to please other people, so no one will ever be disappointed in them. This inhibits their curiosity, creativity, individuality, and problem-solving or decision-making skills.
- Children behave and do their work because they get rewards—material payoffs, acceptance, and conditional praise—not because they are *self*-motivated.
- Separation issues are often difficult for Perfectionistic Supervisors because they think they are losing control of their children. When their children try to spread their wings, these parents often have difficulty letting go. The children resent this ongoing control and struggle to control their own lives. As teens, their children might rebel, to prove they can't be controlled.
- As teens, children of Perfectionistic Supervisors frequently display obsessive, over-achieving, or perfectionist habits. They practically kill themselves (sometimes literally) trying to live up to unrealistic expectations. If they are not obsessed with trying to prove their worth and don't rebel, they might simply give up trying.
- As adults, children of Perfectionistic Supervisors often have strict rules about what is right and wrong. They usually see things in black and white and having difficulty operating in gray areas.

### **HISTORICAL TRENDS IN AUTOCRATIC PARENTING**

Until the 1950s, most parents used an over-controlling (autocratic) parenting style, which fit the structure of society and most families. Back then, there was a pecking order of superiors and inferiors. At home, the father was the supreme ruler, the mother was expected to obey him, and the children were supposed to obey both of them. To succeed in the workplace people said, “Yes, Sir. No, Sir. What do you want me to do next, Sir?” If someone in authority told people to do something, they did it—without question. Autocratic parenting was the style that best prepared children for the real world *then*.

The 1960s brought a major shift in American society, from a superior/inferior structure to one of equal worth and rights. Civil rights, women's rights, laborers' rights, minority rights, and children's rights forever changed American society. Only when children believe adults are superior and infallible do they believe adults have the right to punish or hurt them.

Teenagers in the 1960s resented adults telling them what to do and rebelled against their autocratic control: how to wear their hair, what clothes to wear, which profession to enter, whether to go to college or be drafted into war. They believed they had a right to voice their feelings, opinions, and make decisions about issues that affected them. Autocratic parenting did not allow for such individuality. Drugs and “the sexual revolution”

provided a temporary escape and a new way to rebel. Parents saw they were losing control. The professionals who tried to help these parents recognized this rebellion against authority and encouraged parents to loosen their reins. So began a new trend—permissive parenting.

***Did you know . . .***

*In America, there were laws and agencies to protect animals from abuse and neglect long before children received the same protection? If children were abused, people called the local animal shelter to intervene!*

## The Under-Controlling Parenting Style (Permissive)

Parents who don't control their children *enough* are also called permissive. At first glance, it may seem to be a positive parenting style because there is no harshness, criticism, or punishment. It is, however, as equally imbalanced as the over-controlling style, but in the opposite way, and also has many negative long-term effects. There are also two kinds of under-controlling parenting styles, the Avoider and the Over-Indulger. They are more different from each other than the two kinds of over-controlling parenting styles. There are some common traits, however, to most under-controlling parenting styles.

### ANSWERS TO COMMON QUESTIONS

#### ***What is the parent's job?***

It is the parent's job to avoid conflict and make or keep children happy. This usually includes protecting children from disappointment, frustration, and getting in trouble.

#### ***Who has rights?***

Most permissive families revolve around the children; their rights and needs are more important than the parents'.

#### ***Who gets respect?***

Under-controlling parents try to treat their children with respect, hoping they will feel happy and, therefore, behave better. Since parents put their needs and rights below children's, they are more willing to accept disrespectful behavior from their children. While it's clear most parents aren't getting respect in these families, the children are also not getting real respect.

#### ***How are mistakes handled?***

When children make mistakes, permissive parents might listen to the child's feelings, but not hold them accountable for the results of their actions. Children have unlimited chances to correct their behavior, with few or no consequences for misbehavior. Some under-controlling parents are overprotective so the children will not make mistakes. Most under-controlling parents rescue their children from mistakes by making excuses for the child's behavior or by blaming others (including themselves).

#### ***How are problems solved and decisions made?***

Most under-controlling families solve problems and make decisions based on the children's demands or what will make the children happy. Some under-controlling parents solve problems *for* their children. Most let their children make whatever decision they want, even if it is impulsive or irresponsible. When a problem arises, these parents deny it exists, hope the problem will go away, or view it through filtered lenses. They only acknowledge a problem's existence when it gets so bad that they can no longer ignore it.

#### ***Who decides how children should behave, which interests they pursue, and the goals they set?***

Children make behavior, interest and goal decisions. The parents are usually willing to let the children do whatever makes them happy.

#### ***Who is responsible for controlling the child's behavior?***

Being responsible means "to be *accountable* for" our behavior. We consider our options, the possible risks, make the best decision we can, and accept the positive or negative effect of the choices we make. Therefore, children from under-controlling families are not *responsible*, but are definitely *controlling* their behavior choices (even if their choice is to behave irresponsibly).

#### ***Who makes the rules and how are rules enforced?***

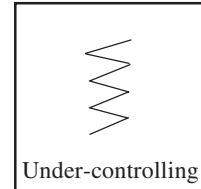
Children can usually do as they please, since under-controlling parents rarely set limits or enforce rules. They use reminders and polite pleading to convince children to behave properly. If they set limits, they rarely enforce them. If the children don't like others' rules or experiencing the effects of breaking rules, their parents often request special treatment or rescue their children.

**How do parents discipline?**

Under-controlling parents rarely discipline because it's too inconvenient or because they fear losing their children's love. When repeated pleading doesn't work, parents often say, "I've had it. I'm tired of being ignored." They either give in or jump to the other extreme and try to regain control through over-controlling means.

**SYMBOL FOR UNDER-CONTROLLING PARENTING**

In *Active Parenting*, author Michael Popkin calls under-controlling parenting "permissive." He uses the symbol of a zigzag line, which symbolizes freedom and choices, without any limits. We use his symbol to represent the under-controlling parenting style.

**LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF UNDER-CONTROLLING PARENTING**

- An under-controlling parenting style poorly prepares children for the real world. Most societies offer some freedom, but within consistent, reasonable limits that protect the rights of others. Since these children can usually do what they want and experience few discomforts, they have little motivation for changing or improving themselves and are unprepared for the harsh realities of the real world. Children who lack self-control, self-discipline, and respect for others have difficulty operating within the rules of structured settings like school and work. They test limits, hoping they can manipulate others into loosening the reins. When their efforts to change others or their environment fail, they often quit, saying "School (or the job) was too hard (or restrictive)."
- Children from under-controlling families are used to others rescuing them or excusing their behavior, so they don't accept responsibility for their actions. They seek out rescuers and blame everyone—parents, teachers, employers, spouses—for their problems and failures. Because they've been pampered, they can't handle criticism or suggestions for improving themselves. They use their energy and creativity to manipulate others into taking care of their needs and desires. They spend more time trying to get *out* of responsibility than in developing responsible independence.

**TYPES OF UNDER-CONTROLLING PARENTS**

Under-controlling parenting can involve two extremes—not doing enough (avoidance) or doing too much (over-indulgence) for children. The following descriptions detail the ways these two extremes expand on the general traits of the under-controlling parenting style.

