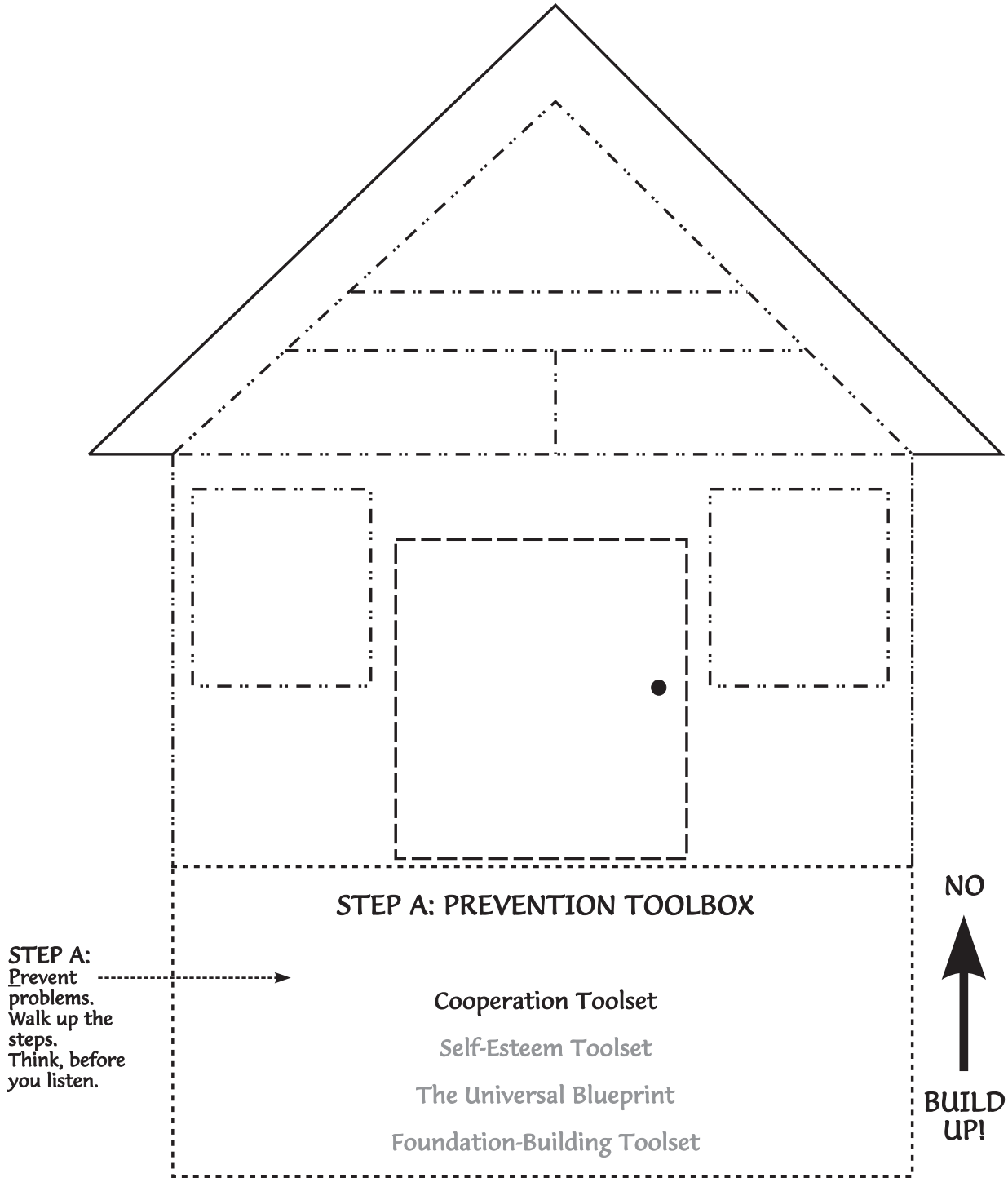
CHAPTER 5
COOPERATION TOOLSET



CHAPTER

5 COOPERATION TOOLSET

To build a house, a contractor needs a team of workers and the master blueprint. The team includes specialists and assistants who have assigned tasks. Together, they build the house. The contractor oversees the work and assures quality and timeliness. If the contractor orders people around and treats them disrespectfully, the discouraged and unappreciated workers might not perform their duties well. They might cut corners just to say they are finished, complain about their treatment, argue, and in some cases, refuse to cooperate. Getting fired might not even matter, for there are times when unemployment seems better than having a job where one is repeatedly mistreated.

In families, parents are the contractors who have the master blueprint. They need the cooperation of their team, the children, to help the family function in healthy ways. Sometimes children have special talents or skills to offer the family, while others help with tasks as their skills develop. If parents bark orders and treat children disrespectfully, as though they are inferior people, the children become discouraged and uncooperative. They may do as little as possible, complain about unfair treatment, and resist the parent's requests for cooperation. While children can't quit the family, they might resist participating in family activities if they think they will be repeatedly mistreated. Some children would rather argue or fight for some control than be blindly submissive.

IN THIS CHAPTER

This chapter encourages us to consider three important parenting ideas:

1. Promoting cooperation is more effective, both short-term and long-term, than demanding obedience.
2. Internal motivation is healthier and more effective than external motivation.
3. We can promote cooperation and internal motivation by using the special language of cooperation—using positive words to make requests or set limits and offering positive choices within those limits.

WHEN TO USE THIS TOOLSET

We want to use the Cooperation Toolset as part of our permanent, daily style of parenting. When children say "no," test limits, and make smart remarks, they usually get into power struggles with their parents. We can use the Cooperation Toolset to avoid or stop these power struggles. When we use the Cooperation Toolset, we usually notice an immediate change in both our attitude and our children's responses. We work together with our children as a team, instead of working against each other.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN COOPERATION AND OBEDIENCE

There is a big difference between demanding obedience and promoting cooperation. First let's look at the negative effects of demanding obedience and compare them to more cooperative attitudes. Then we can learn the specific tools to use when we want more cooperation from our children.

Demanding Attitudes

Children usually want to be helpful, but our attitude or tone of voice can unintentionally discourage cooperation or start a power struggle. If we want more cooperation, we must change the negative attitudes that start power struggles: demanding power, wanting to control others, needing to win, or wanting children to obey commands. Dogs are trained to obey commands. People can be motivated to voluntarily cooperate with respectful requests.

When parents feel superior, giving orders to inferior family members, they often speak to their children disrespectfully. "I set the rules and you follow them." These attitudes create resentment and parents are more likely to get disrespectful attitudes and replies in return.

Healthy families value each person's role in and contribution to the family, despite age or ability. When children feel their contribution is important, they naturally want to cooperate more. They learn "We cooperate and help each other, not because someone makes us, but because we are a family who works together. We need each other." This approach differs from permissiveness, where children have few responsibilities and parents do too much for their children. A team theme helps the household run smoother and makes it easier to uphold family rules and practices.

DEMANDING OBEDIENCE CREATES RESISTANCE

It is a natural reaction to resist someone who is trying to control us. Most children and adults don't like being told what to do, how to do it, and when to do it in a rigid or demanding way. Most of us are willing to do what others ask, unless they speak disrespectfully and *demand* that we do something. Allowing others to treat us disrespectfully lowers our self-respect and self-esteem.

DO PARENTS ALWAYS KNOW BEST?

When asking a child to do a task, we usually think we know the best way to get the task done. Often, we are in such a hurry that we don't stop and listen to the child's ideas. Our children's stubbornness is often an effort to get us to listen to their ideas or let them be more involved in planning *how* to do a task. If children are more involved in the planning, it increases their motivation to cooperate.

Most of us think that if others need our help, we should have *some* say about how, where, or when we do the job. Children are no different. When we focus on cooperation, a task doesn't have to be done *exactly* the way we might do it, but must meet realistic time and quality guidelines. When we allow some flexibility, people are more likely to cooperate and put forth greater effort.

If we insist our children do something our way, stop and ask, "Why?" If we have simply pictured in our mind how we want it done, we can look for ways to offer choices within those limits.

WINNING AND LOSING

Demanding obedience is a win/lose game. Both parent and child try to win, but eventually one or both lose. Ultimately, the relationship always loses. Cooperation finds win/win solutions. Parents and children work together to meet both their needs.

