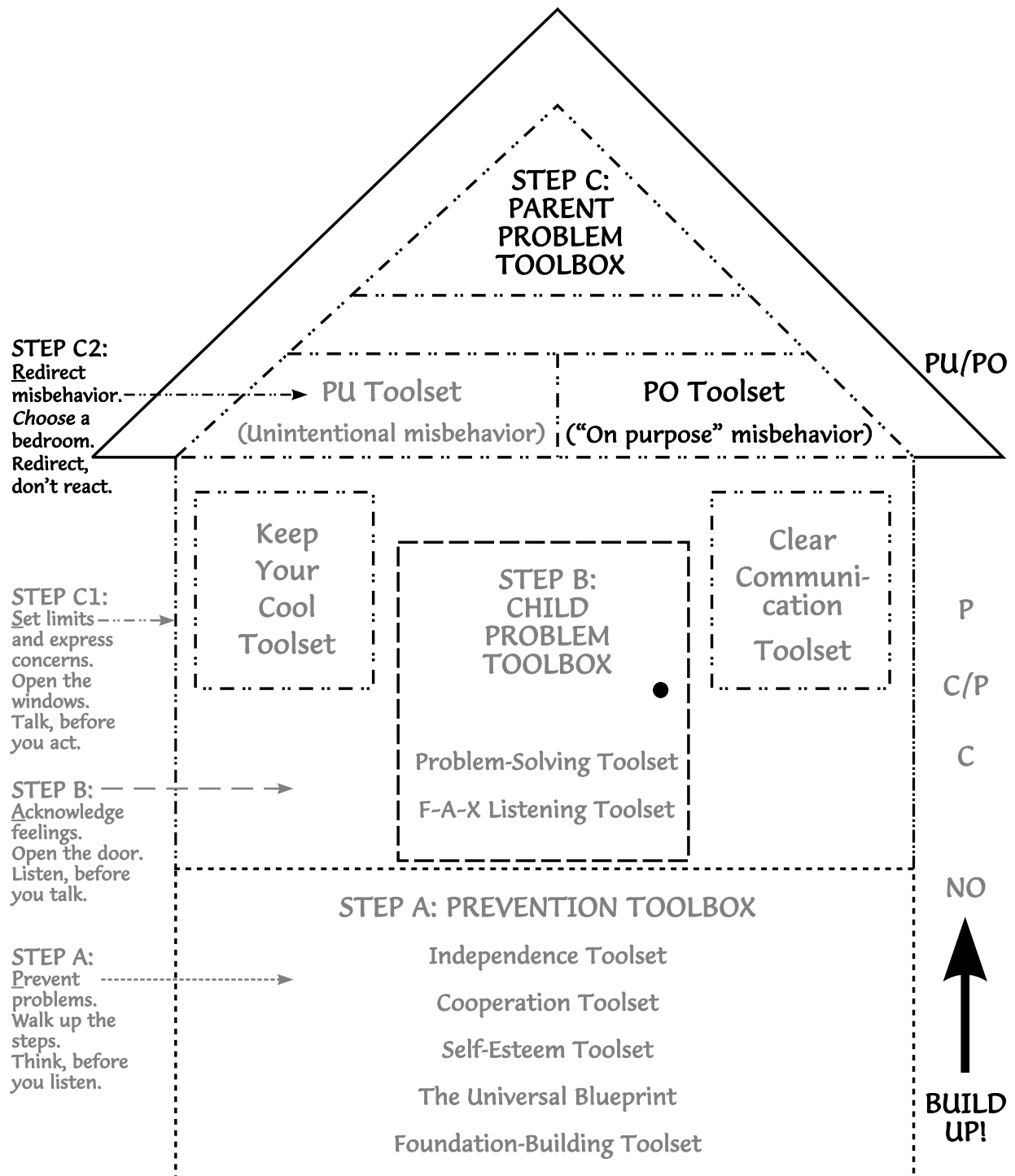


CHAPTER 12

PO TOOLSET ("On purpose" misbehavior)



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If a furnace rattles or a faucet drips, it’s a symptom of a problem. We can tighten the furnace bolts or the faucet handle, but if that is not the cause of the problem, the symptoms will continue and might even get worse. If we figure out the cause of the problem and fix it, the symptoms will disappear.

In parenting, intentional misbehavior is a symptom of an underlying problem. It is the outer skin of the onion. If we react to the behavior, but don’t address the real cause, the misbehavior either escalates or gets a payoff. We want to identify what children are trying to accomplish through negative behavior and help them achieve these purposes through positive behavior. When we address the real issue, the symptom (intentional misbehavior) usually stops.

IN THIS CHAPTER

In Chapter 3, “The Universal Blueprint,” we learned three questions to ask to identify the type of problem we are facing: (1) Is it a Child problem or Parent problem (SHARP RV)? (2) If there’s misbehavior, is it PU or PO? (3) If the misbehavior is PO, *what* is the purpose? This chapter teaches us how to answer the third and final question. We already know the tools we’ll use to redirect PO behavior, but we still don’t know *which* tools are most effective for specific *types* of PO behavior. The PO Toolset helps us do four very important tasks:

1. Correctly identify the purpose behind PO misbehavior. Misbehaving children give us clues to their purpose. We need to know what clues to look for and what they mean.
2. Avoid reacting in ways that escalate the behavior or give it a payoff, while effectively redirecting the behavior. Each type of PO behavior has a specific strategy for responding effectively, using tools we already know.
3. Use what we learn in the PO Toolset to understand and helpfully respond to intentional adult misbehavior, too.
4. Understand the motives behind lying, how to prevent it, and how to effectively respond to it.

WHEN TO USE THE PO TOOLSET

We *only* choose the PO Toolset when children or adults are misbehaving *on purpose*. If we respond to intentional misbehavior without first correctly identifying the purpose it serves, we will probably choose an ineffective response. If we use discipline without first breaking misbehavior cycles with the PO Toolset, our discipline is less effective and in some cases is even harmful to the relationship.

IDENTIFYING PO PROBLEMS

PO problems are **P**arent problems involving misbehavior that seems to be “**O**n purpose.” Parents have seen children *consistently* behave appropriately, but for some reason they *deliberately* misbehave. While their behavior seems intentional, children are usually unaware of their subconscious beliefs and behavior choices. They have an underlying need or purpose and *falsely believe* this misbehavior will help them accomplish that purpose. (Even adult behavior operates on this principle.)

People mistakenly believe their PO behavior will help them meet a specific purpose, but are usually unaware of their subconscious beliefs and behavior choices.

How PU Behavior Turns into PO Behavior

In the PU Toolset, we learned that strong reactions to PU behavior can turn it into PO behavior. Once this occurs, it is difficult to decide if similar future behavior is PU or PO. The clues lie in the child’s past behavior and current motive. To be sure the behavior is really PO, consider the following questions.

If we answer “yes” to *any* of these questions, we are most likely facing PO behavior.

- Have we seen *consistent* appropriate behavior in the past?
- Are we *positive* the child knows better and has *mastered* the skill?
- Did the child seem to be looking for or *expecting* a reaction?

In addition to strong reactions, PU behavior can also turn into PO behavior if children’s positive efforts fail to meet their purpose. It becomes a survival tactic. For example, if children fail to get attention during a family gathering through positive behavior, they feel discouraged and think, “Well, that didn’t work! What else can I do?” They remember when they or others *were* able to get someone’s attention. If they think misbehavior will work, children are likely to try it. “Hmm, I remember when my cousin burped real loud. *That* got people to notice him!” Others, besides parents, can also reinforce mistaken beliefs or negative behavior. If relatives laugh when children burp the first time (when it’s PU behavior) and the parents respond effectively, children *still* might use the behavior again, since *someone* noticed them. If parents don’t break PO cycles, they can become habitual problems.

PU behavior comes naturally, as part of the learning and growth process.
PO behavior is usually learned. People have often seen or heard the behavior work for someone, somewhere, sometime. People are more likely to repeat any behavior they believe will give them a payoff or quick result.

***A Personal Story.** As a protective service worker, I had a case involving David, four, and his parents, who were total opposites. David’s mother was heavily medicated for depression and very passive. His father was slightly mentally retarded and worked long hours at a minimum-wage job. The few times he was home, he was tired and stressed and physically punished David.*

Whenever David didn’t get what he wanted, he would become so out-of-control his mother would eventually give in. Although she complained about David’s behavior, she said it was too hard to stand up to him. When she tried to be firmer, he only became more destructive and defiant. He would resort to whatever drastic measures he needed to get what he wanted. I observed him throwing and breaking things, yelling, and even urinating on the carpet just to get his way.