**Avoiders**

Some under-controlling parents are Avoiders. In these families, the parent's needs are most important. Parents don't teach skills, set limits, supervise, or follow through because it takes too much time; they are either too busy or too tired (lazy?) to be bothered. Extreme Avoiders are physically or emotionally neglectful.

**Personality Traits of Avoiders**

Avoiders are into comfort—their own comfort. They are often easy going, undemanding, and let their children do for themselves. They avoid responsibility and commitments because they are too busy or too relaxed to be inconvenienced. They often break promises at the last minute, because they no longer feel like doing it. They are often emotionally detached and rarely take the time to talk or listen.

**What Avoiders Believe**

Children will learn skills and proper behavior on their own, just from trial and error. Children should not inconvenience parents. Problems (and problem behavior) will eventually go away if parents ignore them or pretend they don't exist.



### ***How Avoiders Handle Negative Feelings***

They avoid stress, negative feelings, and conflict. Even if people are upset, they should not express it. They often perceive even healthy disagreements and assertiveness as fighting or arguing and insist on eternal family peace.

#### ***The Avoider's Tools***

Avoiders have a hands-off approach to parenting. They let their children do whatever they want, as long as it doesn't inconvenience them. Parents who are into their own comfort are often preoccupied with adult conversations and activities. They don't pay attention to children, allowing them to do whatever they want, even if it is inappropriate or hurts others.

#### ***Long-Term Effects of Avoidance Parenting***

- Letting children learn by trial and error has its merits, but Avoiders don't take the time and effort to teach their children good decision-making skills or help children process what they learn from their mistakes. If children are unsupervised or alone a much of the time (e.g., latch-key kids), they become bored and often make impulsive, poor decisions.
- The children often respond to problems and mistakes as the parent does—they deny responsibility, make excuses ("I'm too busy" or "I don't feel like it."), and expect special treatment. When the real world holds the children accountable and they fail, their parents want to avoid further disappointment, so they often give up on the children and "write them off."
- Children of Avoiders usually have a poor sense of self-worth because their parents didn't make an effort to show they cared.



### **Over-Indulgers**

Over-indulgence is the more common, positive, yet still imbalanced, type of under-controlling parenting style. Here, the parents don't set limits because it might make their child unhappy.

#### ***Personality Traits of Over-Indulgers***

These parents are usually sensitive and understanding people, in touch with others' feelings and desires. These are positive traits, if used properly. Over-indulgent parents want to be loved, liked, and appreciated. They try to please others to earn this approval. They sacrifice their own needs and rights to keep the peace or make others happy.

#### ***What Over-Indulgers Believe***

Children should have a happy, carefree childhood. Over-Indulgent parents want their children to have the things they didn't have and protect them from negative experiences, even if these experiences could offer valuable lessons.

#### ***How Over-Indulgers Handle Negative Feelings***

They do whatever it takes to keep others happy and rescue them from their negative feelings. These parents usually sense what their children want or need and are afraid to disappoint or frustrate them. So they give in or give undue service, hoping that if their children are happy, they'll cooperate more.

### ***The Over-Indulger's Tools***

Too often, these parents give and serve too much, at the expense of their own rights and needs. They suffer from “affluenza,” doting on their children, emotionally and materialistically. They usually take on too many responsibilities, becoming maids, cooks, toy stores, tutors, financiers—and doormats.

Over-indulgers are great rescuers, protecting children from even healthy hardships. They often volunteer their time to the child's activities so they can intervene or prevent problems from occurring. They deliver forgotten lunches and retrieve homework left at school so their children won't experience disappointment. Perfectionistic Supervisors are overly involved so they can *control* the situation or child and look like good parents. Over-indulgers are overly involved so they can *protect* children and *serve* their children's whims.



### ***Long-Term Effects of Over-Indulgent Parenting***

- Children from under-controlling homes develop a distorted perception of reality—they think the world revolves around them. At first, they may feel powerful, because they can take advantage of others. Eventually, they resent the people who don't have the courage to set limits. Because they've been protected and rescued, they have trouble coping with the normal struggles of adult life. They expect success, but aren't willing to work for it.
- Over-Indulgers, who bend over backwards to keep their children happy, are often shocked when their children become ungrateful, demanding, and disrespectful in return. But the children know who's really in control—they! Children learn to manipulate by using “please,” promises, and logical arguments to get their parents to give in.
- Young adults from under-controlling families have difficulty operating within the limits of a job, its rules, and with authority figures. They often drift from job to job, trying to find the perfect job. When they can't support themselves, their parents welcome them home, offering the standard of living to which they are accustomed. The parents think this is their job and they like feeling needed.

*A Personal Story. When I was in college, I worked at a runaway shelter. I expected most runaway teens would come from negative, controlling families. I was surprised to find just as many who ran away from perfectionist-controlling families and permissive ones. Runaways from permissive homes thought their parents didn't care about them. They tested how far they could go before their parents would set limits. I rarely saw a child who had run away from a family that wasn't over-controlling or under-controlling.*

## **HISTORICAL TRENDS IN PERMISSIVE PARENTING**

The angry teens of the 60s blamed their parents and authority for their problems and vowed to raise their children differently. Instead of keeping what their parents did well (such as setting limits and teaching respect for authority) and rejecting what they did poorly (such as demanding blind obedience and trying to control children's individuality), they went to the other extreme. These changes tipped the scale to the other extreme—permissive parenting.

In 1970, Thomas Gordon developed *P.E.T.: Parent Effectiveness Training*, the first parenting curriculum that was widely accepted in America. It taught effective communication skills such as problem-ownership, active listening, I-messages, and problem solving. These skills greatly improved family relationships by fostering effective communication. In fact, *P.E.T.*'s communication skills are so effective, nearly every major institution still uses and/or teaches them, including business, education, counseling, human relationships, and parenting. Parents and professionals eventually became frustrated with *P.E.T.* because it contained no guidelines for discipline—and they labeled it “permissive.” Today, a few popular parenting resources encourage parents to throw out all the important valuable skills *P.E.T.* taught, simply because it was missing one important skill area. *P.E.T.* was *not* a permissive parenting program, just an incomplete one.

By the 1980s, problems that started in the 60s had reached epidemic proportions. Many families were touched, in some way, by problems such as widespread drug use, teenage pregnancy, AIDS, gangs and violence, child abduction, and sexual victimization. Many people rightly blamed permissiveness for most of these problems. Other problems, such as abduction and sexual victimization, had their roots in abusive parenting and autocratic practices that taught children to blindly obey any authority at the expense of their own rights. Some people said parents should go back to autocratic methods to regain control. They had obviously forgotten, or didn't know, the reason permissive parenting became popular in the first place—because autocratic parenting had a long-term rebound effect. The pendulum was swinging away from permissive, but was going too far again into the autocratic zone, without finding and maintaining a healthy balance. Since autocratic and permissive parenting both resulted in negative results for children and society, it is wise to avoid both of these extreme, imbalanced parenting styles.

## The Balanced Parenting Style ☆☆☆☆

Any time our parenting style is extreme, so are the long-term effects. The balanced parenting style is based on a healthy, balanced philosophy and uses effective parenting techniques. Therefore, the long-term effects are almost exclusively positive.