> ***A Graduate's Story.*** *We were leaving to have our pictures taken and my four-year-old son was piddling around (as usual). I was late (as usual) and told him to get his shoes on so we could go. He started into this long explanation, "I want to wear my old shoes in the car and then change when we get there and have my pictures taken with my new shoes, then change into my old shoes again . . ." I was too impatient to listen and didn't want to be tying shoes all day, so I said, "Pick a pair of shoes and put them on; you can't keep changing shoes all day." He started his litany again, and I completely lost my patience and said, "Just get your shoes on, NOW!"*
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> *This, of course, caused the tears to flow and he tried again to explain. "Mom, they're my feet, and I don't tell you what shoes to wear. Why can't I wear what I want to wear?" I took a deep breath, thought about it, and said, "You're right, they are your feet, and you can choose whichever shoes you want. I will tie your shoes once. If you decide to change shoes, you will need to either wear them untied or choose your Velcro shoes."*
>
> *He put his tie shoes in his bag and his velcro shoes on his feet. On the way he explained to me that he didn't want his new tie shoes to get dirty and that's why he wanted to change into them at the studio. He actually had a very good reason for the whole thing! I "won," because I didn't have to tie shoes more than once and he "won," because he could wear the shoes he wanted for his photos. When I focus on win/win solutions, I often prevent power struggles and long negotiations.*

LONG-TERM EFFECTS

Demanding obedience sometimes works in the short run, but it usually breeds resistance. We can punish or overpower children until they obey orders, but eventually children become discouraged. They either give up or fight back. Most importantly, children obey out of fear, not because they *want* to cooperate or understand the *value* of the request.

Cooperation, on the other hand, is effective in both the short and long run. The short-term result is more helpful behavior with less resistance and fewer power struggles. In the long run, it promotes an atmosphere of teamwork and self-responsibility. Children become *self*-disciplined, because they understand the value of rules and requests and feel their contributions are important.

THE DANGERS OF BLIND OBEDIENCE

Some professionals advise parents to say "Because I said so" or "Because I'm an adult and you are a child." While parents get their way by pulling rank, children do not learn to think for themselves. This type of power play might cut off a child's disagreement—but undermines healthy long-term parenting goals. The most competent way to handle a situation is not always the easiest or quickest route!

Many parents were taught as children to obey *anyone* in authority. In today's society, it is not safe for children to do something just because someone in authority tells them to. We've all heard about authority figures who have victimized children by using their position to gain children's trust and obedience. These abusers often succeed because adults and children are less likely to question people in authority.

Demanding obedience usually results in one of these outcomes: children either rebel or become submissive. Submissive teens often seek out peer leaders to guide them—and may not choose their leaders wisely. Clique and gang leaders try to impress others with their power and popularity. Teens who feel rejected, lost, or powerless often seek membership in these peer groups to gain acceptance and a sense of power. Children who feel unconditionally loved and accepted by their families and already have some power in their lives are less likely to join these negative peer groups.

Today, children need to judge whether they should obey a *request*, rather than the *person* giving the order. It is important for children to treat *all* people with respect (adults *and* children) and *cautiously* obey orders. A balanced parenting style helps children find the value behind requests, so they *want* to cooperate more. They seek win/win solutions that respect everyone's needs. If children need to refuse a request to protect themselves, they learn to do so assertively and respectfully.

DEMANDING OBEDIENCE	PROMOTING COOPERATION
Rigid limits with few or no choices.	Some choices within reasonable limits.
Superior parent gives orders to an inferior child.	Team theme—work together and each person's role is important.
"My way or the highway."	Children have *some* choice, such as when or how to do something.
Children obey out of fear.	Children understand the *value* of the request.
Children *have to* do what they are told.	Children are *self*-motivated to cooperate.
Win/Lose game.	Win/Win solution.
Short term—it sometimes works.	Short term—it almost always works.
Long term—creates resentment, rebellion, or blind obedience.	Long term—creates teamwork, self-responsibility, cooperation, and mutual respect.

If we wait to see cooperation before we stop demanding obedience, we continue to see the results of ordering children around—resistance. If we change our attitude first, we begin to see other people's attitudes and behavior change. The difficulty for most parents is taking the first step: adding choices or flexibility to their firm limits and rules—or simply wording our requests in more respectful terms. Many parents are surprised at how cooperative their children become when the children are no longer *forced* to obey.

COOPERATION TOOLS

I could fill an entire book of testimonials from parents who rave about the effectiveness of the Cooperation Toolset. Many parents begin seeing immediate changes in their attitudes and their children's willingness to cooperate. The following story is similar to comments many parents make after learning the Cooperation tools.

> ***A Graduate's Story.*** *As parents arrived for the Cooperation session, a young mother wiggled in her chair with a grin on her face. I asked the group if anyone had any success stories to share. The mother almost leaped out of her chair to tell the following story.*
>
> *All day long I've been telling the people at work how anxious I was to come to class tonight. I could hardly wait to tell you about my week. You all have heard about my daughter and how headstrong she is. We argue day and night. Every time I ask her to do something, try to do anything for her, or tell her to stop something, we get into a power struggle. After I read the Cooperation Toolset, I started using the tools immediately.* ***Everything*** *has changed! We haven't had a single argument for five days and I'm still counting! Our whole home atmosphere is more peaceful. She's more cooperative and I feel so much better about how I'm handling situations that used to lead to arguments.*

Avoid Bribery

> ***Bribes*** **are tempting rewards, designed to manipulate, control, or influence someone to take a particular action.**

When children are slow to cooperate, parents often use bribery. They offer their children something enticing, like a toy for good behavior, payment for good grades, or a cookie to finish their veggies. Parents are usually trying to distract the children from what *they* want to do so they will do what the *parent* wants them to do. Bribes sometimes work in the short run, but they quickly become addictive for the child and ineffective for the parent.

Bribery teaches children to cooperate so they will get something in return. Most parents would prefer their children do something because there's some value behind the request.

> ***Bribes*** **are offered by the person seeking** ***control*** **and focus on** ***external*** **payoffs.**
> ***Cooperation*** **focuses on the** ***value*** **of the request or rule and the** ***internal*** **payoffs.**

When parents state the value of a rule or request, children cooperate because they understand *why* the request is important, even if they don't get a payoff. As children mature, they can figure out the value of a request on their own, even if it's not spelled out for them. Bribes are always external payoffs, so children get used to looking outside themselves for motivation. Bribes send hidden messages that are often different from the value of the request. Here are a few examples.

FOOD BRIBES

If we say to children, "If you eat your peas, I'll give you a cookie," why would they eat their peas? To get a cookie! But we *really* want them to eat their peas because they're nutritious, right? That's not the message the bribe sends. Food bribes can result in children developing unhealthy habits or overeating. If

we want children to eat better, we teach them about nutrition, limit the unhealthy snacks that are available, and set consistent rules about when they can eat unhealthy food. "Unhealthy food can make you sick if you don't already have healthy food in your stomach. When you've given your body enough healthy food to grow, you can have a little unhealthy food just for fun."

Another type of food bribe is to give children food for comfort and stress relief. If children are upset, we need to teach them stress management skills and healthy ways of dealing with negative emotions. "I can tell you are really upset. Let's sit, so you can tell me what happened." Human comfort eases stress and upset feelings; food pacifiers simply offer a temporary distraction.

MONEY BRIBES

If we pay children for their grades, why are they motivated? For the money? If we pay one dollar for good grades in the third grade, what will we pay when one dollar no longer motivates children? Five dollars? What will children expect when they graduate? A car? And what if they try their hardest, but can never earn as much as another child who naturally excels at academics? Will they be motivated to try harder or give up, feeling their best is never good enough? We want children to get good grades so they will learn important information and skills. We can instill a love for learning by asking, "How do *you* feel about your grades?" We can offer encouragement, "Your hard work really paid off." If children want a reward, we can present it as a celebration, not a payoff.

> ***A Personal Story.*** *My son came home from school one day and said, "Jack just bought a new video game with the money his parents paid him for his grades!" "Really?" I asked. "Yeah, but you know what really stinks? I got better grades than he did!" For a second I was tempted to pull out my wallet, but stopped myself. I said, "I bet it seems unfair to know you worked harder than he did but didn't get that kind of a payoff." He nodded his head in agreement. "You know I don't agree with paying for grades," I said. "Why do you think Jack tries to get good grades?" I asked. "So he can get more money," Chris replied. "And why do you try to get good grades?" I added. He thought for awhile and said, "Because it feels good to put things in my 'proud portfolio' at school." "How long does Jack's money last?" I asked. "A couple days," Chris answered. I continued, "And how long do your good feelings last?" Chris looked at me, smiled, and said, "I get the point." I gave him an understanding look and a big hug.*

THE DANGERS OF BRIBES

Bribes are addictive. Children *only* do something *if* they get a reward. If we have been using bribes and try to change our approach, it might take some time to break their addiction to bribes. If we consistently use these tools, however, our children learn to cooperate without payoffs. The inner values they learn are far more lasting than any tangible payment they could receive.