*David only exhibited his demanding behavior and tantrums at home with his parents. With his grandparents, who cared for him frequently, David’s behavior was more acceptable. Obviously, David was “in control” of his parents, but could change his behavior when he chose to. Only his grandparents, who were consistent, firm, **and** loving, did not have to endure David’s tirades. David had **learned** to behave in certain ways with certain people to get what he wanted—attention and control. David’s example is extreme, but shows what can happen when parents reward misbehavior or overreact to it.*

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE UNIVERSAL BLUEPRINT

We can prevent *and* effectively respond to PO behavior if we follow the Universal Blueprint. As we discuss each type of PO behavior, we will dip into toolboxes and toolsets we've already learned. In PO problems, the importance of following the Universal Blueprint becomes crystal clear. If we skip steps, we miss opportunities to prevent PO behavior or we may even accidentally reinforce it.

We will learn exactly what skills to use to prevent and respond to specific behavior goals, but first, let's review some important points we've already learned that will help us respond to *all* PO problems.

Step A: Prevention Toolbox

Planning ahead is an important part of preventing PO behavior. If we follow two major philosophies from the Prevention Toolbox, we can prevent many different types of PO problems.

- **Balanced parenting sets limits without overreacting, which can prevent or break PO cycles.** An over-controlling parenting style usually escalates PO problems. An under-controlling style usually gives a payoff, because the parent gives in.
- **Discouragement is the root cause of intentional misbehavior.** Therefore, it is a logical conclusion that descriptive *encouragement* (noticing or describing positive behavior) can help prevent it.

Step B: Child Problem Toolbox

We can use this toolbox as the main source of tools for our response to *one* specific type of PO behavior and as part of our PASRR response to *any* PO behavior. We can use the F-A-X process to identify the feelings beneath PO behavior, which offer clues to the goal of the PO behavior. When we look at each goal in detail, we learn which feelings usually cause certain types of PO behavior. If we can help children resolve these feelings, it often de-escalates the situation or even stops the behavior.

Step C: Parent Problem Toolbox

- **Step C1: Keep Your Cool Toolset** prevents us from *reacting* to misbehavior instead of effectively redirecting it. *Gut reactions almost always escalate the PO problem or accidentally give the PO behavior a payoff.* We must have enough self-control to be aware of what we *feel like* doing, but *not act* on those feelings and temptations. The Keep Your Cool Toolset helps us maintain our self-control. We can then think logically enough to see the clues we need to identify PO behavior and choose the most appropriate response.
- **Step C1: Clear Communication Toolset** helps us respond assertively to intentional misbehavior. Passive responses do not address the misbehavior or give it a payoff. Aggressive responses escalate the behavior and cause discouragement and hurt—core issues behind almost all PO behavior. Assertive communication addresses the problem *and* prevents escalation.
- **Step C2: PO Toolset** offers reliable guidelines for identifying and responding to PO behavior. Once we use the Universal Blueprint to correctly identify PO behavior, we are ready to take three new steps (which we learn in detail in the next section):
 - Step C2a: Identify the purpose of the misbehavior.
 - Step C2b: Avoid escalating the situation or giving the misbehavior a payoff.
 - Step C2c: Redirect the behavior by showing children how to meet the purpose through positive behavior.
- **Step C3: Discipline Toolset** shows children that PO behavior has a negative effect. We need to be careful, though, not to jump right to this step. If we do, we are simply reacting to the behavior

without addressing the real issue children are trying to express. The PO Toolset breaks the PO cycle, which makes our discipline more effective, and prevents repeated PO behavior.

When we use discipline as a first response to PO behavior, it can escalate PO behavior or give it a payoff. Therefore, discipline is only effective *after* negative misbehavior cycles are broken.

When we see problem behavior, we first decide whether the behavior is PU or PO. If we have *consistently seen* that children know how to behave but aren’t (PO), we keep our cool and use two or three sentences *at the most* to move through the first four steps of the PASRR formula. (The Prevention and/or Child Problem Toolbox and the Clear Communication and PO Toolsets.) These tools usually stop the behavior. If not, we have broken the PO misbehavior cycle, which is essential before revealing discipline.

PO TOOLS ☆☆☆☆

Let’s look at the three basic steps we take *every* time we deal with PO behavior. Then we’ll apply these steps by looking at each of the four types of PO behavior, learning the clues that reveal the purpose, and reviewing the best tools for preventing and responding helpfully to that type of PO behavior.

The steps in the PO Toolset are always the same, but our response will differ depending on the *type* of PO behavior we identify.



Step C2a: Identify the Purpose of the Misbehavior

To answer Question 3 of problem identification, “If misbehavior is ‘on purpose,’ *what* is the purpose?,” we ask the following *three questions* to find the clues we need.¹

- i. How do I feel when I see this behavior?** Since all intentional problem behavior can cause us to feel angry (PO’d), we want to look for the underlying feeling that is *causing* our anger. Different feelings are clues to the different goals of PO behavior.
- ii. What am I tempted to do?** Our feelings and temptations are clues that help us identify the purpose, but we don’t want to act on them. Gut reactions usually escalate the situation or give a payoff.
- iii. If I did this, how would the *child* react?** If we carried out our gut reaction, would we give the behavior a payoff? Would it escalate the situation? How would the child interpret our actions? Would the behavior get better or worse? Would the short term result have long-term negative consequences?

We can also ask, in a curious, respectful tone, “Could the reason you’re (action) be that you feel ___?” They probably won’t admit it, but their reaction often shows we’ve guessed correctly. We don’t want to *confront* others about their goals, nor do we always need to check it out. If we don’t see the clues easily, however, it may be helpful to ask.



Step C2b: Avoid Escalating the Situation or Giving a Payoff

This is a tricky step, because we need to avoid doing the very thing we are tempted to do (the answer to question ii above). This is harder than it sounds! We must keep our cool and resist the urge to react.

Hard as it is, we need to get in touch with our feelings and temptations, to learn the clues they hold, without acting on those urges.

Step C2c: Redirect the Behavior

In each case, we want to show children how to meet their purpose through positive behavior. Depending on the purpose we identify, we select specific skills we already know for our response. Sometimes we try to meet the need directly, through our response. Other times, we use problem solving to brainstorm more appropriate ways children can meet their purposes.

We usually use the same tools to redirect PO behavior that we use to prevent it.

Now, let's go through each type of PO misbehavior, answering the three questions for each. We will learn which tools (that we've already learned) are best for preventing *and* responding to each type of PO behavior. *One* tool will have a black star next to it (★). This is usually the best all-around tool to use if you want to prevent *or* respond to *that* type of PO behavior. Your goal is to remember three important facts:

- The different clues to look for when identifying the four types of PO behavior.
- What reactions to avoid
- Which tool is usually the best tool to use with each type of PO behavior (the starred tools)

THE FOUR TYPES OF PO BEHAVIOR

When Rudolf Dreikurs² identified “The Four Goals of Misbehavior” decades ago, it explained the *cause* of intentional problem behavior, which led to more effective responses. Several generations have passed and these four goals have been proven to be accurate and the remedies effective.

Each misbehavior goal has a positive and negative side. If people *think* they cannot meet their purpose through positive behavior, they become discouraged and resort to negative behavior to accomplish their goal. Ideally, we want to *prevent* negative behavior by teaching children positive ways to meet their behavior goals. The next page shows the four goals and their positive and negative sides.

Involvement/Attention

Some common negative attention-seeking behaviors are interrupting, silliness, whining, emotionally overreacting, or acting “stupid” so someone will spend more time explaining something.

STEP A: PREVENT THE BEHAVIOR (PREVENTION TOOLBOX)

We want to use the Prevention Toolbox when PO misbehavior first appears, or we will become increasingly frustrated and impatient. Then, our nonverbal language says that we *do* notice them, which gives the child a payoff and escalates the negative attention-seeking behavior.

Meet the positive goal of *involvement*. People feel accepted and important when they can be involved with, included in, and offer meaningful contributions to a group they identify with, such as their family or peers. They want others to recognize their efforts, contributions, and presence.

When children try to gain this approval through positive behavior and no one notices, they feel discouraged and may settle for negative attention. If others *only* notice children when they are making bids for attention, the children may believe they are *only* important *if* they are the center of attention.

THE FOUR GOALS OF MISBEHAVIOR		
POSITIVE GOAL/BELIEF	If people believe they have failed to meet this goal, they feel discouraged and change their beliefs and behavior.	NEGATIVE GOAL/BELIEF
◆ INVOLVEMENT: “I want to be a part of the group. I belong when I’m involved and noticed.”	⇒	◆ ATTENTION: “They will <i>only</i> notice me if I am the center of attention—and negative attention is better than no attention at all!”
◆ INDEPENDENCE: “I want to make decisions and do things by myself.”	⇒	◆ POWER: “Someone is trying to take away my power! If I want to keep it, I must be the one in control.”
◆ JUSTICE: “One good deed deserves another!”	⇒	◆ REVENGE: “Someone hurt me! I must hurt others the way I’ve been hurt.”
◆ WITHDRAWAL: “I can handle conflict and failure appropriately. I want reassurance.”	⇒	◆ GIVING UP: “I <i>can’t</i> belong because I’m incompetent. Others should expect nothing from me.”