### ANSWERS TO COMMON QUESTIONS

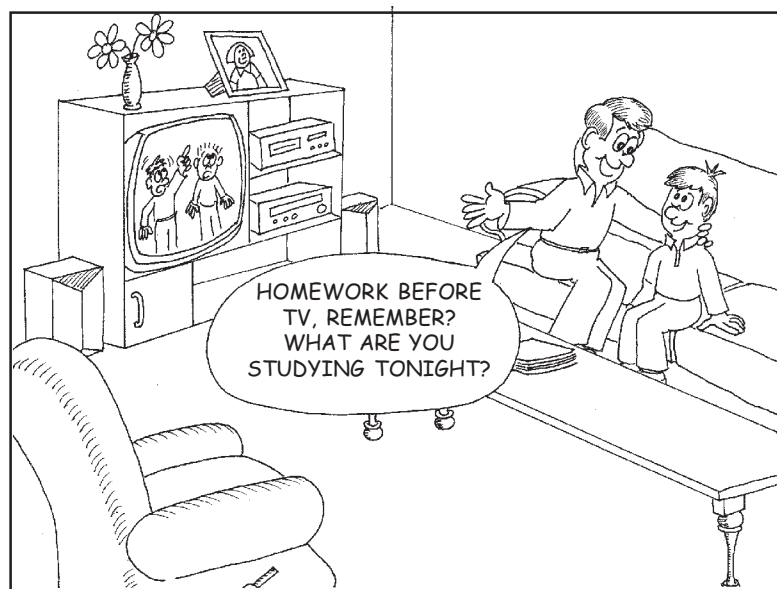
#### *What is the parent's job?*

Balanced parents share the individual, family, and societal goals we listed earlier. They believe their job is to *teach* children the life skills they need to be self-sufficient, responsible members of society.

#### *Who has rights?*

In balanced families, parents and children are equal but different. They each have equal human worth and deserve to be treated with equal dignity and respect, even when their individual needs are different. Parents try to balance the needs of the adults and their

relationships and also the children's individual needs and the parent/child relationship. While this is a difficult balancing act, they also realize that they can't (and shouldn't) meet each member's every need. Their goal is to teach children how to meet their own needs. They strive to maintain appropriate boundaries—they are available to their children, without fostering unnecessary dependency.



In balanced families, the adults aren't superior to children, just different—they are older, more experienced, and usually more knowledgeable. Increased privileges result from increased responsibility, not just one's age or position.

***Who gets respect?***

Balanced parents believe that *all* people deserve to be treated respectfully, regardless of their age or position. Parents teach respect to their children and earn respect from their children by treating their children and others respectfully, as role models.

Balanced parents set rules that are mutually respectful. They show self-respect by setting limits and they show respect for their children by offering choices. Children have some freedom and choices, within limits that show respect for others' rights. Balanced parents are socially responsible, teaching their children the positive and negative effects of their behavior choices.

Over-controlling parents treat children like objects, doing things *to* them. Under-controlling parents treat children like royalty, doing things *for* them. Balanced parents treat children like assets that have worth by doing things *with* children and involving them in decisions and activities.

***How do balanced parents handle negative feelings?***

Balanced parents show empathy and understanding for their children's negative feelings and differing opinions. They don't try to *change* them or label them right or wrong. They recognize that feelings and opinions are a part of life, so they teach their children *how* to express those feelings appropriately. In a balanced family, "We can agree to disagree, if we disagree respectfully."

Balanced parents regularly practice the healthy communication skills they teach to their children. They express their concerns in respectful, assertive ways. They stand up for their rights, but don't violate their child's right to be treated with respect. They avoid using blame or guilt to motivate others. When their anger is about to erupt, they disengage and calm down so they don't direct their anger at their children.

***How are mistakes handled?***

Balanced parents encourage their children to learn from their mistakes. They know that mistakes are part of life and learning, so they avoid blame and criticism. Instead, they hold children accountable for making amends for the effects of their choices and learning better skills.

Balanced parents are gentle with their own mistakes, willing to admit when they are wrong, and consider others' viewpoints. Through their words and actions (role modeling not lecturing), balanced parents show children how to make responsible decisions, accept responsibility for their mistakes, learn and grow from them, and still maintain their self-respect and sense of self-worth.

***How are problems solved and decisions made?***

When problems arise in a balanced family, parents take responsibility and ownership for their contribution to the problem. They shift the focus to what there *is* a choice about, within limits that respect the rights and needs of others.

Whenever possible, balanced families strive to reach win/win solutions to problems. *Balanced families do not vote* because there are always losers—and discouraged losers will usually sabotage the decision. While mutual agreement is their goal, it isn't always possible. On occasion, parents need to make an executive decision. Balanced parents listen to their children's ideas and opinions and consider them in their decision. Children can have a say about an issue, but might not always get their way.

***Who decides how children should behave, which interests they pursue, and the goals they set?***

Balanced parents view their children as unique individuals, not carbon copies of themselves or balls of clay to mold into whatever forms *they* think the children should become. They teach their children *how* to set and reach goals, rather than setting goals *for* their children and then pressuring them

to meet unrealistic expectations. They may not share their children's interests, but they strive to understand them so they can increase their own knowledge and better support their children.

***Who is responsible for controlling children's behavior?***

The balanced parent's job is not to *control* their children; their job is to guide and teach children how to control their *own* behavior. As children develop the skills and qualities they need to be healthy, well-balanced, fully-functioning adults, they naturally make increasingly responsible decisions that positively affect their lives.

**Sometimes balanced parents are more firm than flexible or more flexible than firm. These are *conscious* choices, based on the needs of the situation, the parent, and child. They are not the result of their personality issues. Such slight, temporary, conscious imbalances, within the balanced range, are often quite appropriate.**

***Who makes the rules and how are they enforced?***

Balanced parents tell children what they *can* do, instead of what they *can't* do. Their rules focus on the *value* behind a rule, rather than the power of the rule-maker. Balanced parents offer some choices or freedom within reasonable rules or limits. They provide limited privileges to see how responsibly their children can handle them. Over-controlling parents use privileges to bribe and control children. Under-controlling parents offer unlimited privileges without any responsibility.

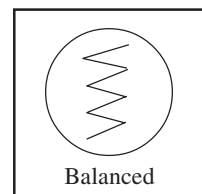
***How do balanced parents discipline?***

Balanced parents try to *prevent* the need for discipline by telling children what they *can* do, teaching behavior skills, revealing children's behavior choices and the possible outcomes of those choices. When children choose to misbehave, balanced parents consider the children's point of view and their possible goals. They show their children how to meet these goals through positive behavior. If children still *choose* to behave inappropriately, balanced parents allow the revealed outcome to occur. They may also need to use discipline in unexpected situations in which behavior is so inappropriate that parents must set immediate boundaries.

The actual discipline balanced parents choose depends on the situation. Balanced parents use the most logically related discipline for the misbehavior. Balanced parents do not add suffering to their discipline, because this distracts children from the lessons they need to learn. It builds resentment and invites revenge, instead of focusing on how children can make amends for their mistakes.

## SYMBOL FOR BALANCED PARENTING

*Active Parenting* calls balanced parenting "democratic" and uses the symbol of a zigzag, representing choices or freedom, inside a circle, which represents reasonable limits. We refer to this symbol often as we learn how to set and maintain a balanced parenting style.