Bribe junkies are more likely to follow abductors or peers of negative influence. Today, parents are more aware of the need to teach children to resist bribes, since adults and other children might use bribery, rewards, and threats of punishment to trick children. Many parents tell their children, "If someone offers you money, candy, or toys to do something, chances are you don't want to do it. The person thinks he has to pay you something to get you to go against your better judgement." If parents teach this rule of self-protection and then use bribery themselves, it's confusing and dangerous.

APPROPRIATE REWARDS

Bribes are different from spontaneous gifts, signs of appreciation, or celebrations. These bonuses are only bribes *if* parents present them ahead of time as a *reason* to do the task. If children do the task because they understand the value and don't know there is any payoff, the gift is a surprise. Children do not need to always get paid or rewarded if they cooperate. We can express our appreciation by returning a favor or saying "thank you" with our actions.

HOW TO TELL IF WE ARE BRIBING OR MOTIVATING CHILDREN

If we aren't sure if we are offering a bribe, conditional reward, or simply pointing out the natural positive consequence of cooperating, we look at four factors:

1. **Motive.** If we are "dangling a carrot" to motivate them, it is a bribe.
2. **Emphasis.** Bribes emphasize the *reward,* rather than the *value* of the request.
3. **Timing.** When parents use bribes *they* present the idea of the reward. "I'll give you a snack if you finish cleaning your room." If the *child* presents the idea of the reward and the parent wants the child to know when he can have it, it's not a bribe. For example, if children ask for snacks to delay finishing their work, parents can say, "When you're finished cleaning your room, you can have a snack." Here, the parent is teaching a value, rule, or explaining conditions the child must meet to get what he wants.
4. **Words or tone of voice.** Children usually (but not always) interpret *"If you _____, then I'll _____"* statements as bribes. "If you clean the house, I'll take you swimming!" Here the bribe is presented first, as an exchange for doing the task. *"When (or "As soon as") _____ then _____"* statements present the task first, emphasizing its value or the conditions children must meet to receive the reward *they* requested.
   - *"As soon as* we finish cleaning the house, we *can* go swimming."
   - "*When I see you are* finished cleaning your room, *I'll know you're ready to* play outside."

These statements teach the rule or value of "work before play." Even these small changes in wording and tone of voice can change a bribe into an appropriate motivating statement.

BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION PROGRAMS

Weight loss programs, employee incentives, and sticker charts for children are all examples of "behavior modification" programs. These programs are a result of scientific studies in which researchers rewarded subjects for desired behavior and withheld rewards or imposed punishments for undesirable behavior. They had great success training rats. (I've seen them play basketball for a food pellet!) They tried it on children, who responded well, too. So, the scientists concluded that rewards and punishment motivate people—which may be true—for a short time.

Instead of buying children's cooperation . . .

. . . focus on the value of the behavior, not the reward.

Long-term studies of all types of behavior management programs have found that they foster dependency on external motivation and material payoffs.[1] People will do a task long enough to get the reward, but lose motivation if a payoff is absent. There are many tasks and behaviors people need to perform that have great value, but no material payoff. It is a sign of maturity to do something because it is helpful to others, improves our skills, or offers intangible benefits.

> ***A Personal Story.*** *I attended a seminar with a teacher who works in an SBH program (Severely Behavioral Handicapped). The SBH program used a token system (earning tokens to buy privileges) to motivate the children to attend school and change their behavior. Often, the children's behavior improved enough to return to a regular classroom. But the regular classroom didn't have the same reward system, so their progress deteriorated. These children learned* ***how*** *to behave but not* ***why*** *they should behave. They only behaved well when they got a payoff. They hadn't understood or accepted the* ***value*** *and* ***natural*** *positive benefits of cooperative behavior.*

Modified Use of Behavior Charts

Parents and professionals are now seeing the long-term consequences of incentive programs—a generation of reward junkies. Rewards work well on rats, but humans need deeper motivation. *The Parent's Toolshop* has plenty of tools to motivate children without rewards, so throw away your stickers and use these skills instead. Despite your efforts to foster internal motivation, some professionals may insist on using behavior charts with your child (in a classroom or therapy situation, for example). You can choose whether to state your philosophical objections before using one of the following options:

a. Say you do not want your child to participate and offer an alternative approach;

b. Grant limited permission for your child to participate in certain parts of the program (track progress but not receive "prizes" from an adult, for example); or

c. Take action and make comments only at home to counter or reduce the inherent side effects of the incentive program.

If your child will participate at all in any incentive program, remember the following suggestions:

- **Explain the value of the task or behavior. Help children see it is a meaningful, worthwhile contribution** to the family, others, or themselves.
- **Involve children in developing the chart.** Creative ideas, like gluing pictures of tasks or desired behavior to a poster, can make this a fun project. Ask open-ended questions to help children set goals and decide how *they* want to celebrate reaching these goals.
- **Focus on learning new skills, instead of getting rewards.** When children reach their goal, comment on how good *they* feel about it and the skills they learned. Avoid referring to the reward as the goal or *reason* they did the task. Let children reward *themselves* if they feel good about what they did.
- **State the intangible rewards of doing the task.** Children will have more play time, know a new skill, and/or develop a new positive habit if they do the task.
- **Use the chart as a reminder of agreements or routines,** not a tally of rewards or payoffs.
- **Keep it positive.** Instead of giving demerits for *not* doing something, have each mark be a record of something positive the children accomplished. Use descriptive encouragement, not praise. (See Chapter 4, "Self-Esteem Toolset.")
- **Focus on doing one's best, not competing.** Competition destroys teamwork and damages relationships. Children are discouraged if they work twice as hard to earn points that other children can earn with less effort. This especially applies to siblings.
- **Gradually phase-out charts,** as children learn skills and change habits. Wean children off the rewards before they become addicted.

A Personal Story. *Our elementary school introduces a homework reminder sheet in the second grade. It helped Chris learn good study habits. Amber's teacher used the sheet as part of a reward program. If a parent signed the reminder sheet every day, the child got a raffle ticket for a toy at the end of the week. We didn't forbid Amber from participating in the raffle program, but we never asked her about the prizes. Instead, we focused on the* ***value*** *of doing homework,* ***her*** *responsibility for accurately recording her assignments, and how she could use self-reminders to improve her memory skills and study habits.*

Later that year, on "Take Your Kids to Work Day," Amber attended my parenting class for the first time. As the class discussed homework routines, I asked Amber several questions.

Me: *What time do you do homework?*
Amber: *At seven o'clock, for 20 minutes.*
Me: *What if you don't have homework?*
Amber: *I read a book.*
Me: *What do you do if you bring home a paper with a mistake on it?*
Amber: *I fix it.*
Me: *What do you do if there is a blank worksheet that you don't have to do for school or homework?*
Amber: *I do the paper anyway.*
Me: *Why do it if the teacher doesn't say you have to?*
Amber: *Because it gives me extra practice.*

As I looked up at the parents in the group, many had their mouths and eyes wide open. They were surprised that even an 8-year-old could understand and voluntarily accept the values and habits of homework. I noticed that she made no mention of the incentives her teacher offered. Amber will continue improving her study habits in the years to come, but it won't be the result of bribes and rewards or stickers and toys, which someday will end. She'll improve because she understands the ***value*** *behind the task, has learned the* ***skills*** *she needs to do the task, and feels good knowing she's done her best, which are all better, longer-lasting rewards.*

Plan Ahead ☆☆☆☆

One of the most effective prevention tools is to anticipate a problem and take steps to avoid it. If you experience a recurring problem or expect a problem, here are several steps you can take:

- **Discuss the behavior you expect.** Describe the behavior you want to see in positive, specific terms that your child understands. "We need to leave the playground in five minutes. You have time for two more rides. After two more rides I'll say it's time to go. I expect you to come right away and walk with me to the car."
- **Teach skills so your expectations are realistic.** Simply saying, "Don't talk to strangers," is often ineffective. Children are either scared to talk to strangers even when their parents are present (to store clerks, for example) or when a "safe" stranger could help them (asking a security guard for help when lost). They might also mistakenly think strangers must look scary and trust someone who looks friendly, but is an unsafe stranger. Define the difference between safe and unsafe strangers and what types of conversations are acceptable. For example, "If you are with Mom or Dad and someone talks to you, you can say 'Hello' and answer questions like 'How old are you?' But if *anyone* asks you to go somewhere, come and tell me right away, even if you know them."
- **Agree to a rule or plan for potential problems.** For example, once parents and teens have negotiated a time, pick *a* clock. *That* clock's time is the time they use. Get an agreement that children will call whenever they are late. Make sure they have spare change so they can call from a pay phone if there is an emergency. Many teens today carry beepers and cellular phones. If they can leave signals on their friends' beepers to say "Hi," they can call parents to say "I'll be late."