★ **Notice and describe children’s good behavior.** If we notice children’s positive behavior, they are more likely to behave this way in the future. Unexpected descriptive encouragement helps children feel important, without having to go all-out to get our attention. Describe any effort or improvement, no matter how small.

Show unconditional love. If children behave poorly and we send the hidden message, “I don’t love you when you misbehave,” they become more discouraged. This leads to more misbehavior.

Spend time with children. If we frequently spend quality time with our children, when they are not demanding our attention, we can prevent some negative attention-seeking behavior. Giving children attention whenever they demand it sends the message that they are entitled to special service. Then, if these children don’t always receive special treatment, they feel discouraged and disappointed and make stronger, more negative bids for attention.

Focus on internal approval and motivation. Descriptive encouragement allows children to tell *themselves* they are valuable and did a “good job.” It prevents dependency on others’ opinions. Consequently, they don’t need to get constant attention and approval from *us*.

As peer acceptance becomes more important to children, they can misbehave to gain approval from their peer group. If parents have built self-esteem (rather than ego-esteem) through encouragement (instead of praise) children are less susceptible to negative peer pressure.

Build teamwork. When we order children around, they don’t feel important, just used. We want to focus on teamwork and cooperation and let children know how their contribution is important to the family. Nagging and reminding with “please” and “don’t” can give a payoff through negative attention.

STEP B: ACKNOWLEDGE FEELINGS (CHILD PROBLEM TOOLBOX)

When the goal is attention, people are *usually* feeling lonely, unimportant, rejected, or forgotten. Use the F-A-X process to identify *and* resolve these feelings.

STEP C1: SET LIMITS (CLEAR COMMUNICATION TOOLSET)

In one sentence, we acknowledge feelings (F-A-X Listening Toolset) and state our needs or concerns (with the Clear Communication Toolset). If there is a reason children can't have our full attention immediately, we explain this now (if we haven't already).

STEP C2a: IDENTIFY THE PURPOSE OF ATTENTION

When children try to get *attention* through negative behavior, we usually find the following clues:

- i. **We feel** *annoyed* or *irritated*, as though our personal space or rights are being *violated*. We might even feel exhausted from trying to please (or stop) the child.
- ii. **We are tempted to** *remind, nag*, tell children to "Stop it," "Quit it," or "Leave me alone!" and *push away* emotionally, to get some space or regain our sanity.
- iii. **If we do any of these**, we don't break the cycle. The behavior might *stop temporarily*, because children receive the attention they want, but may be repeated later. Sometimes the behavior will *escalate* until we give them attention (the payoff). Children might also choose a *different behavior* to get our attention.

STEP C2b: AVOID ESCALATING OR GIVING MISBEHAVIOR A PAYOFF

When people misbehave and we notice them (even if it's to discipline them or to tell them to stop), we are still giving them our *attention*. **If giving attention is a payoff, we want to give the behavior *no* attention. We can say *one thing* before we ignore the behavior.** Any more attention and we give children a payoff. We want to give quickly use the PASRR formula. "I can tell you feel _____. I feel _____. If you want _____, you can _____ instead." Then *ignore* the behavior long enough (usually 15–30 seconds) to send the message, "This behavior does not affect me." Do not give the silent treatment, roll your eyes, or huff and puff. These are passive-aggressive responses that tell children, "You are getting to me." The effective way to ignore behavior is to act as though children aren't doing what they are doing. If, at anytime, children stop that misbehavior or behave appropriately, we can pay attention to them again. For example, a child is demanding you give them something. Clearly and firmly state, "When people want something, they need to say 'May I please have a _____?'" Then ignore the behavior until they ask appropriately.

Sometimes children escalate their behavior, thinking if they get outrageous enough, we can't possibly ignore them. In the PU Toolset we learned that ignoring behavior is only appropriate *if the behavior is not dangerous*. If we must respond to dangerous behavior, do it quickly with few words until they are safe. (For example, move a child in a head-banging tantrum to a pillow or carpet. Remove a dangerous object without comment and go on with your activity.) Children may still be misbehaving, but we can then ignore the behavior completely. ***Once we have completely ignored the behavior long enough to get our point across and break the cycle (usually about 15–30 seconds) we can move to the next step.***

STEP C2c: REDIRECT THE MISBEHAVIOR

Suggest or brainstorm appropriate ways to get attention or to get involved with another activity. Name a specific time when you can be with children—and follow through. Give attention when children are not expecting or requesting it. Involve them in what you are doing or in a activity they can do nearby.

Choose a “meaningful” activity, not just something to keep them busy and out of your hair; kids eventually figure out what you are up to and will continue the misbehavior.

***A Graduate’s Story.** While talking on the phone, I noticed my four-year-old son tormenting the dog. He’d look at me and, when he was sure I was looking, pull the dog’s tail. I kept telling him to stop. Instead, he kept getting worse! He kicked the dog and finally grabbed a butter knife and chased the dog. I dropped the phone, chased him, and spanked him when I finally caught him.*

Did this boy get his mother’s attention? How extreme did he have to act to get her attention? Since his misbehavior ended with a payoff, how far do you think he’ll go the next time he wants her attention? No, he’s not destined to be a serial killer or animal mutilator. He probably just believes the phone is his competition or that misbehavior is the best way to get his mom’s attention. As the mother reinforces these beliefs, it becomes harder to change his behavior. At four, however, there’s plenty of time to reprogram the parent and child in this situation. So let’s replay this scene using the skills we just learned.

If you are making a call, plan ahead. Whenever possible, make calls when kids are napping, at school, or busy playing. Let children know you will be on the phone and under what circumstances they may disturb you. (Fire and blood are a minimum bottom line!) If you have young children, take care of their bodily functions (drink, snack, potty, etc.) and get them involved in an independent activity. If they like to be near you, keep a box of quiet toys near the phone. If children are older, let them know they can write you notes.

If you are receiving a call, ask to return the call or ask the caller to hold. Take 30 seconds to 1 minute to do the above activities. Tell children that you *will* spend time with them and make sure you keep your promise. Avoid taking phone calls during your special time with children (that’s what answering machines are for).

When children behave appropriately, thank them. Describe what they did and how it was helpful and independent. Don’t word it negatively, “Thanks for not ___” This reminds them of misbehavior and gives it attention. Instead, say, “I really appreciate the way you ___.” Usually, these preventive measures work if you don’t talk for unreasonable periods of time (like an hour). It is especially helpful if you immediately spend time with children when you are off the phone, to ask them about their activity and give positive attention when they weren’t asking for it.

If you haven’t planned ahead, you are already on the phone, and children interrupt for an unacceptable reason, you can stop *once*. Acknowledge their feelings (Step B). Remind them of the phone rules (Step C1) and their options (Step C2). Reassure them that you will spend time with them when you are done. Some additional options are to let them sit on your lap (if they are quiet) or color with them. (Most of us can handle coloring and talking, if we don’t have to stay in the lines.) Make it clear that once you start talking you expect to talk uninterrupted. Explain the value—respect for the caller and your right to talk to others. Acknowledge their rights and suggest alternative activities. Reveal the effect of interrupting—you will ignore them. If the behavior is annoying, but not dangerous, and you have a cordless phone or long extension cord, move out of the room.

***A Personal Story.** Since I work from home, I get many business calls when my children are home. They had to learn, when they were very young, that Mommy needed to listen to people on the phone. When they fussed, I used all these great ideas and they really worked. Now and then, nothing seemed to help, so I’d sit on the basement stairs to talk. My kids would fuss on the other side, but never opened the door! I have never had a bad problem with this behavior and probably talk more on the phone than many parents.*

Independence/Power

Some common power behaviors are logical arguments and defiance, either aggressive verbal refusals or passive ignoring. People also use emotions like pouting, tantrums, or crying to get their way. “Defiant compliance” is following an order, but doing a lousy job of it or doing it in an aggressive or hurtful way.

STEP A: PREVENT THE BEHAVIOR (PREVENTION TOOLBOX)

Meet the positive goal of independence. All people want to feel as though they have some control and independence in their lives. We see this goal of power and independence at every developmental stage of life, adults and seniors included. People assert their independence and personal power in positive ways when they make choices, offer opinions, and do things by themselves.

If people try to exert their independence and personal power, but others resist or try to take their power away, they feel discouraged and frustrated. Rather than give up their control, they may push even harder for control. The toddler and teen years are developmental stages in which achieving independence and a sense of power are primary developmental tasks. Consequently, curious toddlers and teens often experiment with risky behavior and test limits (others' and their own) to prove they have some power, control, and independence.

The best tools for preventing power struggles are in the Cooperation and Independence Toolsets. These skills can prevent *and* redirect power struggles.

Model humbleness. It takes maturity to admit when we are wrong and accept responsibility for our mistakes. Openly model this. Some people, whether by personality or conditioning, believe they must always be right or never to blame. When we insist on pointing out faults or gaining confessions, they become more defensive. Focus on lessons and solutions, not blame.