Balanced parenting got the label "democratic" when authors compared the qualities of a balanced parenting style to a democratic *society*.<sup>2</sup> Here are just a few examples:

- Citizens have certain basic rights (free speech, for one) and privileges they can earn (a driver's license, for example). They must balance these rights and privileges with the responsibility of using them appropriately and not violating other people's rights in the process.
- All people have equal human worth, even when they are different or have individual needs. "All men are created equally." ("Men" refers to humankind.)
- Citizens are involved in decision-making whenever possible. When they cannot make the final decision, they can express their opposing opinions and their representatives will consider them in the decision.

Balanced parenting is no longer called “democratic,” because parents and professionals confused democratic parenting with a liberal political belief. (Someone can be a conservative Republican and still practice balanced, “democratic” parenting.) As a result, a few authors have criticized “democratic parenting” as being liberal and permissive. These authors inadvertently discourage parents from using accurate, healthy, effective parenting resources, simply because the resources use a label that has lost its original meaning. They usually present only two extreme styles of parenting, permissive parenting and autocratic parenting.

When you read criticism about “democratic” parenting, carefully read the explanation. If you use the guidelines and accurate definitions in this book, you can recognize imbalanced parenting advice, whatever its label. (See the “Screening Advice” section of Chapter 15, “The Three C’s,” page 416, for more suggestions.)

## LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF BALANCED PARENTING

Research and decades of experience have proven that children from balanced families learn the life skills and develop the qualities we listed as our individual, family, and societal goals. Over the past 40 years, each generation has had a growing number of children raised in healthy, balanced families. Even when these children (and later, adults) are the minority, they make a significant impact on their corner of the world.

- Children and young adults from balanced families know how to operate within rules and limitations. They find the *value* of a rule (even when it is not stated) and the choices they have within those limits. They also act responsibly in permissive settings because they are *self*-disciplined. They usually only resist a request if doing so defies logic or would violate someone’s rights, ethics, or a higher law.
- As teens and adults, children of balanced parents usually make responsible decisions. They have been making choices their entire lives—to varying degrees, based on their age, maturity, and the situation. Children from balanced families often want more independence and are usually skilled and responsible enough to handle it.
- Children from balanced families are self-motivated. They are more likely to take the initiative to do tasks, simply because they see that it needs done. They also know when they need to ask permission first. These are valued qualities in the business world.
- Children and young adults from balanced families have excellent leadership and communication skills. They know how to motivate people without bribes or threats. They promote teamwork and bring out the assets in each team member. They know how to resolve problems, learn from their mistakes, and accept responsibility for their behavior choices.
- Children raised in balanced families learn *how* to be responsible—for their jobs, emotions, bodies, and behavior. They have good time-management and organizational skills. Whatever profession these children choose as adults, they are active members of the work team and resolve problems professionally and maturely.
- Children from balanced families are less likely to rebel against authority. Their relationships with authority figures are usually positive because they don’t see them as a threat or symbol of power and control. They see them as people—and people have different personalities and needs. Because their parents respected their individuality and taught them important life skills, they know how to tolerate or work *with* people who are different. When someone treats them disrespectfully or tries to manipulate them, they know how to respond appropriately. They might reach a win/win agreement or voice their opinion assertively, which are both respectful options.

Some parents comment that the military’s autocratic style of training develops some of the qualities they want their children to develop. They suggest, therefore, that similar tactics will develop these traits in their children. There are several reasons why this is an incorrect assumption.

(1) The military *must* be autocratic. A general cannot assemble the massive troops and ask “Which field should we attack? What strategy should we use?” The military’s goal is to develop soldiers who will unquestioning obey their orders. Therefore, autocratic leadership fits the goals of the military. (Military *leaders*, however, often use peaceful negotiation to prevent conflict or brainstorm options before passing on orders to the troops.) Healthy parents, on the other hand, strive to meet a broader range of goals. To develop positive traits and skills in children, they must choose a parenting style that is most likely to help them meet *all* their goals, not just a few.

(2) The military trains *adults*, who undergo the harsh training necessary to serve their country. Children are affected much differently by such harsh training. There may be obedient children who would thrive in a military career, but the military also needs soldiers who are emotionally stable. Autocratic parenting does not develop or nurture emotional stability. An over-indulgent family might develop children with emotional stability because it is nurturing, but it doesn’t develop children who operate well within strict limits. Balanced parenting, however, is the style most likely to develop emotional stability *and* a broad range of skills that produce well-balanced adults who can succeed in *any* career.

## HISTORICAL TRENDS IN BALANCED PARENTING

Since the beginning of time, there have always been healthy, balanced families. They were often in the minority and there was no label for that parenting style. In 1976, Donald Dinkmeyer and Gary McKay wrote *S.T.E.P. (Systematic Training for Effective Parenting)*. *S.T.E.P.* took the effective communication skills of *P.E.T.* and added guidelines for understanding and disciplining problem behavior. These additional skills came from Rudolf Dreikurs, who coined the terms “The Four Goals of Misbehavior” and “logical and natural consequences.”

Today, most parenting resources teach balanced parenting, including *The Parent’s Toolshop* and the many resources it references. Only a few parenting authors encourage parents to exert their power by using quick fixes that are unhealthy and ineffective in the long-run. These authors feed on parents’ fears of losing control of their children and offer few helpful, healthy suggestions. Since there are so many accurate, healthy parenting resources available to parents, parents are wise to simply avoid parenting authors whose advice is so questionable.

Most people have healthy, positive parenting goals. They want their children to learn how to think for themselves and make decisions *and* follow rules that respect the rights of others. Parents, children, and society have already proven, for several generations, that a balanced parenting style is most effective in producing well-balanced, fully-functioning, mature, responsible, independent adults who make positive contributions to society. We are now at a critical turning point in family history—only time will tell if parents (and society) will repeat the mistakes of the past or learn from them to improve the future. Now, more than ever, parents and professionals need to know how to use balanced parenting (and teaching and leadership) skills, so we can work together to reach the healthy individual, family, and societal goals we share.

## THE ULTIMATE EXAMPLE OF A BALANCED PARENT

Balanced parenting is not only psychologically and emotionally sound, it is also spiritually healthy. Consider the three common philosophies people believe about God as a heavenly parent. One is balanced and the other two are extreme. These three sets of beliefs are similar to the three styles of parenting. If you disagree with the religious interpretations presented here or don’t believe in God, simply view them as interesting analogies to consider.

**God is a balanced parent.** God is loving and forgiving, yet has clear expectations and laws. God understands the emotional nature and difficulties of human existence. God reveals rules and guidelines, through the writings and living examples of godly men and women, to help us live responsibly, enriching lives. God gives us the information we need to make responsible decisions and

reveals the effects of our positive and negative options. Then, because God also gave us free will, we are allowed to live our own lives and make our own decisions. One universal law states, “As you sow, so shall you reap,” which means “what you give, you get.” (This law of cause and effect is obvious when we consider the long-term effects of the different parenting styles.) People may choose to ignore the teachings, examples, and their conscience (God’s intuitive nudging) to violate the universal laws. God does not stop us from making these choices—or the positive and negative effects that result. The results are not God’s subjective, personal revenge; they are objective, natural consequences. God shows us unconditional love, when we are good *and* when we stray. It is as though God embraces us and says, “I will always love you. You knew my rules and the effects of your choices before you decided to do this, so *I* am not doing this *to* you. It is happening because of the *choice you made*. You will soon have another chance to show you’ve learned this important lesson and choose differently. I am always here for you, to love you and guide you, if you choose to allow me.” When we see others are on the wrong path, we can share the values of virtuous behavior in non-judgmental ways, serve as role models of godly living, and unconditionally love others, even if they don’t immediately change.