Offer Choices Within Limits ☆☆☆☆

This is one of the most effective and useful four-star tools in *The Parent's Toolshop*. We learn several different ways to use this tool throughout our tour. When we use choices within limits, we shift the focus from giving commands to possible options within our rules or limits. Here are a few guidelines for offering choices effectively.

Don't give a choice if there is no choice. "Do you want to take your medicine?" sounds like the child has a choice. The child could say, "No, I don't want to take my medicine." Also avoid saying "The trash cans need to be brought in, *okay*?" "Okay" sounds like we are asking children if they *agree* with our request. We need to say what we really mean, "Do you understand?" or "Did you hear me?"

State your bottom line or what needs to be done, then offer choices within those limits. "We are having guests Saturday, so your room needs to be clean by Friday. You can either clean it all up at once or do it a little each day." "If you stay in the sun any longer, you'll get sunburned. You can either put on a shirt or play in the shade. You decide."

> **"Bottom line" limits are the minimum standards that must occur, what is non-negotiable. We balance limits by offering choices within our bottom line.**

Choices involve the following types of statements:

- "Which would you like?"
- "How many do you want?"
- "Are you going to _____ or _____?"
- "When do you plan to _____?"
- "You can _____ or _____, you decide."
- "How do you plan to _____?"
- "Do you want to _____ or_____?"

Using this tool in the previous examples, we can say, "Do you want to take chewable medicine or liquid?" "The dogs need to be fed before you play. *When* will you feed them?"

Make the choices respectful to both parent and child. If we say "Either quit throwing the ball in the house or I'll take it away," we are making a threat, not offering a respectful, fair choice. This is called a power play. An effective, mutually respectful choice would be, "You can either play with the ball outside or with another toy inside. You decide." Here, parents address their safety concerns *and* respect the child's need or desire to play.

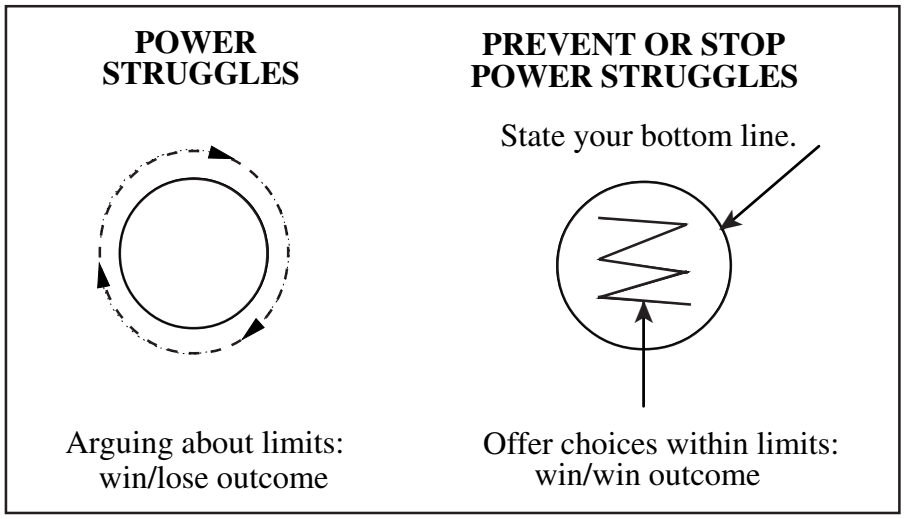
Allow the child to offer choices. "We can have meatloaf or fish for dinner, unless you have an idea for something nutritious and delicious." Remember to state your bottom line. Don't be too open-ended unless there are truly unlimited choices. Otherwise, children will suggest pancakes, pop, and donuts. If children suggest something different, go with the idea if it meets your bottom line. This is *not* giving in. If children say, "I want spaghetti" and that's okay, say, "Well, spaghetti is quick and nutritious. Good idea!" (If it's not okay, use the "No No's" tool described later in this chapter.) Don't be overly rigid about forcing children to pick one of *your* choices; it could lead to a power struggle. Remember, your goal is to *share* power and reach a win/win solution.

Continue to focus on what the child can control.

> **If there is not a choice about *if* something will happen, offer a choice about *how* or *when* it can happen.**

Think about the circle symbol for over-controlling parenting in the Foundation-Building Toolset. When parents debate *if* something will happen, they can go in circles debating and it often turns into a power struggle. These are win/lose battles. Now, think about the symbol for balanced parenting, a

circle with a zigzag inside. The circle represents the bottom-line limits, the parent's "win." The zigzag represents the choices children have within these limits, their "win."



When we set reasonable limits and then shift the focus to *how* or *when* they can meet these limits, children still have some power—their choices. When facing a win/lose game or having some control in a win/win situation, most people choose win/win. We can use choices to prevent resistance at every step of a task.

> ***A Personal Story.*** *When Amber was 5, she often got distracted while getting dressed. (I once saw her playing with only one leg in her pants.) One day I realized just how much I used choices to keep her moving from one step to the next.*
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> *"Your body and hair look dirty. Do you want to take a bath or shower?" Whether she wanted a bath or not, I shifted the focus to her choices again. Knowing she prefers baths, I said "Do you want to take your bath before I take my shower or after me so you'll have more time to play?*
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> *"Okay, get your clean clothes while I'm in the shower. You can play with your dolls until I'm done." As her water filled, I said, "Are you going to get in now or wait until the tub is full? . . . Okay! Be careful stepping in!"*
>
> *After a few minutes, I said, "Do you want to wash your own hair or do you want me to wash it?" As she shampooed, I offered suggestions such as, "If you tip your head back you'll get all your hair wet." I planned ahead, saying "Daddy needs to take a shower, too. You have until I'm done with my makeup to finish washing and playing."*
>
> *When I finished my makeup, I said, "Go ahead and let the water out. You can get out now or wait until the water is all gone." She decided to stay and a few minutes later I said, "Daddy needs to take a shower. Do you want to get dressed in here or in your room?" She got out of the tub.*
>
> *Amber was clean, dressed, and ready in the time it took me to dry my hair, put on makeup, and get dressed (about 20 minutes). By using choices, she improved her ability to move from one step of a task to the next. By age 7, she could get ready on time all by herself with no input from me.*

ACCOUNT FOR INDIVIDUAL PERSONALITIES

***"Strong-willed"* children need lots of choices.** If we order and command, they debate with the skill of union negotiators. When we provide choices within reasonable limits, these children learn that rules are a natural part of life and following them does not always mean giving up personal power. If we say "Do you want milk or juice" and children say, "I want both," we can say, "Which one *first*?" If we offer a choice and children respond with "neither," we can say, "That's not one of your choices."

If children persist, we can say, "You can decide or I'll decide for you. It's up to you." We need to focus on what children *do* have a choice about or we might start a power struggle. Usually, children who are this logical and persistent can handle more open-ended choices. Try stating the bottom line and allowing *them* to figure out their options.

Pleasing **children sometimes feel overwhelmed by choices.** They try to anticipate what the parent wants and can't decide what *they* want. With these children, we need to keep choices simple and use them less often. We must be careful, however, to not always tell pleasing children what to choose. These children need permission to make decisions, try new things, and take risks.

Indecisive **children are afraid that if they choose one thing, they'll miss out on the other option.** Always point out that they'll have another chance to try other options later. They often play the "I can't decide" game. This game drives even the most sane parent up a wall. It goes like this: "Do you want milk or juice?" "Juice." "Okay, juice it is . . ." "No! Milk!" "Milk?" "No! Juice!" Get the picture? You want to avoid going in circles trying to please children who have no idea what they want. To promote cooperation without getting sucked into this game:

1. *Use choices less often if the child is going through an indecisive phase.* (These periods come and go, often unexpectedly.) During these times, offer only two choices. More choices might overwhelm and confuse the child.
2. *Teach indecisive children simple decision-making tricks*, like "eenie, meenie, miney, moe." They will usually make their finger land on their favorite item or will do it again until they select the choice they really want.
3. *When children finally choose, confirm their choice.* Say "Okay, you want cereal, right? Once I pour the milk on the cereal, I expect you to eat it." Be clear that you are unwilling to be a short-order cook, throw out food, or make multiple meals, because this violates *your* rights and makes children think the world revolves around them.
4. *When they change their answer* say, "Think carefully! You will need to stick with your next answer!" Then give them a minute to think about their options and decide.
5. *If they still can't decide, add "Either you decide or I'll decide for you."* This can be a short-term, sanity-saving measure. Still, remember that these are the children who need practice at making choices, so you want to give them opportunities to make choices about other issues.
6. *Follow through with the choice.* You may still have an upset child who throws a tantrum. (See the section on tantrums on pages 74–75.) You might still get the I-can't-decide-game, but stick with your plan. Eventually children learn that when they have a choice to make, they need to think about their options and be sure of their choice before answering. Learning this decision-making skill is much more important than the actual choices the child makes.
7. *If children don't like the choice they made,* acknowledge their disappointment and remind them that they can choose another option next time.