Avoid bribery. It is manipulative, to control others. Over time, children resent others controlling them and use defiant compliance, logical arguments, and deals to get what they want.

- ★ **Offer choices within bottom-line limits.** Keep priorities in line by picking and choosing “battles” carefully. When children have choices, they can assert their independence without starting power struggles or violating our bottom-line rules.

Don't Say “Don't.” Any time we approach people with negative attitudes or words, we are more likely to get negative responses. “You can't do that” challenges some people to try it, “Oh yeah? Watch me!” They'll test to see if we mean it, what will happen if they do it, and if we follow through with our threats. Instead, we describe what others *can* do or the behavior we want to see.

No No's. “No” often results in logical arguments, “But why?”, “But I . . .” Instead, we can give a conditional “Yes, when . . .” or “Sure, if . . .” State the reason or give information in a few words. Acknowledge feelings and offer acceptable alternatives.

Use humor. If children try to bait us into an argument, we can respond in a light-hearted tone of voice. A smile, tilted head, and glance from the corner of the eye says, “I don't think so.” If, for example, we ask children to turn off a light and they say “I did,” we use humor in several ways. “Light!” With a smile, “I must be crazy! I was just up there and saw it on! The electric elves must have turned it back on!” We can use, “Please,” but only once, to be polite.

Routines and family rules prevent many power struggles. When we start routines in the early years, they become habits. When family rules are clear, all we have to do is acknowledge feelings and briefly restate (or ask others to repeat) the rule.

Teach skills. If children are frustrated, angry, or express opinions disrespectfully, we can teach assertive communication skills. We allow children to have their feelings or opinions, but teach them how to express them respectfully.

Let them do things by themselves. Children can become defiant or resistant when they think we are trying to take over. Offer a few quick tips and let go.

Ask their opinion. This prevents power struggles, because we consider their needs when formulating a win/win plan. When children argue, “but . . .” they are trying to express their opinions. We can't

always give them exactly what they want, but listening to them with respect, stating our limits, and seeking a win/win solution will usually prevent defiance and resistance.

Nudge, but don’t push. It is easy to get into power struggles over PU behavior by pushing children too hard. Many parents find potty training, mealtime, and bedtime are daily battles. It takes practice to know when we are nudging or motivating and when we are pushing. Usually, if we get resistance, we’ve crossed the line. Get to the bottom line and shift the focus to choices.

STEP B: ACKNOWLEDGE FEELINGS (CHILD PROBLEM TOOLBOX)

If people are challenging our power and authority, they are usually feeling frustrated, disappointed or out of control of the situation, too. They may not know how to get power in positive ways or have already tried and think their efforts failed. If people want something and can’t have it, acknowledge their disappointment and frustration. Sometimes, this alone prevents power struggles.

STEP C1: SET LIMITS (CLEAR COMMUNICATION TOOLSET)

If we follow the Universal Blueprint, we have probably already stated our reasons for not allowing children to do what they want. Children don’t have to *like* what we ask them to do, but if we offer them some control or listen to their feelings first, they may cooperate, grudgingly. If they don’t, keep your cool and decide whether your limits are too controlling. If they aren’t, we can say we are unwilling to argue or debate the issue. We don’t want to spend too much time at this step, emphasizing *our* feelings and needs. It easily turns into a lecture, which escalates power struggles and shuts down communication. Use one sentence and move to the next step to stop and redirect the power struggle.

STEP C2a: IDENTIFY THE PURPOSE

When children resist requests, make power plays by testing us, or we’ve been sucked into a power struggle, we usually find the following clues:

- i. **We feel** as though the person is *challenging our authority* or we are in a battle of wills.
- ii. **We are tempted to** either *exert our authority* with a power play (threats, demands, punishment) or *give in* to their demands to avoid conflict.
- iii. **If we do any of these**, we don’t break the cycle. If we exert our authority, it escalates the power struggle. The more we push, the more they resist. If we force a “parent wins/child loses” outcome, children often rebel and feel hurt, which brings on revenge. If we allow a “child wins/parent loses” outcome, we give children a payoff. “It worked!” They will try at least this hard, and two steps more, to get their way the next time.

STEP C2b: AVOID ESCALATING OR GIVING MISBEHAVIOR A PAYOFF

Fighting and giving in are both “win/lose” outcomes. (Actually they are “lose/lose” in the long-run.) **Avoid doing both.** Logical arguments also rarely accomplish much. If there is nothing for others to struggle against, it breaks the cycle. We often feel we are “between a rock and a hard place” and have no other options. You do—a *balanced* approach—choices within limits.

STEP C2c: REDIRECT THE MISBEHAVIOR

Most of the tools listed in the “prevent the behavior” section also help break power struggles and redirect misbehavior. Once we make our point, if children do not cooperate, we first want to shift the focus to the choices (the child’s “win”) within bottom-line limits (the parent’s “win”). If the child persists, we make it clear that we are willing to listen further if they are willing to put forth an effort to

solve the problem. “We’ve discussed this problem for quite awhile. You’ve come up with several options. I’m sure you’ll decide how you want to handle it.” Then we may need to emotionally and/or physically disengage by walking away. If they follow, they are now trying to get our attention. Shift to the appropriate strategy—ignore them. (This is why it is so important to control our emotions and keep our logic on-line. **The goal of intentional behavior can shift.** If we aren’t on the ball, the situation can mutate into another goal before we realize it!)

Only reveal discipline or follow through with it *after* there has been a break in the power struggle. If we discipline in the middle of the power struggle, it turns our discipline into punishment. When discipline results in a “parent wins/child loses” outcome, children feel hurt, which can *start* revenge cycles.

A Personal Story. *Chris has particular taste in clothes. He knows what he wants and doesn’t like others trying to talk him into buying anything different. My dad and stepmother, after taking him shopping, once joked, “We’d rather throw our money off a cliff than take him shopping.” I can usually shop with him, but have to be on-the-ball for power struggles.*

*When Chris was 11, he needed a winter coat. I was willing to go to three stores of his choice in our local area. He would need to agree, however, to pick one coat from those stores. (Step A: **Prevent the problem.**) At the first store, we found hundreds of choices, so I said, “With all these coats, I’m sure you can find something you will like.” He wanted a particular name-brand and styled coat. (This was a first! I could tell he was nearing the teen years.) We only found a boys’ size in an ugly green and a man’s size that cost nearly \$100. Again, I had to adjust my bottom line. I said, “I’m willing to get any coat in this store that is less than \$50.”*

*He almost got the \$50 ugly green coat, but put it back and started getting resistant. He was trying to bait me into an argument or to make the decision for him. I knew that no matter what I picked, he would complain about it. Things were starting to escalate and he was anxious to go home. I said, “Look, there are plenty of coats to pick from here. I know you won’t find the one you really want (Step B: **Acknowledge feelings**), but I bet you can find **something** you like. I’m going to look for a shirt over there. The next time I see you, I want to see a coat that costs less than \$50 in your hand. Then we’ll go home.” (Step C1: **Set limits with Clear Communication Toolset** and Step C2: **Redirect misbehavior.**) As I walked away, he headed back toward the coats, mumbling “I’ll pick one out, but I won’t wear it.” I shopped where I could keep an eye on him, for safety reasons, but stayed out of sight.*

In a few minutes Chris walked up with a soft, brown coat that cost \$40. He acted only somewhat satisfied, so I confirmed his decision and my unwillingness to return it or go somewhere else. He confirmed this was the coat he wanted. The next day was a cool (but not cold) day and, to my surprise, he wore his new coat to his soccer game. The whole team took turns wearing it on the sideline. It ended up being one of his all-time favorite coats.

Justice/Revenge

Revengeful behavior takes many forms. Aggressive tactics can involve name-calling or physically acting out. Passive-aggressive tactics are the silent treatment or secretly damaging or hiding something of value to the person who hurt them.

STEP A: **PREVENT THE BEHAVIOR (PREVENTION TOOLBOX)**

Meet the positive goal of justice. All people have some sense of justice and fairness. When people receive a kind gesture, they often want to repay the kindness. When people feel wronged, they think something should happen to “balance the scale.” Few people have the assertive communication skills to respond respectfully, so they even the score with another unkind word or deed. Some people will even attempt to hurt themselves (drugs, attempted suicide, risky behavior) to hurt others (“They’ll be sorry”) or to express how much they are hurting inside.

- ★ **Revengeful behavior is usually the result of hurt feelings or anger over a lost power struggle.** *Acknowledge feelings* before setting limits, to prevent hurt feelings. Use *choices within limits* to avoid win/lose power struggles. *Teach children assertive communication and problem-solving skills*, so they can express their hurt respectfully. If we defend ourselves, argue, or say they are “mouthing off,” they will conclude that assertiveness doesn’t work, feel more hurt and discouraged, and resort to stronger revenge tactics.