**One extreme belief is that God is a permissive parent** who is *only* loving and forgiving—no matter how often we sin, whether we feel regret, or if we ask for forgiveness. God is always watching over us, to catch us when we fall and to pick us up. Because we don’t always immediately see the effects of violating God’s laws, it must be okay to break them. We don’t need to take personal responsibility for our actions, because God will forgive us anyway.

**The other extreme belief is that God is an autocratic parent** who hovers over us, watching every move and judging every mistake, so we will get our rightful punishment on Judgment Day. We must follow the rules of our *religion*, rather than discovering the wonders and revelations of deeply spiritual experiences. Anyone who doesn’t follow the same denominational rules or share our beliefs is wrong and bound for hell. Since God tells us the right way to live and judges our actions, we must do the same to others, to try to convince them to follow what we know is right. If we point out others’ faults, they will feel shame and want to improve. If we can make them fearful, by describing the horrible punishment that awaits them, they might change their ways.

When parents use religious beliefs to intimidate, shame, and control their children, it emotionally traumatizes their children. The clinical term for such parental treatment is called “religious abuse.”

*A Graduate’s Story. My girls, ages 4 and 6, were playing at a neighbor’s house with her children, a boy age 3 and a girl age 7. It was during a scorching heat wave and her house had no air conditioning. The children went to an upstairs bedroom to play and closed the door. When they got hot and sweaty, they took off their shirts and continued playing. When my neighbor saw them she screamed at them, saying they were “naked, sinful children and God would punish them.” She locked each child in a different room for a half an hour and told them they had to stay on their knees and pray for God’s forgiveness. When my children returned, they were **very** upset and confused. They didn’t understand what they did wrong.*

*I don’t want my children to be ashamed of their bodies, but also want them to be modest and sexually responsible—although they are still too young to even understand these concepts. My girls don’t usually take off their shirts, but that wasn’t even my issue here; I could understand a parent’s disapproval of girls taking off shirts, although I knew these children weren’t doing anything sexually inappropriate. My problem was with the way my neighbor treated my children. I’ve taught my children about a loving God and that our bodies are beautiful creations we are to respect and protect. My neighbor undermined these values. Now I wonder what my children think about God, the purpose of prayer, and healthy, appropriate sexuality.*

A belief in a “balanced” God is a *healthy* belief, but is it an accurate belief? To answer this, consider the following questions. When people do something wrong or commit a crime does God reach down from the sky and physically slap them? Does God shoot a bolt of lightning? Does God



yell at us in a harsh, critical, discouraging voice? No. Just because this doesn't happen, does it mean people are getting away with their crime? No! Sooner or later, there are consequences for their actions, even if we don't see them. People may experience emotional or spiritual pain (in life or the afterlife), or physical problems (depression, drug addiction, etc.).

Of the thousands of people who have had near death experiences, none have reported meeting an angry, wrathful presence. While some details of near-death experiences vary among cultures and religions, almost all people encounter a similar spiritual presence who is warm, loving, teaches them lessons, and sometimes even has a sense of humor. Another common trait of near-death experiences is a life review. Here, the person re-experiences *every* thought, word, and deed from their lifetime—and the effects these had on others, from *that* person's perspective. They see every mistake they made, whether small or severe, and the value of their other options. People who attempted suicide or lived a criminal, disrespectful, or irresponsible life before their near-death *still* experienced complete joy, peace, and love in the afterlife. Their life review, however, sent additional, strong messages: God is Love, all human life is sacred, life's hardships can help us grow, and we *will* be held accountable for *everything* we do in life. As a result of their near-death experience, many people who didn't believe in God dramatically changed their beliefs. They embraced a God that loves them intensely and unconditionally, but also holds them personally accountable for every choice they make.

As human parents to human children, we can follow God's example. We can show unconditional love toward others. We can teach positive values and behavior and reveal the possible effects of straying from that path. We can be disciples, who model appropriate words and deeds. When our children make mistakes, we can teach them how to choose more wisely in the future. If their behavior isn't dangerous, we can allow the natural consequence to occur and help them learn from the experience. When there are no natural consequences, we can discipline in loving ways that don't impose additional suffering that can traumatize them.

We do not often explore religious parallels in *The Parent's Toolshop*. Nevertheless, you can feel assured that if you believe in a loving but firm "higher power," the teachings in this book will be consistent with your beliefs.

**Balanced parenting principles are based on the universal laws of human behavior, so the positive and negative effects of our parenting choices *will* occur whether we believe this philosophy or not.**

## PARENTING AS A TEAM

Many of us have a variety of parenting partners: spouses, ex-spouses, teachers, day care workers, religious educators, relatives, and neighbors we regularly visit. Each partner can have a parenting style that differs from ours. When parenting styles clash, resist the urge to overreact, interfere, rescue the child, or control the partner.

If we have a parenting partner with an opposite style, we can fall into an overcompensation cycle; one partner thinks the other is too strict, so he or she becomes more lenient to counteract the other. As this partner becomes more lenient, the other gets more strict. Each tries to compensate for the imbalances of the other and they seesaw back and forth. (Consider the balancing scale again. If you put *two* weights on the scale, where would you need to put them so the scale balances the quickest? Opposite ends create a seesaw effect. When each weight is close to the middle, the scale will balance more quickly.) Overcompensation cycles damage parenting partnerships and children learn how to manipulate better.

Many of us, upon learning effective, balanced parenting skills, are concerned when others parent our children in ineffective ways. We often judge or criticize the person and preach about all we've learned. This causes the criticized person to become even more defensive and closed to learning new ideas. Whoever your parenting partners are, there are some ways you can work together as a team.

- Talk to your partner about the parenting approach you have *chosen*. Explain that you want to work *cooperatively*. Ask your partner to read the book, just to "see what you think." If it makes sense to both of you, you can use the information as a common language and starting point.
- If your partner isn't interested or is resistant and defensive, back off. Your main purpose in reading this book is to improve *your* relationship with your child. Your child will benefit from that improvement alone. When only one parent changes, it still changes the family system and each member adjusts. (Remember the ripple effect?) Often, the changed parent serves as a role model for the partner, which avoids criticism, lectures, and interference. When parenting partners see a positive change, they might try the skills, without even realizing they are changing. If not, their behavior choices are not your responsibility. Do what *you* believe is best for you and your child; don't make it a divisive issue between you and your parenting partners. If your differences persist, be careful not to fall into old habits of overcompensating. (In Chapter 15, "The Three C's," there are additional suggestions in the "Inconsistent Parenting Partners" section, page 412. You can read these suggestions anytime.)