Young children need limited choices. Two simple choices are usually enough. The number of choices can increase as the child's intellect and maturity develop. ***Older children*** need broader choices or it starts power struggles or long negotiations. ***Teens*** need open-ended choices. State your bottom line and ask them to come up with a plan. Express your confidence in their ability to make an appropriate decision. Remember to get agreements with specific time frames if the time limit isn't open-ended.

Children of all ages love choices. They quickly catch on to the change in language. In fact, many parents report that their children start offering *them* choices! At first, the choices children offer aren't always fair to the parent. Some parents feel threatened when their children offer them choices, as though parents should only be allowed to come up with options. Instead, encourage children to keep thinking of options and teach them how to offer choices appropriately.

> ***A Graduate's Story.*** *My son offered me an interesting choice when it was time to leave the playground. I planned ahead, offering him choices about leaving. He calmly and firmly said, "But I don't want to leave! You can either let me stay or I'll scream and cry." I tried hard not to laugh! I said, "Choices have to meet both people's needs. I know you are having a lot of fun and don't want to leave. I also know that Janey will be home from school soon and someone has to be home when she gets there. We can't stay much longer, but you can choose how you spend the time you have left. You can go on two more rides and have fun or we can leave now. If you decide to scream and cry when it's time to leave, I'll know you don't want to come to the playground the next time we have a free sunny day. It's up to you."*

Here, the parent not only taught her son how to present appropriate choices, she also revealed the positive and negative effects of his behavior choices (which is part of the Discipline Toolset). Remember, you can teach children how to use the tools you are learning, so they can improve the relationships they have with others.

One final note about choices: Some parents have so much success using choices within limits that they use it in *every* situation. They forget that in some situations another tool may be more appropriate. Don't overuse choices or feel you have to give children a choice about *everything*. Use them within reasonable limits.

Don't Say "Don't" ☆☆☆☆

This is a favorite tool among parents because it is logical, positive, and usually has immediate results.

People learn by hearing, seeing, and doing. When we hear something, we see it in our minds and then try to do what we see. We also do what we see others doing. When children hear "don't," "stop," or "quit" before a description of negative behavior, they picture the negative behavior the parent is trying to prevent or stop. For example, if a parent says "Don't spill your milk," the child pictures the milk spilling. For children to obey this command, they must:

1. Figure out the opposite,
2. Picture it in their mind,
3. Think of the different options for accomplishing it,
4. Evaluate each option,
5. Select one, and
6. Do it.

They must do all this in about five seconds, or the parent might get impatient, angry, and louder. ***Older children*** and adults have had many years to practice this process of taking a negative image and figuring out what to do instead. ***Younger children***, however, simply do what they see. If they see the milk spilling in their minds, they are more likely to spill their milk.

> ***A Graduate's Story.*** *I was volunteering at my daughter's preschool Valentine party. I heard the parent at the other table say "Don't spill your drinks!" I remembered what you said about "Don't Say Don't" and told the kids at my table "Keep your drinks in your glass!" Almost immediately, a kid at the other table spilled a drink—and it was like dominoes. Almost every kid at that table spilled a drink and then it spread to the other tables on that side of the room! Not one kid spilled a drink on my side of the room. "Don't say Don't" really works!*

Sometimes children want to find out *why* they aren't supposed to do something, so they do it to see what happens. These are I-want-to-learn-for-myself children. Their frustrated parents say, "Didn't I just tell you *not* to do that?" Saying "don't" and describing negative behavior offers no helpful information about the value of the request or the behavior we want to see.

We *all* respond better to positive directions. Do good track coaches say to their runners, "Don't fall over the hurdles"? No! They describe how to run and extend their legs, so the runners will clear the hurdles. This creates a picture of success in the runner's mind. If we watch athletes on TV, we often see them closing their eyes and moving their bodies. They are picturing what they want *to* do. In the

military, a parent once told me, instructors only explain the correct way to do something. They see no value in mentioning the incorrect way.

> ***A Personal Story.*** *When my daughter first played soccer, at age four, she had difficulty understanding the rules. When she played with her team, she'd stand there, confused. But when she practiced with us and my son's coach, she played better. I finally understood why, when I overheard her coach reviewing the rules before a game. She said, "Now remember, don't touch the ball with your hands, don't run in the wrong direction, and don't* ***not*** *listen to the coach."*
>
> *My husband and I were shocked! No wonder our daughter was confused! How many kids could figure out those rules? Clearer directions would be "Kick the ball with your feet, run toward* ***that*** *goal [pointing], and listen to me if I call you."*

Sometimes, children (and adults) rebel when they hear "stop" or "don't." They resist, simply because they don't like being told what to do. Or they enjoy getting a reaction by misbehaving.

> ***A Graduate's Story.*** *I was at a barbecue at Carol's house, my next door neighbor. Her son began shooting us and the grill with his water pistol. Carol kept saying, "stop it" and "don't do that." I shared the idea of "Don't say Don't" and suggested a different way to say what she meant. Carol scoffed at the idea, "Right! Like he's going to listen any better to that!" I simply said it had really worked for me and dropped the issue. When her son squirted his father, who was standing at the grill, Carol said* ***to me,*** *"What am I supposed to say, 'Squirt the water on the grass'?" Although she said the statement to me, her son immediately turned and squirted his water pistol in the grass! Carol's jaw dropped in amazement and she said, "Wow! That really does work!"*

Whenever possible, we want to flip our attitude, thoughts, and words from negative to positive. Instead of telling people what *not* to do, we describe the behavior we *want* to see, so they will see it in *their* minds. Tell children what they *can* do and let them test what happens when they do it. Here are some examples of flipping negative commands into positive requests:

NEGATIVE COMMANDS	POSITIVE STATEMENTS
"Stop fighting!"	"Use words, not fists," or "People aren't for hurting."
"Stop arguing!"	"Find out what you both need and make an agreement."
"Don't play so loudly!"	"Use your inside voices," or "Play quietly."
"Quit whining."	"Talk so I can understand you."
"Don't talk back to me."	"In this family we talk to each other respectfully." (Then make sure you honor this rule, too!)
"Don't forget your lunch."	"Remember your lunch box."

If you don't have "healthy paranoia" yet, you are sure to have it after learning this skill! Many parents say "don't" or "stop" dozens of times a day. One mother insisted, "I *can't* stop saying 'don't'!" On the other hand, some parents try to completely erase the words "don't" and "stop" from their vocabulary. They are afraid to say "I want to stop at the store" or "I don't like broccoli." Just avoid the words *don't* and *stop* when trying to redirect or prevent unwanted behavior. If you hear yourself saying an unhelpful "don't" or "stop," just think about what you want your child *to* do and describe it.

Using this tool is awkward at first. It's easier to point out what others *shouldn't* be doing than to point out what they *should* do. If we have trouble flipping a "don't" around, imagine how difficult it is for children. With practice, you'll catch yourself *before* the "don't."

> ***A Personal Story.*** *I have countless success stories from parents and my own life about the effectiveness of "Don't say Don't," but there's one last story I must share. When Amber was four, she was playing in a small pool with Brian, our neighbor. My son, Chris, who was eight, asked if he could play too, ". . . but don't splash me" he added. As if on cue, Amber and Brian stopped splashing each other, took a bucket of water and chased him all over the yard. Chris came to me, dripping wet, and said, "I shouldn't have said 'don't'—I gave them the idea!" That's when I knew "Don't say Don't" really makes sense to kids!*

No "No's" ☆☆☆☆

Every parent needs to set limits or refuse a request at times. The most common and seemingly simple way is with the word "no." But this small word often results in dramatic, uncooperative responses from children. If parents can get what *they* want by saying "no," children think, "Hmm, 'no' equals power." It's only natural for them to then imitate this behavior when *they* want control.