STEP B: ACKNOWLEDGE FEELINGS (CHILD PROBLEM TOOLBOX)

If the goal is revenge, people are usually feeling hurt and angry. When we *listen* to the hurt, people may not resort to revengeful behavior to *show* the hurt. When revenge has already occurred, listening rebuilds trust and *problem solving* helps people resolve their hurt and reach healthier solutions without revenge.

STEP C1: SET LIMITS (CLEAR COMMUNICATION TOOLSET)

When people do something mean on purpose, it usually causes an immediate angry reaction. It is *vital* to keep your cool and stop this reaction, but identify the feelings behind it, which are clues to the goal of the revengeful behavior. Not reacting is very different from not asserting our right to be treated with respect. Later in our response, we *will* address the negative effect of hurtful behavior and brainstorm more appropriate, healthy ways to express or resolve the hurt. If we skip Step B, Acknowledging feelings, rush through the steps, or spend too much time expressing *our* hurt, we are not addressing or resolving the *real* issue behind the revengeful behavior—the hurt feelings.

STEP C2a: IDENTIFY THE PURPOSE

When someone does something mean to us, we usually find the following clues:

- i. **We feel hurt** (either physical or emotional), *disgust*, or *disbelief*.
- ii. **We are tempted to retaliate** or *show our hurt*. We want to punish the person for hurting us or use guilt and shame to make the person feel bad. Verbal or nonverbal responses such as shock, crying, passively withdrawing, or getting angry all say, “You hurt me.”
- iii. **If we do any of these**, we continue the revenge or give the behavior a payoff. Children interpret immediate discipline as punishing revenge. Children then find a way to match this new hurt, which escalates the revenge cycle. Shame and guilt makes children feel more discouraged, which brings on new forms of intentional misbehavior. Any retaliation will escalate a revenge cycle. When parents show their hurt, they give revengeful behavior a payoff. Since children wanted to even the score by hurting back, they think, “Yes! It worked!” This reinforces the mistaken belief that revenge is an effective way to achieve justice.

STEP C2b: AVOID ESCALATING OR GIVING MISBEHAVIOR A PAYOFF

We must break revenge cycles before we address the misbehavior. Power and revenge cycles take two people. If we don’t participate, we can break the cycle. We may need to walk away temporarily to get our emotions and thoughts together. This will prevent children from seeing our hurt. This is a temporary delay, to show the behavior had no effect, not a passive withdrawal that never deals with the problem. Once we get our attitude and logic on-line, we can respond helpfully.

STEP C2c: REDIRECT THE MISBEHAVIOR

We’ve already learned how to respond to hurt feelings with the F-A-X Listening Toolset. Responding to revengeful behavior with listening is the hardest tool to use in *The Parent’s Toolshop*. When someone is

mean to us, it is *not* our natural reaction to say, “Wow, you must be really angry with me right now. Tell me how you feel.” This tool asks us to “turn the other cheek,” which means “return kindness for hurt,” not “do nothing” or “invite more hurt.” Until we acknowledge and resolve *their* hurt, children will continue to seek ways to express their feelings through revenge.

If we follow the Universal Blueprint, we can rebuild trust. Take Steps B (**A**cknowledge feelings) and C1 (**S**et limits) in one sentence, “I can tell you are really hurt and angry, but I don’t appreciate being spoken to like that.” If we need to apologize, do so now. Quickly move to the PO Toolset, because the guidelines for revenge remind us to spend more time at the Child Problem Toolbox. **F**ocus on feelings (“Tell me how you feel about what happened.”), **A**sk helpful questions (“Do you understand why I did that?”), and **X**-amine possible solutions (“What do you think we can do, instead?”). Model forgiveness. Once we resolve their hurt, children will be ready to listen to us. Then we can assert our feelings or expectations, “It’s okay to be angry, but I am more willing to listen if people express themselves respectfully.”

If children use dangerous behavior for revenge, we may need to gently restrain young children or temporarily distance ourselves from older children until everyone cools down. If we need to do either of these, we use the statements just outlined *while* taking action. For example, a young child hits a parent. The parent says the statements above *while* firmly but gently taking the child’s hands, to keep them away from the parent’s body. With older children, the parent acknowledges feelings and sets limits while walking away. “I can tell you are really angry, but I will not subject myself to this treatment. I’m willing to listen when you’ve calmed down. I’m going to calm down, too. Let me know when you want to work this out.” The parent disengages, physically and emotionally, until both have cooled off.

Once we address the hurt that caused the revengeful behavior, we need to deal with the way the child *expressed* the hurt. We can simply point out the emotional consequences of revengeful behavior using the Clear Communication Toolset. “When people feel hurt, they often hurt back, which only creates more hurt and doesn’t solve the problem.” If children damage something, we can show them how to make amends (Step C3: **R**eveal discipline). If possible, we want to use parent/child problem solving to reach this agreement. If we tell them what they *will* do, we can start a new power struggle or revenge cycle. The trust level is still shaky, so we need to carefully choose our attitudes, words, and actions.

A Personal Story. *Before I decided the best way to set allowances, I proposed a new system to my children. The allowance system was something like one dollar per year of age. The child had to split the money three ways, a third each for savings, spending, and family “taxes,” which are used to fund family activities. To pay this much, I concluded, they’d have to do more chores. After calculating the actual dollar figures, Chris realized he would be doing more chores for less spending money. I had regrettably not done the math, but didn’t want to give up the idea of trying a good way to teach responsibility. Chris saw my idea as a new way to control how much work he did and how he spent his money.*

I tried to avoid a power struggle by offering a choice between three allowance options. Amber chose the new system and I was pleased. Chris complained that I rarely paid him his allowance anyway (this was true, we rarely had enough left over after bills). The discussion was dragging on, so I pushed a final decision. It started a power struggle, so I tried to disengage. I stated the bottom line, “You need to pick one of the choices.” Chris kept trying to argue. I stopped the discussion at that point and started to walk out of the room. Chris said something like, “Why should I do more chores, you never do anything extra for me.” Now I was offended. I decided to get out of this before I got angrier. I concluded, “If you don’t want to do chores to help the family, then I’m not willing to do chores for you. You can do your own laundry for a while.” I did not say this in an angry way and, in my mind, the discipline made logical sense.

Later that week, my kids began packing for a weekend trip to Grandma’s. When they needed clean clothes, I offered to wash some for Amber. I thought if I did Chris’ laundry I wouldn’t be following through. I said, “Chris, since I’m not doing your laundry this week, you’ll need to do it yourself.”

No sooner had the words passed my lips than I heard the revenge in my plan. Here it was, a week later, that I realized that I was in a revenge cycle. I was surprised, because I wasn't feeling angry or hurt at that exact moment. I asked myself, "If this is revenge, who felt hurt and why?" I replayed the entire allowance discussion in my mind. Only then did I realize that I had forced a win/lose solution to the power struggle and was using discipline for revenge.

I called Chris into the room. We sat together and I apologized for using the laundry to get back at him. I acknowledged his feelings about the allowance being unfair. I told him my discipline was inappropriate and canceled it and the new system of allowances. We decided to do allowances as we always had. I emphasized that I was willing to do his laundry for the trip, but he insisted on doing it anyway! We hugged each other and confirmed all was okay. While I made several mistakes in this situation, I learned a lot. I recognize revenge almost immediately, now, and know the guidelines for redirecting it really work.

Withdrawal/Giving up

Children who have become deeply discouraged may finally give up. They believe they are helpless and incompetent. They give up so others won't expect anything from them. This behavior is most common when learning a task or managing a responsibility. It can also occur when children have been negatively labeled and give up, believing they are worthless.

STEP A: PREVENT THE BEHAVIOR (PREVENTION TOOLBOX)

Meet the positive goal of *withdrawal*. There are times when it is appropriate and healthy to withdraw from conflict or avoid frustration or disappointment. This withdrawal may be temporary, until the timing is better or an effective response can be planned.

Sometimes, when people feel particularly threatened or discouraged, they withdraw more than necessary—they give up. If a task seems too demanding or past attempts to resolve a conflict failed, people sometimes simply choose to quit trying. At these times, withdrawal may be unhealthy.

- ★ **When children are so *discouraged* that they've given up, use descriptive *encouragement* and teach skills.** These are the tools that can prevent *and* redirect “giving up” behavior.

Teach when withdrawal is appropriate. It is healthy to walk away from fights and arguments where continued involvement will escalate the situation. There are times when it is healthy to accept the things we cannot change and change the things we can (like *our* attitude or behavior). We want to teach this value and skill to our children.

Show unconditional love. Make it clear that children don't have to achieve anything for us to love them. Children need to know we love them, even when they fail or aren't perfect.

Focus on what's right not wrong. Avoid “constructive criticism.” Give credit for any effort children make or improvements they show, no matter how small.

Describe, don't praise. Since praise adds pressure, it usually backfires when children are deeply discouraged and have given up. More pressure does not motivate them to try again, but descriptive encouragement can.