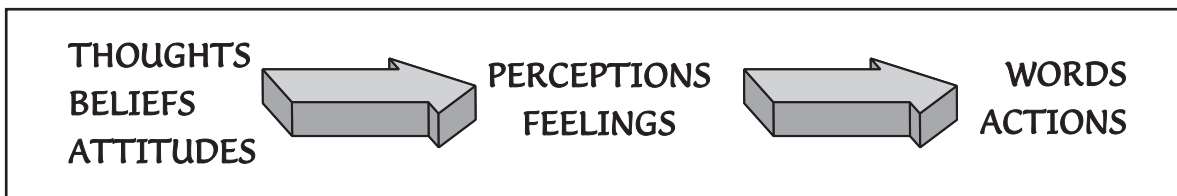
If you and your parenting partners can agree on a common style, discuss situations and options regularly. Talk often and encourage each other. Recognize times when each of you used the skills, rather than pointing out times when someone missed the mark. If you do discuss mistakes, focus on what was learned and brainstorm ideas for more effective responses, in case the situation arises again.

***A Graduate's Story.** My sister and I attended the parenting class together, since we had our firstborn children within six months of each other. At the time of the class, our daughters were both two-years-old and we needed help just to survive the experience of child-rearing. Discussing the ideas and skills with her was very helpful, especially in times of crisis. We would observe the situation between our two girls, such as fighting over a toy, and put our heads together to plan the most effective response we could find, then do it and evaluate our results. If one of us fell back into an old habit, such as yelling, using guilt trips, or spanking, the other one would offer support and remind her that our children keep giving us chances to try again.*

*We felt silly huddling in a corner and talking "strategy" for a few extra seconds while our children were fighting in the next room, but we were so excited by the success of our new skills that it was well worth it. Now our girls are four years old, and we have adopted the strategies we learned over two years ago. We frequently receive comments about how delightful our children are and how well they play with others. We know that we owe it to the parenting skills we learned.*

## ATTITUDE ADJUSTMENT TOOLS

The first step in balancing our parenting style is to *identify* our imbalances. The next step is to become aware of and change the beliefs that *cause* the imbalances. Our beliefs are the result of what we were told, what we saw, and how we interpreted events as we were growing up. They are the little tapes that play in our minds, influencing our interpretation of situations and, therefore, our responses to them. Beliefs can be positive or negative, accurate or inaccurate. Consequently, what we *believe* about a situation influences our perceptions, feelings, and reactions more than the *reality* of the situation.



Beliefs also affect our children's attitudes, thoughts, feelings, words, and actions. Children observe the world around them and don't always interpret situations accurately. These mistaken beliefs can affect them into adulthood. Consider this example: A child makes her bed, leaving lumps in the sheets. Later, she finds her mother smoothed out the lumps. If this is a daily occurrence, the child might conclude, "My way is never good enough. Everything always has to be perfect" or "Why should I even bother making my bed if she's going to make it again?" If you asked the mother, she'd probably say she was *helping* the child. Nevertheless, it is the *child's* interpretations, not the parent's intentions, that program the child's beliefs. Throughout life, the child will occasionally hear a little voice inside, saying her best is never good enough. Did her mother ever say this? No! But the child *believed* this was the message behind her mother's actions.

**There is always more than one way to look at a situation.** Once we are aware of an unhelpful belief, we can choose to replace it with something more positive. The power and choice are ours.

*A Personal Story. When my son, Chris, was eight, I encouraged him to try baseball. He was afraid he wouldn't be one of the best players, since some children had been playing longer. I pointed out that four years wasn't a big disadvantage at that age and he was very coordinated so he'd probably catch up quickly. He argued with all the praise, logic, and explanations I offered. He dug his feet in and wouldn't budge. I even resorted to bribing him, if he'd at least try it for one season. "No," was his firm response. He only wanted to play soccer and maybe track when he was older. I realized I couldn't **make** him try it.*

*I finally looked at why this was so important to me. After all, I don't even like baseball, was never involved in any sports, and the rest of our family is not athletic. I realized I saw his potential and wanted him to reach it. I also saw the value of "giving it a shot." I decided to look at the positive side of the situation: He knew what he wanted and wouldn't be swayed. This was a quality I admired—if he were applying it to a situation where someone was pressuring him to do something negative. He was committed to one sport and focused on doing it to the best of his ability. I would only have to drive to one sport's practice. When I looked at it from this perspective, I realized there was nothing wrong with his decision and backed off.*

While we teach life's lessons to children, children teach *us* life lessons, too. They teach us about unconditional love and forgiveness. They watch what we say and do, so we try harder to set a good example. Parenthood sometimes forces us to explore parts of ourselves that we have not looked at before. It can raise buried issues about our own childhood, which we might not have resolved had we not become parents. When we reprogram our beliefs, we have a chance to "re-parent" ourselves. We can free ourselves from the past and develop our potential as parents—and people.

## Replace Unhealthy Beliefs

If we consciously choose our parenting beliefs, it is easier to develop the skills that are consistent with those beliefs. By now, you have probably decided that "balanced" parenting sounds like the style you'd like to have. To achieve this balance, use the styles quiz to identify the style(s) of imbalance you might have. Consider replacing the common, unhealthy beliefs of that style with the healthier alternative beliefs you read in the "Balanced Parenting" section. You can write the helpful beliefs on index cards and repeat them out loud or in your mind throughout the day. Read them all each day or focus on one statement each day. If you do this for at least 21 days, the healthier beliefs will become a new habit.

## Believe It and You'll See It ☆☆☆☆

Have you ever watched an Olympic athlete prepare for a performance? Many of them close their eyes and rehearse their moves—and success—in their minds *before* they start. They know that believing in success can bring success. Most people operate on the idea, "When I see it, I'll believe it!" When it

comes to change, however, we usually have to believe “it,” before seeing it. It’s never too late to change or improve a relationship. When we believe we have the potential to change, we start seeing the change in ourselves. Once we change, it affects other people and situations in positive ways. Start picturing the qualities and skills you want to have. Believe that you already possess them. Believe that your relationship with your children can be full of joy and love. You will soon start noticing that reality is growing closer to what you have pictured in your mind.

***A Graduate’s Story.** I took the parenting class so I could help my four-year-old grandson. I found myself using the communication skills with my adult children and people at work. People commented on how my attitude and behavior changed. I had a new sense of joy in my life and soon saw positive changes in all my relationships. My adult son and I had never really gotten along. After changing my attitude and beliefs, he started opening up to me and we resolved some hurts we were both hanging on to. I guess it’s never too late to change! Every area of my life has improved—and I really believe a lot of it is because I changed my perspective from negative to positive!*



## Avoid Double Standards

The old saying, “Do what I say, not what I do” was designed to steer children in the right direction. It was proven, however, to produce the opposite result. Parents’ *actions* impress children. Double standards confuse children. Children quickly detect their parents’ inconsistencies. “If you slap my hand when I reach for something you don’t want me to touch, why can’t I slap the kid who grabs my toy?” “Why do I have to knock on your door, but you can walk into my room without knocking?” We need to act and speak the way we want our children to act and speak.

Ideally, we want to have few or no double standards. Apply rules to everyone in the family: “Everyone hangs up their coats when they come home.” “In this family we don’t hit.” “We respect each other’s privacy.”