"No" might bring short-term success when setting limits, but more often it starts a power struggle. Now, let me be very clear. I am *not* saying "don't set limits" or *mean* "no." Parents have the right and the responsibility to set reasonable limits and need to do so. But we can state those limits with positive words, without the word "no," to prevent a power struggle. This switch, from negative to positive words, actually accomplishes more with less resistance.

Toddlers and preschool children are still developing self-control and learning how to influence the world around them. Therefore, they may say "no" when they really mean "yes." This is a test to see if they can have control with this word, too. When parents think children are challenging their authority and react by exerting more power, the child learns it is important to have power over other people and "no" is the way to get it. This is one way a toddler's "no" phase begins.

Most parents believe that every child goes through a "no" stage, that it's inevitable. Dozens of parents who use this skill, however, can tell you that it is *not* a certainty. It depends on how the people in his life handle power and control issues and whether they use negative or positive words to set limits.

> ***A Graduate's Story.*** *I am so glad I learned these skills when my kids were still young. I have a lot of friends who ask, "What do you do when your kids do (this and that)?" I realize I haven't had a real problem with those behaviors. I know the parenting class is the reason I avoided these common problems. In fact, neither of my boys ever went through a bad "no" phase. This is not to say I never experience resistance or conflicts. They just seem less severe and I know I have the resources to respond to them quickly and productively.*

Older children, from school-aged to teens, value independence and want more choice about issues involving them. When parents use the word "no" or lay down the law in negative, inflexible ways, these children think the parent is challenging *their* power and rebel. When parents make a power play, they are practically asking for defiance. Then the cycle starts. As parents exert their authority to say "no," these children try to show parents they aren't willing to be controlled. (In Chapter 12, "PO Toolset," we learn how to stop power struggles once you are in them. Right now, let's learn how to avoid them!)

Many resources offer suggestions for setting limits in positive words, without the word "no." Most of these ideas fit within one of the following tool groupings:

GIVE A CONDITIONAL "YES"

When some children hear "no," they start planning their strategy to change our minds. Their loud protests usually drown out our explanation. If we say, "No, you can't have a snack, because we are getting ready to eat," when do they tune us out? After the "no." If we say, "Yes, when . . .," they are still listening when we explain the conditions they need to meet.

This tool does not allow unwanted behavior. It simply tells the child under what circumstances the answer could be a "yes." For example, instead of saying "No, you can't go to the movies. You haven't finished your homework yet," say "Sure, when your homework's done."

Sometimes, there is no way the answer could be a "yes," such as, "Yes, you can play in the street . . . when you're twenty years old!" In these cases, a conditional "yes" is not an appropriate tool to select.

> ***A Personal Story.*** *My son and his friend (then ages nine and ten) asked if they could eat a popsicle. I said, "Yes, if you stay in the kitchen or take it outside to eat." When I checked on them, they were sitting in the living room with their feet propped up on chairs in the kitchen. This was their interpretation of "staying in the kitchen." This time, I stated more clearly my bottom line, "I want the popsicle to be in the kitchen, over the tile floor and away from the carpet and chairs." They put down their feet and leaned over in their chairs so any drips would go on the tile. I guess the lesson here is to be clear about what you ask for; they might take you literally.*

OFFER AN ACCEPTABLE ALTERNATIVE

When parents take something dangerous away from a baby, they usually trade it for an acceptable toy. We can use this approach in any situation with children of any age (and adults). In fact, I was using this tool when I promised in the first chapter to ". . . avoid telling you *not* to do something unless I offer at least one or more positive alternatives." When we want to redirect children without saying "no," we can say, "You can do _____" or "Well, you can _____ instead," or "I'd prefer you . . ."

GIVE INFORMATION

Children can't read our minds. We often have a good reason for denying a request, but if our children don't have this same information, they may balk when we say "No." For example, if a child with a cold asks to play outside, the parent can say, "If you play in the rain, your cold could get worse. When your fever goes away, you can play in the rain again." This gives children information they can use in the future. Try using the previous suggestions to give information with positive words. For example, if your child asks you to take him to the toy store to get a friend's gift, avoid saying, "No, I don't have time." Instead, say "I need to leave for a meeting in an hour. We could go tomorrow, though." Long explanations are not necessary, nor is repeating yourself. If we don't really have a good reason, this skill might not be appropriate.

There may be times when we sense that the child's request isn't a good idea, although there is no tangible reason for that opinion. We can actually state this as our reason, "I know you really want to go to Joe's party but I have this uncomfortable feeling that I can't explain. Maybe if I knew more about Joe or his party I could figure out if my concern is valid."

TAKE TIME TO THINK

Children are great at pressuring us for a quick response—and we can get ourselves into agreements we wish we hadn't made. Tell children you *will* answer them, after you have a moment to think over their request. Respond in a timely manner, out of respect for the child, instead of using this response to avoid or delay the issue. If we delay too often, children will only pressure us more strongly for a quick answer.

RECOGNIZE FEELINGS

When we acknowledge feelings first, before denying a request, our children know we understand how they feel and are more likely to listen to us. This reduces the chances of an Oscar-winning performance to convince us of their position. (This is also consistent with the PASRR formula: **P**revent the problem and **A**cknowledge feelings, then **S**et limits and **R**edirect problem behavior.)

Remember that children's priorities are often different from ours. Sometimes, our goal is not to make our children *like* doing the things we ask them to do or agree with our priorities. Sometimes we simply want them to agree to do a task, even if they don't really want to do it. If children ask to stay up late, we can say, "I know you might not feel tired now" or "It's hard to go to bed when you don't feel like it." This could be all we say. We don't even have to say "no" or "you have to go to bed anyway," because our sentence implies it. We can add choices, "You don't have to go right to sleep. You can read, work puzzles, or do some other quiet activity. That's your choice." Notice how this statement shifts the focus away from the firm limit to what the child *can* do.

GIVE WISHES IN FANTASY[2] ☆☆☆☆

While we can use this skill any time we want to recognize feelings, it is particularly effective to use it when children can't have what they want. When children get in fantasy what they can't have in reality, it helps them move on. At least they know we understand that they "wish" it could happen. Wishes and fantasy can take many forms, depending on the situation and the age of the child. Here are a few examples:

- "I bet you wish you could stay at the pool all day and not get sunburned!"
- "I know you'd like to have that sword. What would you do with it?"
- "If you had a magic wand and could change this situation in any way, how would you change it?"
- "Let's erase this argument and start over fresh."

Don't be afraid that you will have to grant the wish. Most children understand it is just a wish. The point is that we show we understand their heart's desire. We can also have fun with this tool, creating exaggerated fantasies that helpfully redirect the conversation. I gave this tool a four-star rating after other parents raved about it and I had the following experience.

> ***A Personal Story.*** *When Chris was three, we went to a shopping mall. I quickly realized I would have to pass a toy store. Fortunately, I had my wits about me that day. As we approached the toy store, Chris said, "I want to play with the train!" I moved to his other side so he couldn't see the store, locked eyes, smiled and said, "We won't be able to play with the train today. It sure is a neat train, isn't it? It's nice that they let us play with it when we have extra time. What's your favorite part of the train set?" As he described the train set, I escorted him past the store.*
>
> *Soon he asked, "Can we buy a toy on the way back?" I was tempted to give my usual prerecorded reply of, "I don't have the money today, besides, you have too many toys already." Instead, I said, "That's a pretty neat toy store isn't it? What are some of your favorite toys in there?" I listened and responded as he listed them.*
>
> *By this time we were well past the store, but we were enjoying the fantasy so I said, "If you had all the money in the world, what would you buy?" He named several things and then asked me, "What would you buy?" I pointed to an outfit in a store window and mentioned a car, etc. He asked, "Mom, where would we put all that stuff?" I enthusiastically said, "Well, if we had all the money in the world, we could buy a house as big as a castle, and fill it up with all our toys!" He was quiet for a minute and then said, "Mom, that sounds like too much stuff. We'd never play with it all!" He paused, then added, "Maybe we're better off with just the toys we have." I had to watch my step so I wouldn't trip over my jaw, which was now dragging on the floor! Without giving my prerecorded excuse, my son had figured out* ***on his own*** *that it is sometimes better not to get everything we want!*
>
> *Several weeks later, he was watching TV and saw an advertisement for a toy. He said, "I wish I could have that." I didn't have my wits about me this time and blurted out, "It's too expensive. Besides, you already have enough toys." In a matter-of-fact voice, he said "Mom, all I said was, 'I wish.'"* ***That's*** *when I knew this "wishes and fantasy" skill really worked. Even a three-year-old could understand the difference between* ***wanting*** *something and* ***having*** *to get it!*

This tool usually brings great satisfaction to both children and parents, but there are a few exceptions. When children are too reality-based or insistent on getting their way, choose a different way to say "no" in positive words. Some wishes can never be granted and may unnecessarily expose deep wounds. If so, avoid using this tool or use F-A-X Listening (Chapters 7 and 8) to help children work through their pain.