Be gentle with mistakes. Focus on what children learn from their mistakes. Avoid perfectionism. Instead, encourage children to strive for their personal best.

Let children do things by themselves. Notice the difficulty of the task and be supportive, but don't rescue them.

Nudge, but don't push. Children give up when we push too hard or their goal can change to power. Just offer choices or quick tips. Don't push children to continue a voluntary activity if they truly aren't

interested. They may need to finish a commitment period, but then let them choose whether to continue. If they are still interested but discouraged, give encouraging nudges. This helps them weather the difficult times that naturally occur when learning a new skill.

Teach skills. Break the task into small steps. Let children try to do things their way. Offer descriptive encouragement at every step.

STEP B: ACKNOWLEDGE FEELINGS (CHILD PROBLEM TOOLBOX)

When the goal is giving up, people usually feel discouraged, frustrated, or confused. When we acknowledge these feelings, we give the feeling a name. This reassures children that their feelings are normal and it is okay to feel it. Now they can focus on resolving the *cause* of the feeling.

STEP C1: SET LIMITS (CLEAR COMMUNICATION TOOLSET)

When *we* give up, we don't reach *our* parenting goals, to develop courage, self-esteem, and confidence in our children. In one sentence, we want to acknowledge children's feelings, maybe state the negative effect of giving up, and quickly move to the next step to redirect the behavior.

STEP C2a: IDENTIFY THE PURPOSE

When children have given up we usually find the following clues:

- i. **We feel *discouraged, frustrated, or at a loss*** about what to do. We may start believing the child really *isn't* capable.
- ii. **We are tempted to *give up*** on children or *do things for them*. "Here, let me show you, it's really easy once you get the hang of it." Sometimes we agree that they aren't up to the task. "Maybe you're not cut out for sports." We might try to motivate them by pointing out what they could be doing differently (constructive criticism) or judge what they've done and reassure them of their potential. "But you're really good at that." "If you try a little harder, I'm sure you'll get the hang of it." This implies they haven't already tried hard.
- iii. **If we do any of these**, it sends the message, "You're right, you can't do this." Children feel incompetent and will not try harder. They will continue the behavior until we expect nothing from them and relieve them of their responsibilities. If we pressure with praise or push too hard, it starts power struggles or increases their commitment to give up.

STEP C2b: AVOID ESCALATING OR GIVING MISBEHAVIOR A PAYOFF

Avoid both criticism and praise. Children who have given up usually agree with criticisms and argue with or deny compliments. They insist they are incapable or "no good." If we discipline children who are already so discouraged they've given up, they withdraw even more. These tactics escalate the situation. Payoffs come from rescuing. Rescuing protects children from the possibility of failure—and the ecstasy of success. If we take over, we only confirm their incompetence and give children an easy way out. If we suggest trying something they will be better at, children learn that people should only participate in activities where they can be the best, instead of learning skills or having fun. If we allow them to quit, we teach that it's okay to give up on commitments, responsibilities, or tasks.

STEP C2c: REDIRECT THE MISBEHAVIOR

Use the tools listed in the "prevent the behavior" section. Find an area of strength to encourage. Use descriptive, observable facts and avoid value judgements like "good job." Break tasks into small steps and shift the focus to a different step, one they might find more success with. We can suggest "taking a break and coming back to it," but not imply they can "give up" on the task.

Acknowledge the difficulty of the task and express faith in their abilities. Focus on what they are learning or what they enjoy about the activity, rather than whether they succeed. Allow them to experience mistakes that aren’t dangerous. If we help, *ask* if they want a demonstration, then work side by side, doing the task *together*. We do not want to take over or do it completely for them. We also want to be careful not to make the task look easy for us to do. Express the difficulty we have, or had when we first learned how to do the task. Instead of commenting on the quality of their job, we can always point out positive qualities we admire, such as a willingness to try and perseverance.

***A Personal Story.** Chris’ teacher called to say he had failed one test because he hadn’t studied and was making careless mistakes on homework. She acknowledged this was not a big deal, since his grade was still in the “B” range, but just wanted to bring it to my attention. When I told Chris about the phone call and asked him how he felt about his grades, he said, “I don’t care.” Chris often talks about schoolwork like it’s no big deal, but he’s actually quite self-motivated and disciplined, so I asked what he learned from not studying. In a defiant tone of voice, he replied, “Nothing.” I was surprised by this uncaring, almost hostile attitude. I was tempted to say, “You’d better start caring!” But his uncharacteristic behavior tipped me off that this was an “onion.” I shifted into listening mode. At first, he didn’t share anything and gave one-word, “nothing” answers to my questions. I just acknowledged, “So right now you don’t care about that, huh?” He was not giving me many clues to work with. As I clarified the few details he did volunteer, I mentioned the teacher’s concern for him. He began to cry and poured out details about times when the teacher singled him out and criticized him. She had called him into the hallway (which is normally only done when someone is in trouble) and said, “I’m so disappointed in you. You could have gotten an “A” on this test. If you’d just put a little more effort into studying, you could be doing better work.” Chris thought she wasn’t giving him credit for his efforts and other good grades. She also moved his seat (which isn’t normally done unless someone is causing trouble), because she thought he was having trouble concentrating near several disruptive students.*

*I acknowledged how it could appear as though the teacher was picking on him. I tried to present the teacher’s perspective, that she liked him so much that she wanted the best for him. She didn’t realize her words were discouraging or that he had misinterpreted her actions. He was unwilling to discuss or work out the problem directly with the teacher, choosing instead to hold a grudge and glare at her during class. We discussed **his** goals and how **he** felt about his grades. His self-motivation was shrinking and he was too angry and discouraged to do anything about it.*

*Since he wasn’t willing to meet with the teacher and the problem was continuing, I carefully considered whether to get involved. I made a few phone calls to friends who had children in his class and asked some open-ended questions, without sharing any details that would violate Chris’ confidentiality or make the teacher look bad. They were able to get information from their children that confirmed everything **had** happened just as Chris described it. I decided to talk to the teacher, positive that her intentions were caring, but her words were unintentionally discouraging. Once I explained how Chris saw and interpreted her words and actions, she understood how he had misunderstood her intentions. She assured me how much she liked, respected, and admired Chris. I told her **Chris** was the one who needed to hear that from her. She thanked me for bringing the problem to her attention and said she’d learned an important lesson about using positive ways to express concerns in the future. She suggested apologizing, which I thought would help, but I asked her not to do it alone in the hall. ☺*

IMPORTANT POINTS TO REMEMBER ☆☆☆☆

The guidelines we’ve learned and stories we’ve read emphasize several important points about PO misbehavior:

- **Deliberate is the key word in identifying PO behavior.** Children know better and have the skills to behave properly, but *deliberately* misbehave.
- **PU behavior can turn into PO behavior, if it gets a reaction or payoff.**

- **Children can use emotions, rather than behavior, to meet any of the four goals.** For example, children can “turn on the tears” to get attention or their way. They can cry to get revenge, hoping parents will feel bad for “making kids cry.” They can cry out of despair and discouragement. Parents need to correctly identify *why* children are crying: to express sadness (a Child problem), communicate needs (PU), or when tears seem forced or insincere (PO). Then they will know how best to respond.
- **Misbehavior might not immediately stop.** It takes time for both parents and children to break the habit of getting hooked in these cycles. Sometimes children may be testing to see if they can get the predictable response or might want a face-saving way to prove *they* stopped the behavior, not us. We can walk away and give children time to think about what we said and change their behavior without an audience.
- **If we don't break power or revenges cycles before we discipline, it turns the discipline into a power play or revenge tactic.** Don't immediately discipline a behavior just for the sake of responding quickly. It can make matters worse. Don't skip steps, just move through them quickly.
- **At whatever point we realize we are facing PO behavior, we begin following the PO a-b-c identification process and PASRR response formula.** It's better to get back on track than to continue in an ineffective direction, just for the sake of following through on what we said when we were hooked into the misbehavior.
- **Giving up behavior always involves passive behavior, but passive misbehavior does not always serve the goal of giving up. Passive misbehavior can also serve other goals.** We must look at the a-b-c clues (“How do we feel,” etc.), to correctly identify the true purpose. Children can get *attention* by acting shy. They can passively exert *power* by procrastinating, forgetting, partially completing a task, or claiming to have forgotten. The silent treatment is a passive form of *revenge*.
- **One behavior can serve more than one purpose.** For example, when children don't clean their rooms, we must first eliminate the possibility that the behavior is really PU. Do they have the skills and consistently shown us they can do the chore? If so, and we are sure it's PO, they might be seeking *attention* to get us involved. They could also be exerting *power*, challenging us to “make them.” If parents use power to force the issue, children might stuff things under their beds in “defiant compliance.” They might refuse to clean their room as a *pay back* for a hurt. Children may feel so overwhelmed and incapable they *give up*.