**When we can’t avoid a double standard, we set guidelines that explain *when* and *why* the rule can change.**

For example, a child leaves a mess after eating in the family room, where both parents and children often eat snacks. The parent can say, “People may eat in the family room *if* they clean up their messes. Tomorrow you’ll have another chance to eat there and show you can remember to clean up your mess.” That night, if the father eats in the family room, the child might ask, “Why does Daddy get to eat there?” The parent can respond, “Because Daddy has shown he will clean up his mess.” If the father *also* doesn’t clean up his mess, it would be difficult for the mother to “discipline” him as she did the child. She’ll need to rely on her communication skills, to reveal the consequence of the double standard: the children will test the rules more. Therefore, double standards need to be the exception, not the rule.

***A Parenting Class Discussion.** During the last session, I asked if anyone still had any behavior problems they wanted to discuss. Jean spoke up saying, “My four-year-old still cusses. I tell him he shouldn’t talk that way and try to teach him what to say instead, but nothing is working.” My first reply was, “Do you cuss?” She admitted that she had only recently started making an effort to control her tongue, but her husband still cursed regularly and was unwilling to stop. He expected his son to hear cussing, but not repeat it. Her three sisters, in class with her, commented on the number of negative role models her son encounters at home and at school. Given the situation, a double standard seemed unavoidable. I asked her, “When **can** he cuss?” She thought a second and answered, “Thirteen.” “Okay,” I responded, “tell him he can cuss when he’s thirteen!” Surprised, she said, “But I don’t want to hear that in my house!” “Well,” I said, “tell him he can cuss when he’s thirteen if he’s outside the house!” We all laughed at how ridiculous the idea sounded, but agreed she had few other options.*



## Be a Role Model ☆☆☆☆

Children are sponges; they imitate what they see and hear, more than what they are told to do. We are their first example of how to speak, act, think, and believe. As they grow older, their positive changes are sometimes *in spite of* our example and their negative behavior is sometimes *because of* our example.

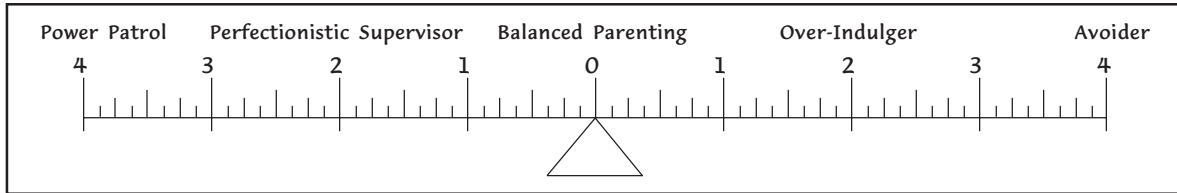
***A Graduate's Story.** When my little girl was only a year old, I began babysitting and I noticed something interesting: Children who can speak give a babysitter a good glimpse at what goes on at home. I heard four- and five-year-old children playing house with statements like, "Do you want a whipping? Then STOP!" and "Now, young lady, I told you a thousand times . . ." and "Fine. I don't care. Go out and play." I'd see them spank the dolls for spilling milk and sit them in time-out for falling off their chairs. I recognized in their actions some of my own responses, only **they** seemed to be **unreasonable** "parents" while I considered myself a decent one.*

*I decided to learn more about how to parent so that some day, when my baby could talk and play, I would be proud to have the babysitter hear her play house. I took the parenting class when my girl was two and worked hard at practicing the skills. I was rewarded for my efforts when she was three-and-a-half, and I heard her playing house. She was putting her doll to bed, saying, "Now, honey, I know you don't feel sleepy, but it's bedtime. You can lay quietly in your bed and look at a book, or just close your eyes. You decide." Since then, I have heard her playing often, and I don't worry at all what a babysitter might hear.*

The best way to learn effective people skills and impart them to our children is to live them, rather than preach them. In short . . .

**Become the kind of person you want your child to become.**

## Balance Your Parenting Style ☆☆☆☆



### OVER-CONTROLLING

### BALANCED

### UNDER-CONTROLLING

demands sole power

shares power

gives up power

inflexible,  
few choices

flexible choices,  
within limits

too flexible  
few limits

teaches obedience  
to any authority

teaches respect for  
others and life skills

teaches self-  
centeredness

focuses on rules  
and compliance

focuses on respect  
and earned privileges

focuses on freedom  
and happiness

parents' rights and  
needs are most  
important

all rights and needs are  
equally important,  
but different

children's rights and  
needs are most  
important

rules apply to  
children

rules apply to all,  
usually

rules aren't applied  
or enforced

uses punishment,  
children suffer for  
mistakes

uses discipline,  
children learn  
from mistakes

rescues from  
mistakes or denies  
children are wrong

negative feelings  
are not allowed

negative feelings are  
expressed and resolved

rescues children  
from negative feelings

parent solves problems

parent teaches children  
how to solve problems

parent rescues from  
or avoid problems

rigid consistency

consistent, based on  
needs of situation

wishy-washy,  
inconsistent

parent makes all  
decisions

children learn to make  
decisions, within limits

children do what they  
want, no "decisions"

SUMMARY SHEET  
FOUNDATION-BUILDING TOOLSET

BALANCE YOUR PARENTING STYLE ☆☆☆☆

Over-controlling: many limits with few choices or freedoms.

Power Patrol, Perfectionistic Supervisor

Under-controlling: many choices and freedoms with few limits.

Avoider, Over-indulger

Balanced: choices and freedoms within reasonable limits.

REPLACE UNHELPFUL BELIEFS WITH HEALTHIER ALTERNATIVES

CHOOSE YOUR ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS ☆☆☆☆

“When you believe it, you’ll see it.”

ELIMINATE DOUBLE STANDARDS

Apply rules to the whole family.

BE A ROLE MODEL ☆☆☆☆

“Become the kind of person you want your child to become.”

## PRACTICE EXERCISES

**A. Identifying Parenting Styles.** In each of the following situations, identify each parent's parenting style (Power Patrol, Perfectionistic Supervisor, Avoider, Over-Indulger, Balanced) and answer the questions that follow each scenario.

1. Mr. Jones was offered a promotion at work, but it would involve moving. He calls his wife and tells her he has decided to take the job. She isn't happy about having to move, but since he's the father, she must comply. She decides to do what she can to make the children agree and make things go smoothly.

That night at the dinner table, Dad informs the children of his decision. They are not happy about the idea—at all! Dad holds up his hands to quiet the mob and says, “This is a good opportunity and I'm not going to pass it up. You'll adjust.” Mrs. Jones says, “Your father and I know what's best for you. You'll see, this move will be for the better.” Then she tells the children her plan for making the move go smoothly. She has lists and schedules the children can use to help them get organized. When the children continue to protest, she stands up, starts clearing away the half-eaten plates of food, and says, “Now that's enough. Go to your rooms and start cleaning. We need to get the house ready to sell.”

*What is Mr. Jones' parenting style? What is Mrs. Jones' style? What were their goals? How did they try to accomplish them? How did the children respond? What was the result?*

2. Mr. Smith was offered a promotion at work, but it would involve moving. He wants to accept the position and calls his wife to tell her the “good” news. She isn't very happy about having to move, but knows how much it would mean to her husband. She wants him to be happy, so she agrees to the move. That night, at the dinner table, Mr. Smith tells the children the news. The children are not happy about the idea—at all! Mr. Smith starts to feel angry and confused, so he leaves the table to watch TV. Mrs. Smith, left with the angry mob, listens to the children's fears and reasons for not wanting to move. She tries to explain, “But this job would make your father so happy.” When the children say *they* won't be happy, Mrs. Smith replies, “I'll talk to your father and explain how hard it would be on all of us. I'm sure he'll understand. Maybe another promotion will come along that doesn't require a move.”