A Graduate's Story. *Nina attended the parenting class to help her grandson, who was living with his abusive mother. Nina had cancer, so she was unable to take custody of the boy, but he visited with her every weekend. One weekend, he asked why he had to go home. Nina used wishes and fantasy in her response, "You wish you didn't have to go home, huh?" The boy started sobbing—and so did Nina—for she realized just how hard it was for both she and her grandson to deal with the pain and impending loss of their situation.*

SAVE "NO'S" FOR DANGEROUS ISSUES

There will be times when "no" is the first thing that comes out of your mouth, such as, "No! The iron is hot!" There will also be times when a request, such as "Can I stay out all night?" is just too dangerous to grant. When our children's moral or physical well-being is at stake, it is certainly worth taking a stand, even if we have to say a firm "no." Whether a "no" accidentally escapes our lips or is quite deliberate, always try to use one of the other skills before or with the "no." When we use "no" sparingly, our children really take notice and usually respond appropriately.

A Personal Story. *I learned "No No's" when Chris was an infant. With some creativity, I was usually able to come up with a positive way to set limits. One day, I was visiting my parents. I walked into the kitchen and saw Chris, then two, dangling my expensive camera over the tile floor. I squealed, "No!" as I rushed over to grab the camera. As I explained what could happen, my father rushed into the room. He said, "I've never heard you say 'no' like that so I figured there must have been something really wrong."*

When we first try to flip our negative statements into positive ones, it usually takes longer to think and respond. But it's well worth our time to choose positive words. We can prevent power struggles, tantrums, or having our children pester us for 15 minutes with negotiations and explanations. If we are willing to make the investment of time and effort, we *will* start seeing results.

Use Humor ☆☆☆☆

Children usually listen and cooperate more when we make funny, light-hearted requests. This can be difficult, especially when we are tired, but humor can prevent many power struggles. Here are a few suggestions, but I'm sure you can add more.

- Use a funny voice, impersonating a celebrity or robot.
- Use sign language or charades to get your point across.
- Act like a media announcer calling the plays of a game or interviewing your child.
- Sing your request or set your request to a familiar tune. (When my children were young, I made up lyrics to dozens of familiar tunes. It really got my kids moving—and lightened up the moment. Be careful, though, because children may repeat the song. . . .)

A Graduate's Story. *One parent, teasing her husband about his vasectomy pains, changed the name of the body part in the song, "Do your ears hang low." She sang it once and didn't think the kids heard her. Six months later, the principal from her child's school called to say her son had been singing an inappropriate song. The principal had the child call his mother, to tell her what he was singing. In front of the principal, her son said, "You should know the words, Mom! You made them up when you sang it to Dad!"*

Make It Child-Friendly

Sometimes we only need to make a task or item sound more appealing to a child, by using our creativity. For example, encourage picky eaters to try new foods by making fruit-kabobs, dips, and food shakes, such as fruit smoothies. Use creative packaging such as ice cream cones. Let children create food art, such as faces and animals out of food.

> ***A Personal Story.*** *In my house, plain milk became "Slimer® milk" by adding green food coloring. "Snow trees" were much more interesting to eat than cauliflower. To get Amber to sit still while I fixed her hair, I called a French braid a "Barbie® braid" after the dolls whose hair I braided to prevent tangles. Pigtails were "Dorothy pigtails," after the girl in her favorite movie.*

Be Polite, But Don't Plead

Saying "Please" is appropriate when making simple requests like "Will you please get the mail?" It models manners and avoids ordering children around with "Go get the mail." "Please" can sound like pleading, however, if our request is more important, like "Please don't hit your sister," especially if we've already asked nicely and the child hasn't complied. Using "please" politely, once, can be appropriate when there is no problem going on. If we don't get cooperation using the tools in this toolset, we have a problem (a Parent problem) and need to use more firm, yet respectful, statements from Chapter 10, "Clear Communication Toolset."

Follow the Rules for Setting Rules

Sometimes our efforts to set rules can backfire on us; we get defiance, are pressed to follow through *to the letter* by a child who takes everything literally, or realize a child has found the exception to the rule. While our rules may still hit snags, we can reduce these frustrations by incorporating some previous skills when setting rules:

1. State the bottom line.
2. Present it as a choice.
3. Credit a "higher authority" or inanimate object with the rule, if possible.
4. Use general terms.
5. Use positive words.

> ***A Personal Story.*** *I figured out these rules the hard way (Is there any other way for most parents?) when I had to set rules about climbing the tree in our front yard. This tree invites every neighborhood child to climb it. I didn't want to wait for a disaster or be a party-pooper by forbidding children from scaling the only decent climbing tree on the block. I invented the "Rules for Setting Rules" while trying to avoid loopholes and vague, negative, discouraging restrictions.*
>
> *My bottom line for kids climbing our tree was safety and legal liability. I said, "Remember, safety first!" Instead of saying, "You can't climb my tree" and explaining why, I said, "If you want to climb this tree . . . ," which made it clear they had a choice. I finished the sentence, ". . . you need to agree to the tree's rules. The tree doesn't want anyone to get hurt in its branches!" This made the rule more neutral and you can't argue with a tree!*
>
> *Instead of measuring and testing each child for ability, I said, "Only kids who are tall enough to reach the lowest branch can climb the tree." When the tall, uncoordinated children asked my help to climb the tree, I amended the rule, "Only kids who can get up in the tree by themselves can climb it." This kept me from standing in the yard giving boosts to the kids and spared children embarrassment if I had to single out the uncoordinated children. I also noticed that the children were more motived to learn tree climbing, instead of feeling discouraged.*
>
> *When my daughter tried to climb the tree in her tights and patent leather shoes, I realized I needed another rule. I didn't want to sound negative and sexist, so I used general terms. I said, "Only kids wearing pants and shoes can climb the tree."*

I've seen so much value in flipping a "don't" into a positive statement, I used the same idea when I set my tree rules. I didn't want to give the kids any vivid ideas by saying, "Don't climb too high in the tree, you could get stuck." Someone said this to me as a kid and I got stuck in a tree for nearly an hour. That's why I'm not willing to climb a tree to get them down! Instead, I said, "You can only climb as high as you can get yourself down."

Once, when a child got stuck at the top, I reminded her of the rule and that I don't climb trees. I told her I knew she could get herself down, since she did such a good job climbing up! I then offered suggestions such as, "That's it! Now put your foot on that branch down there and grab that branch with your other hand."

To date, I have never had to rescue anyone from my tree. All have come down in one piece and each child has developed extraordinary tree-climbing abilities.

Parents often comment on the negative words schools, churches, preschools, and other child-focused institutions use in their rules. Several have rewritten them, using the "rules for setting rules."

A Personal Story. *My son's fifth-grade teacher was wise. She just had one general rule, instead of many rules about everything. To this day, my son remembers this rule: "Respect yourself, others, and your environment." If you think about it, it covers everything!*

In most settings, parents or other adults set the rules and then tell children what they are. The adult's tone of voice and attitude, however, can turn rules into orders and commands. **Teens** are especially likely to rebel when adults talk down to them. If teens don't agree with a rule and adults can't enforce it, they might sneak to do it anyway. It is far more effective, especially with teens, to use two-party problem solving (Chapter 10, "Clear Communication Toolset") to negotiate rules.

Establish Routines

Children are more cooperative when it's time to do chores, clean up after themselves, or go to bed if there is a special routine. Younger children adapt especially well to routines. Older children may need time to break poor habits. It's important to involve children in planning new routines, instead of *telling* them what they will do. Routines increase parental consistency, eliminate power struggles, and help each family member feel his contribution is important to the family.

Here are some examples of routines to use. Some are more elaborate than others. You can tailor your routines to fit the ages, abilities, structure, and schedules in your family.

Meals. Whoever isn't cooking can either set the table or help clean up. People can volunteer or make a schedule.

Laundry. Divide laundry duties at family councils—sorting, washer/dryer loading, folding, and ironing. The family can decide whether to rotate these duties or keep regular voluntary assignments. Only wash clothes that are in the hamper by sorting day. Family members put away their own basket of clean clothes.