The only way to tell which goal it is in *each* instance is to consider the three clue-finding statements. As we respond, the goal can change and the next time we see the same behavior, the goal might be different. With time, we see the clues more quickly and can respond more helpfully.

- **The purpose behind misbehavior can shift.** If children try to get attention and it doesn't work, they might try to use power. The most common shift is a lost power struggle turning into a revenge cycle. We need to stay in touch with our feelings and how we are *tempted* to react (but not act on them) so we can see the clues that tell us the goal has shifted. When we notice a goal shift, we adjust our response accordingly. (You can see why keeping our cool, staying logical, and regular practice are all so important. That's why we waited so long to learn this toolset! We use every tool we've learned so far!)
- **Each goal represents a deeper level of discouragement.** The revenge and giving up stories are good illustrations of how goals shifted as the child became more discouraged. A child who is seeking attention is less discouraged than a child seeking revenge. Children who have given up are the most discouraged of all. This does not mean, however, that shifts in behavior *always* follow a

predictable pattern: attention to power, to revenge, and finally giving up. Sometimes, when we try to walk away from a power struggle, children follow us, trying to get our attention! Again, look for the clues so you know when and how the goal has changed.

PO COMBINATION PROBLEMS

We’ve been talking mostly about situations that are clearly or exclusively PO problems. What about situations where PO behavior is just one part of the total picture?

C/PO Problems

Whenever there is a Child problem, we always want to address that part of the problem first. The Child problem is often the real issue underlying the PO behavior—if we resolve *it*, the PO behavior might disappear. Other times, there are two different problems in one situation. We still want to resolve the Child problem first, unless we must respond to the PO behavior immediately. If this is the case, move through the Universal PASRR steps quickly, making sure to include Step B: **A**cknowledge feelings (Child Problem Toolbox). Once we’ve taken care of the immediate PO problem, we want to come back to the Child problem and resolve it.

Some homework and school problems illustrate important points about C/PO combination problems. When children don’t do homework *on purpose*, the goal could be any of the four purposes of misbehavior. Children can “act stupid” so teachers (or parents) will pay attention and spend time helping them. Children might also want to prove that they are in control, by doing nothing. “You can’t make me do my homework.” Power can also be the goal if children want to see if giving up will make us take over and do the work for them. After all, if someone else is willing to take responsibility for remembering homework or thinking of answers, why not let them? Children might believe giving up on homework will “punish” a disliked teacher or hurt parents. If good grades are important to a parent and children want to hurt the parent, getting poor grades is revenge. Most often, however, children do not do their homework because they are extremely discouraged and have given up.

***A Personal Story.** The only “F” I ever got was in fourth grade math. The teacher was grumpy and mean and had flunked my brother five years earlier. Because I was left-handed, she wouldn’t help me learn to write in cursive. She showed everyone the right-handed way and told me, “Just do it the opposite way.” If I asked for help, she said, “Figure it out.”*

I was discouraged because I wasn’t getting the help (attention) I was legitimately entitled to. I finally concluded that if she was going to treat me this way, I wasn’t going to do the homework she asked me to do. This would “show her.” I did all my homework—except math.

I hadn’t really thought about report card day. When I saw the “F,” I thought about changing it to an “A,” but knew it would be too obvious. I prepared myself for my parents’ reaction. Fortunately, my parents knew how to do effective listening and problem solving by this time. My mom commented on all my As and Bs first. I knew she wasn’t blind and actually enjoyed a few moments of pride. She asked me how I felt about the F and what I thought happened. I told her my logic. Instead of lecturing me, she asked open-ended questions such as, “Who really suffered when you didn’t do your homework? What other options do you have for dealing with this teacher?” We both knew this teacher wouldn’t change, so my plan was just to survive that year.

I realized on my own, without a parental lecture, that I was only hurting myself by failing math. I decided to do the best I could in math—for me. The following grading period, I brought my grade up to a “C.” By fifth grade, I was on honor roll. Had my parents punished me for the grade, I might not have learned this lesson. Knowing me, a power and control child who was already discouraged, I might have resorted to another type of misbehavior.

C/PU/PO Problems

In most cases, problem behavior is *either* PU *or* PO, but rarely both at the same time. Usually, the reason children are misbehaving is because they don't have the skills to express themselves appropriately and choose misbehavior to express their goals. The *real* cause of the behavior is PU, a lack of skills.

A Graduate's Story. Jackie, eight, is my youngest daughter. I admit to spoiling my last child, my "baby." I was planning to be away from home for a week and told Jackie ahead of time so she would have time to prepare for my absence. Jackie was upset about my impending vacation. She became moody, short-tempered, and smart-alecky. She even yelled at me, "You don't love me! You wouldn't leave me if you loved me!"

What type of problem is this? The core of this onion is a Child problem, Jackie's sense of loss and abandonment. At eight, she doesn't understand why her mother must leave and is taking the decision personally. She feels hurt by her mother's decision, so she uses guilt trips for revenge (PO) *and* to express her feelings the only way she knows (PU). Since Jackie has shown that she can behave properly and has not acted this way before, her behavior seems deliberate. When we look further, however, we see the underlying issues. Instead of reacting to the PO behavior, Karen needs to help Jackie work through her feelings of loss, anger, and hurt (Child Problem Toolbox). If Karen can teach Jackie how to express herself appropriately (PU and Independence Toolsets), then Jackie won't have to use PO behavior to meet her needs in the future.

Always try to resolve the problem that is closest to the center of the onion. If we resolve *this* problem, the more surface behaviors and issues sometimes take care of themselves or are much more manageable.

THE GOALS OF ADULT MISBEHAVIOR

Parental reactions can follow the attention → power → revenge → giving up cycle and can serve all four goals. Some frustrated and angry parents yell or spank to get a child's *attention*, although it doesn't serve any positive purpose. Parents frequently discipline or give orders to exert their *power*. Parents use punishment, which makes children suffer for their mistakes, to get *revenge*. Some parents give in or *give up*, just to avoid conflict. All these approaches escalate the misbehavior cycle or give children a payoff. Instead of repeating unhelpful cycles, we can identify *our* goal and choose healthier responses to meet that goal.

In troubled adult relationships, like unhappy marriages, adults may try to get people's *attention*, to let them know there is a problem. If their polite and positive attempts fail, they may use louder, more negative ways to get attention. If these attempts fail, adults often argue or make threats, to see if they can get their way (*power*). If they lose the power struggle, they feel hurt and seek *revenge*. "You'll see how it feels to be treated the way you treat me." As the revenge cycle continues, both parties resort to more extreme behaviors and the relationship quickly deteriorates. If adults don't heal hurts at this level and use healthier conflict resolution skills, irreparable damage to the relationship can occur. Finally, when adults experience nothing but emotional pain, they *give up*. Couples divorce, but if children are involved, they often use the children to continue their power and/or revenge cycles.

When adults want to get another person's attention, we can use the Cooperation or Clear Communication Toolsets. If they ignore our attempts, we can try to negotiate a win/win agreement. If others use PO behavior with us, recognize what's really going on, avoid escalating the situation or giving a payoff, and respond in ways that break these cycles. Notice positive behavior, no matter how small, when people aren't expecting or demanding it. If others try to argue with us, we can set limits for *ourselves* (what we are willing to do or endure) and disengage. If we recognize revengeful behavior, acknowledge the other

person’s hurt and rebuild trust. If we are totally discouraged, we need to encourage ourselves and the other person. Positive, encouraging, or empathetic statements can have amazing, almost miraculous, results. Sometimes all efforts fail and we need to end a relationship in the healthiest way possible, for our own safety, self-respect, and inner peace.

LYING

When children lie, parents must first ask themselves “Why?” What purpose did the lie serve? We can avoid giving the lie a payoff or making the situation worse with our reaction. Instead, we show children how to meet this goal without lying. These three steps are consistent with the PO Toolset.

Motives for Lying

Lying is intentional behavior and the motives fit the four purposes of misbehavior.³ These motives apply to both children’s and adult lies. Here is a list of some types of lies and their related goals:

Lying for Attention

- **Getting a reaction.** Exaggerated stories and imaginative stories get people’s attention.
- **Acceptance by peer group.** Sometimes, children lie to do something with their peers they know is forbidden. Other times, adults question children about their peers’ wrongdoing and children feel pressured by their peers to lie. Research shows that children almost always tell the truth when interviewed alone, but almost none tell the truth when interviewed in pairs! Parents need to acknowledge the difficulty of telling the truth at these times. A quick reminder about the value of honesty and possible effects of lying are helpful, before pressing children further.

Lying for Power

- **Fooling people.** People feel powerful if they tell a false story and the listener believes it.
- **Avoiding punishment/lecture.** When there is a problem, parents may angrily ask, “Did you do this?” If children say “yes,” they know they will definitely get in trouble. If they say “no,” they have *some* chance of not getting in trouble. Guess which choice most make?