When Mrs. Smith tries to talk Mr. Smith out of taking the job, he is amazed! “I thought you wanted me to take the job.” Mrs. Smith explains, “I wanted you to take it so *you* would be happy. But then I realized how miserable the children would be.” “Fine!” Mr. Smith snaps, “I'll turn it down. Now leave me alone!”

*What is Mr. Smith's parenting style? What is Mrs. Smith's style? What were their goals? How did they try to accomplish them? How did the children respond? What was the result?*

3. Mr. Brown was offered a promotion at work, but it would involve moving. He wants to accept the position, but knows it will affect his wife and family. He calls his wife, tells her about the offer and his desire to accept it. They discuss it over the phone and decide this is an opportunity he should accept. Both know that the rest of the family will probably have concerns. They decide to schedule an “emergency” family council after dinner, to discuss the decision.

After dinner, at the family council, Mr. Brown explains the job opportunity and the move it would entail. When the first child interrupts him, he says, “I really want to hear *everyone's* feelings and concerns. Let me finish and each of you can have a turn to be heard.” He concludes his explanation by saying, “This job is a great opportunity for me and I think there could be some benefits for all of us. Your mom and I have already discussed it and I plan to accept this offer. I want your support, too. What do you each think? How do you feel about moving?” Each child expresses only



negative comments. Mrs. Brown says, “Each of you has very valid concerns. Your dad and I can’t imagine leaving either. *We* need to make this decision, but we care about your feelings and needs and want to consider them as we work out the details.” Mr. Brown adds, “Right now, we just want you to know what’s going on. We’d like to hear and discuss your concerns more at this week’s family council. We are also willing to listen to your feelings and concerns privately. Until then, will everyone try to think of some positive things the move will bring as well as your concerns?”

The children aren’t happy about moving, but they know they will have a chance to talk about their concerns. A few share their feelings with their parents throughout the week. Mr. and Mrs. Brown listen with respect and help them work through their concerns. When they ask questions about specific details, their parents suggest writing them down, so they can involve the entire family in future planning.

At the next family council, the children are beginning to think a little more positively but still don’t like the decision. They realize they can’t change the decision to move, but want their opinions and concerns to be heard. The family brainstorms ideas for making the move easier for each person and makes a list of questions, decisions, and ideas to discuss at future family councils.

*What is Mr. Brown’s parenting style? What is Mrs. Brown’s style? What were their goals? How did they try to accomplish them? How did the children respond? What was the result?*

### **B. Rewriting Unhealthy Beliefs.**

1. In addition to the imbalanced beliefs you identified while reading this chapter, listen to your self-talk. Record the positive and unhelpful thoughts.
2. Re-write the negative beliefs into positive affirmations. Some good formulas are:  
I will . . .                      I can . . .                      I want to . . .                      I choose to . . .
3. Notice how the changes in your thoughts and beliefs change your responses and perceptions.

One graduate did this exercise for a month and found 75 negative thoughts or statements she made to her children! (Don’t worry, you don’t have to come up with that many!) Here is one example.

#### ***Negative Thought or Statement***

I don’t understand my son; he never listens to me.

#### ***Positive Alternative***

I can better understand my son, if *I* listen to *him* first.

## **Activity for the Week**

Choose a situation involving your child that seems negative and answer the following questions:

1. What am I telling myself about the situation and how I “should” respond?
2. Is there a positive side to this behavior or situation?
3. Is there a more helpful way to respond?

Here is one example of a positive interpretation of a behavior parents often view negatively:

#### **Negative Behavior**

A child is argumentative.

#### **Positive Perspective**

Being logical and analytical are traits that are helpful as an adult. Children express their individuality by voicing opinions. At least my child has the courage to speak up. I can teach my children how to voice their opinions assertively *and* respectfully. I can choose not to argue and acknowledge my *child’s* perspective. If my child just wants to argue, I can walk away.

## Detailed Answers

1. Mr. Jones is a Power Patrol. He has a demanding attitude and puts his needs above others'. *He* makes the decision, although it affects the rest of the family. He doesn't consider or address their feelings. Mrs. Jones is a Perfectionistic Supervisor. She tries to control through organizing and doesn't listen to the children's feelings, either. The Jones' are trying to force the decision on the children, thinking that if they just tell them "That's the way it is," the children will cooperate. The children think their feelings and opinions don't count. They have no healthy outlet for their concerns. The family will move, but the children will probably feel angry and resentful. Once they get to their new home, one or more might even try to sabotage the move, to prove the move was a bad idea. Score: parents won, children lost.
2. Mr. Smith is an Avoider. He avoids conflict by shutting everyone out. Mrs. Smith is an Over-Indulger. She tries to please everyone, except herself, and gets caught in the middle trying to please her husband *and* the children. She won't let the children be temporarily unhappy, even if the move might be good for the family in the long-run. The children have learned that if they complain and push hard enough, their parents will give in to their wishes. The family doesn't move. Score: children won, parents lost.
3. Mr. and Mrs. Brown are both balanced parents. They recognize that a family move is an executive decision that is ultimately up to the parents. Since it will affect the entire family, they want to deal with everyone's feelings, so the move will go smoothly. They hold a family council meeting, but not to take a vote on *whether* to move. They discuss everyone's feelings about moving. The children still aren't happy about the news, but they have a healthy outlet for their feelings. This will prevent resentment and revenge in the long run. They can also have *some* choice about the move, such as whether they move before or after summer break. By offering choices within limits, the family will still move, but each family member's feelings and ideas will receive equal respect. Score: parents won, children won.

## WHAT'S NEXT?

Take the knowledge and skills you just learned and use it daily with children *and* adults. Be observant; you can find many examples of these styles at home, at work (leadership and teaching styles), and in the world around you.

If you have decided that balanced parenting is the style you want to use in your family, this is the book for you. You are ready to start touring the Universal Blueprint and the actual toolsets. The next chapter, "Chapter 3, The Universal Blueprint," is different from all the other chapters; it is an overview of our parenting plan and explains a logical thinking process. In it, we learn how to look at *any* situation and ask three questions to identify what type of problem it is. We also learn the steps that are part of our universal response formula. Once we understand the general steps we will take, the rest of the book will go through each step, toolset-by-toolset, telling us exactly what tools we can use and how to use those tools effectively. If you are ready to read Chapter 3, then (as my elementary school teachers used to say) put on your thinking cap!

## REFERENCES

1. Dolores Curran, *Traits of a Healthy Family*, (Winston Press, 1983. Ninth printing, Ballantine, 1988.) pp. 26–27.
2. Rudolf Dreikurs, M.D. (*Children: The Challenge*, with Vicki Soltz, R.N.: E.P. Dutton, 1964) discussed how a democratic *society influences* parenting. *S.T.E.P.* and, later, *Active Parenting* labeled a balanced parenting style "democratic" and further defined the democratic analogies.