Bedtime. For many families, bedtime battles are routine. Most parents know about the basic "5 B's: bath, brush teeth, bathroom, books, and bed" routine. To prevent bedtime struggles and delays, offer choices about these steps. For example, children can choose whether to take a bath at night or in the morning, brush teeth before or after bathroom duties, and how many or which books to read. Invent fun, but not too physical, games as options to bedtime books and tapes. These games can have time limits. Each person gets one turn or you play the game until the time is up. The following games have helped our family turn bedtime into precious, loving memories.

- *Twenty questions.* Think of a person or thing. Others ask yes and no questions to guess what it is.
- *Guess the feeling.* Someone acts out an emotion while others guess the feeling.
- *Guess that animal.* The same, except you act like an animal.

- *Finish that story.* One person starts a story and, at some point, passes the story on to the next person, who continues it however he wants.
- *Tell a family story.* Write in a journal and read the stories occasionally. Or tell stories from your childhood.
- *Guess the story.* Tell a familiar story without identifying the characters, such as a movie or family adventure. The rest of the family tries to guess who the story is about.
- *Build forts and tents* on weekends or school breaks—with an agreement for when the children will clean up. Let them camp out on the floor in sleeping bags or in each others' rooms.
- *Back rubs and scratches.* Draw letters, pictures, and words on their backs and have them guess what you drew.

House Cleaning. Pick a time each week to clean the house together. Besides family members cleaning their own rooms, they can choose one or two rooms to clean or one or two activities, such as dusting, vacuuming, or cleaning sinks. Play music or make a game of it, but not a competitive game, such as racing, which would have a loser. I have catchy names to specify levels of cleaning:

- "Litter control" means to just pick up.
- "Vacuum path" means the floor has to be ready to vacuum.
- "Organize" means things need to be put in their place, rather than just thrown in the general area where they belong.
- "Hotel quality" means everything needs dusted and to look like it's ready for guests. I try to be realistic, reasonable, and not overuse "hotel quality," or my children are tempted to check into one to get a break from me!

Keeping one's bedroom clean is a *routine* many parents wish their children would develop. This especially applies to parents of **teens.** Teens' bedrooms are an extension of their identity and a symbol of one area of their life that is theirs to control. It's very difficult to start this routine once a child has already reached the teen years. If parents start the routine when children are young, they can develop positive habits.

> ***A Graduate's Story.*** *Jack and I are both very organized. Everything has a place and we always take a few extra seconds to put things away. Ever since our kids were young, we have taught them to pick up after themselves. We've never had a problem with them being messy. I guess they have never known any different. I didn't realize how many other parents had a problem with getting their kids to clean up. I guess our neatness has some advantages.*

FINAL COMMENTS

All the tools in *The Parent's Toolshop* are great, but this toolset is a favorite. Many parents and children make a complete change in their attitudes and behavior within weeks of using these tools. If you can honestly look at your power and control issues, focus on cooperation rather than demanding obedience, and consistently use these tools, you will also have fewer power struggles and more teamwork.

What if you consistently use these (or other Prevention) tools and *don't* get cooperation? Then you are no longer in the "prevention" zone! It's a Parent problem and time to move to the next PASRR step.

SUMMARY SHEET
COOPERATION TOOLSET

AVOID BRIBES

PLAN AHEAD ☆☆☆☆

OFFER CHOICES ☆☆☆☆
If there's not a choice *if* something happens, give choices for *when* and *how* it can happen.

DON'T SAY "DON'T" ☆☆☆☆
Describe what they *can* do.

NO NO'S ☆☆☆☆
Give a conditional "yes."
Offer an alternative.
State a reason.
Give information.
Recognize feelings. Use wishes and fantasy.
Save "no" for dangerous issues or emergencies.

USE HUMOR ☆☆☆☆

MAKE IT CHILD-FRIENDLY

BE POLITE, BUT DON'T PLEAD

FOLLOW RULES FOR SETTING RULES
Use general, simple, positive terms that state your bottom line.

ESTABLISH ROUTINES

PRACTICE EXERCISES

(Possible answers are at the end of the chapter.)

A. Choices. Find a way to offer choices within limits in these situations.

1. Your toddler wants to play in the sand box in his good clothes.
2. Your preschooler resists having her hair washed.
3. Your elementary school-aged child needs to work on a book report.
4. Your preteen wants to plan a party.
5. Your teenager is trying to decide where to apply for jobs.

B. Don't Say "Don't." Flip these negative orders into positive requests.

1. "Quit pulling the dog's tail."
2. "Don't run away from me in the store!"
3. "Quit being so bossy!"
4. "Stop teasing and calling people names! It's not nice."
5. "Don't be late!"

C. Personal Application. List three things your children do that you tell them to "stop" or say "don't." Now say each with positive words.

D. No "No's." Write an alternative to saying "no" in the following practice situations. Your choices are:

a. Give a conditional "yes"
b. Give a reason
c. Give information
d. Recognize feelings
e. Offer a positive alternative

1. "Can we go out to eat tonight?" (You don't have the time or money.)
2. "Can I borrow the car?" (The last time the car was returned with an empty gas tank.)
3. "Can I go to the park with Tom and John?" (You are concerned about three 10-year-old boys walking through the woods to the park.)
4. "Can you take me to the library to do research for my book report? It's due tomorrow." (You don't have time tonight, but would have, had you known sooner.)
5. "Can I have this toy?" (You are in the toy store shopping for someone else.)

E. Personal Application. List three things your child might ask for and to which you would say "no." Now, word your refusal with positive words instead.

Activity for the Week

Practice using these tools at home for one week. Then list a situation (or more, if applicable) where you are having difficulty in getting your child to cooperate. Now review the summary page to see if there are any tools you could use in that situation.

Possible Answers

The following answers are just *one possible* response. Different answers are not wrong answers. See if your answers also fit the guidelines for using the Cooperation Toolset.

A. Choices

1. "Clothes get dirty in the sand box. You can either change into play clothes for the sand box or keep your nice clothes on and play inside. You decide."
2. "I know you don't like getting your hair washed. Would you like a wash cloth to cover your eyes or would you rather tip your head way back?"
3. "Will you work on your book report before dinner or after?"

4. "I only have three rules for having a party here: (1) There are no drugs, alcohol, or cigarettes. (2) You know that the people attending are responsible. (3) There is an adult at home during the party. If you agree to those rules, I'd love to hear your ideas for the party."
5. (Pause between each question.) "What are you interested in doing? What kind of jobs appeal to you? What is your class schedule? How will you balance school and work?"

B. Don't Say "Don't"

1. "Be gentle and kind to the dog. Pet him like this." (Guide child's hand.)
2. "Stay where you can see me." Or "Stay with me." (If you say, "Stay where I can see *you*," children don't realize when *you* have lost sight of *them*!)
3. "When people are ordered around, they might not want to play anymore. Can you give your friends some choices or ask what *they* want to do?"
4. "Teasing hurts people's feelings. Treat others with respect."
5. "You need to be home by five o'clock," or "Be home on time," or "Keep track of the time."

D. No "No's"

1. "Maybe we could go out to dinner Friday night. We don't have any plans and I get my paycheck."
2. "You can borrow the car, if you put gas in it before you return it.
3. "I know how much fun you have together at the park, but I worry about you walking through the woods without an adult." If you can't go with them, ask if an older sibling could go with them.
4. "I am always willing to take you to the library to do your research, if I have a couple days notice. I have a meeting tonight, so you'll need to find another way to get there."
5. "It's fun looking at toys, isn't it? Today we are buying a toy for Suzy. Can you find a toy *she* will like?"

WHAT'S NEXT?

Use the Cooperation Toolset everyday to prevent the struggles most parents face. We will refer to them often when we get to the Parent Problem Toolbox and learn how to redirect children's intentional misbehavior and reveal discipline.

In Chapter 6, "Independence Toolset," we talk more about balancing parental limits—as it relates to children's independence. We discuss ways to develop responsibility, teach skills (such as tasks, behaviors, and values), and dozens of other ideas to prepare your child for self-sufficient adulthood.

REFERENCES

1. Two resources that offer strong arguments that behavior charts cannot be used "appropriately" because incentives are counterproductive are *Punished by Rewards: The Trouble with Gold Stars, Incentive Plans, A's, Praise and Other Bribes,* by Alfie Kohn (Houghton Mifflin, 1993) and *Kids Are Worth It!* by Barbara Coloroso (Avon Books, 1994).
2. *How To Talk So Kids Will Listen, And Listen So Kids Will Talk*, Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish (Avon Books, 1982) pp. 17, 44.