Fear of harsh or unjust punishment and long lectures is the main reason people lie.

- **Protecting privacy.** Children may lie when parents ask prying questions. If lying works, children prove they have the power to prevent parents from knowing everything. (Remember the “Respect Their Privacy” section in Chapter 6, “Independence Toolset”?)
- **Getting something that’s forbidden.** When people think a request will be denied, they may sneak or lie to get it. Some examples are shoplifting, having an unchaperoned party, or experimenting with cutting one’s own hair. These lies usually need a planned alibi. When parents catch these lies, they are particularly angry, because the child had to plan the misdeed *and* the lie.

Lying for Revenge

- **Getting justice for a hurt.** When people are hurt, they lose respect for and trust in the person who hurt them and may lie to “even the score.”

Lying because the person has given up

- **Feeling discouraged with honesty.** When others don’t believe truthful statements, people may give up and lie.

Lying and Development

There are five stages of understanding and practicing truth and lying, but age is only one factor. Not everyone reaches the final stage and many adults never go beyond the second stage. When people feel strong emotions, they may revert to an earlier stage.

1. By age 4, children are honest (or lie) to get their own way, get rewards and to avoid punishment.
2. By age 5 or 6, children are honest (or lie) to please adults. Children may tell adults what they think the adults want to hear. If the lies during these first two stages work and children get their way often, they can become manipulative or more chronic liars.
3. Around ages 6–8, children's honesty (and lying) is motivated by what's in it for them. At this stage, if adults around them model lying, children will believe that lying is okay.
4. Around ages 8–12, children are honest (or lie) so others will think well of them. At this age, children also shift their focus from wanting to please parents to wanting the approval of their friends. They may lie if they think their peers expect them to.
5. Ages 12 and older are usually honest because they want to be good citizens or lie because it is a habit.

Two age periods are especially important. One is somewhere around three or four, when children can tell a deliberate lie. Adolescence is the other crucial period, because teens are capable of understanding that lying destroys trust. Whether teens reach the final stage of learning honesty depends on several factors: how well parents handle their teens' need for privacy, whether they grant their teens more responsibility over new areas of their lives, and how they react to the truthful (but difficult to hear) statements their teens share.

Parental Influences on Lying

Children who lie most often have parents who also lie frequently: Lying to the traffic cop, asking children to lie for parents (“Tell (the telephone caller) I’m not here.”), or not admitting their mistakes. Such commonplace deceits often go unnoticed—by parents, that is.

Parents usually lie to avoid conflict, to protect children from an unpleasant or dangerous situation, to benefit themselves or to be tactful. There *are* ways to be both truthful in these situations. “My dad can’t come to the phone right now. Please call later.” (Actually, adults should speak for themselves, instead of using children to help them avoid uncomfortable situations!)

It is also important to teach children the difference between “good” secrets and “bad” secrets. “Good” secrets are surprises that make people feel good (as in birthday gifts). “Bad” secrets make the secret-keeper feel uncomfortable or hide something others *should* know (as in sexual abuse).

Parents also lie to their children to protect them from knowing about potentially upsetting situations. Once parents lie about these situations, they must continue lying to answer children's questions and keep the false story alive. (See the “Children and Stress” section of Chapter 9, “Keep Your Cool Toolset,” for more information about discussing these topics with children.)

A Personal Story. In 1995, a four-year-old girl was missing. The girl's picture filled television screens and the front pages of newspapers. Children could hardly avoid seeing or hearing about the missing girl and many joined the search effort. Many parents used the situation as a reminder to their children to “never talk to strangers.”

After several days, police found the girl's body and within days her mother was charged with the murder. Children who knew about the missing girl still asked about her. Now parents had a dilemma; how could they explain that the cute little girl was dead and it was the girl's mother, not a stranger, who killed her? Some parents made up lies to protect their children from the

grim reality. The children’s continuing questions about the girl prompted these parents to tell even more lies. The more lies they told, the more guilty they felt about lying.

One neighborhood brought in a panel of experts, of which I was one, to allow parents to discuss their feelings and get advice about explaining this situation to their children. We encouraged parents to tell their children the truth, as difficult as it was, in a factual but reassuring way, saying the mother did something very wrong and the child was not at fault.

Children from bitter divorces lie more than children from intact families or from respectful divorces. Divorce is *always* traumatic for children, but one of the biggest factors in the children’s adjustment is their parents’ treatment of each other in front of and away from the children. Children of bitter divorces suffer from the lies and half-truths angry parents tell them to gain the child’s loyalty. Visitation and custody disputes can divide children’s loyalties and disrupt their lives. Children love both parents, but angry parents may criticize an ex-spouse or use the children as pawns in the parents’ struggle for control. The emotional damage to children and the relationship between the adults who must still parent them can take decades to heal.

Privacy is especially important to children who are trying to survive the delicate balancing act of living in two worlds and pleasing two separate parents. When parents grill their children about an ex-spouse’s activities, children may lie or hide information, knowing it could be used against them (or the other parent) later. To avoid putting children in situations in which lies seem the only way out, parents must develop a short “need to know” list. This list might include whether children are sick while visiting the other parent or if children are physically or emotionally abused. Beyond this, parents can be friendly nonjudgmental listeners, if children feel like talking. It takes enormous self-discipline to suppress questions and criticisms, but parents need to remember *they* are the adults and act like it.

Parents start with their children’s trust, but as children grow older, they must earn it.

Preventing and Responding to Lies

- **Model truthfulness.** We want to be clear with our children that we do not accept lying and why—and then practice what we preach.
- **Teach truthfulness.** It is best to teach truthfulness repetitively, not only after children have already lied. Share events from the newspaper and talk with children about the hardships people experience because of their mistakes and lies. Almost every fairy tale poses a moral problem. Parents can use these opportunities to discuss decision-making and the results of truth and dishonesty.
- **Practice balanced parenting and respectful discipline.** Children need to feel safe enough to admit their wrongdoing. When parents use power punishments that are harsh or unfair, children are more likely to lie. When there is too little parental supervision, children can get away with lying often, so they become quite skilled at it. When parents use reasonable, respectful discipline, children are more likely to be truthful. Studies have found that children from balanced families not only lied less, but showed a stronger belief in moral behavior.
- **If you suspect a lie, try not to respond in anger, although you will probably feel hurt and betrayed.** Remember what it was like to be a child and how hard being honest can be. Try to understand the child’s motive and use problem solving, instead of only punishing the child.
- **Believe children, unless you have good reason to be suspicious.** Too often, parents presume children are guilty unless the children can prove themselves innocent. If children have lied in the past, don’t hold a grudge and suspect lying even when children are being truthful. When we disbelieve truthful children, the damage can be severe. Be willing to forgive and start rebuilding trust.

- **Question children in ways that encourage them to be truthful. *Don't try to trap children in a lie.*** For example, a parent finds an empty bottle of alcohol in the trash and asks, "What did you and John do while you were playing pool in the family room last night?" If you have reason to suspect a problem, maintain self-control, be up-front with what you know, and present it respectfully. "I just found . . . I need to know the truth about . . ."
- **Reassure children that you won't be as angry if they tell the truth**—and then keep your cool as you listen. Deal with the problem and thank them for taking the risk to be honest. Depending on the offense, consider not disciplining or disciplining less, when children are honest about their mistakes. This doesn't mean we "plea-bargain" about more or less discipline.
- **Have separate disciplines, one for the actual misdeed and an additional one for lying.** Children need to understand that these are two separate disciplines for two different offenses. The discipline for lying can reflect the breakdown in trust. For example, when teens miss curfew and lie about why they were late there are two problems. An appropriate discipline for the missed curfew is to give up social privileges for one or a few nights. Teens can rebuild trust by agreeing to call home once or twice during the evening, when their privileges are restored.

***A Personal Story.** One night, when Amber was six, I saw that her bed sheet had been cut or ripped. I said, "Look at this big rip! Did you do this?" Her nonverbal language said, "Yes," but I could tell she was considering lying, probably because I sounded upset. I quickly changed my tone of voice and approach. I said, "This sheet has been cut. It was either cut a little bit and it tore more or the whole thing was cut. Can you tell me which?" She was still hesitant and whispered, "Will I get in trouble if I tell?" I said, "If you lie, you will be in double trouble, for lying **and** cutting the sheet. If you tell the truth, you might or might not get in trouble for cutting the sheet. I would need to ask you a few questions first."*

She admitted to cutting the sheet by nodding her head "Yes" ever so slightly. I said, "Thank you for being honest. I know it's scary to talk about something that might get you in trouble, but it's important to tell the truth. I won't get as angry about what you did if I know it took extra courage to tell the truth. What were you thinking when you cut the sheet?" She shrugged her shoulders. I said, "You just had the idea and didn't think first?" She nodded. I continued, "How did you feel when you cut the sheet?" "Bad," she replied. "So you realized you did something wrong," I reflected back. She nodded. "What did you learn about using scissors on cloth?" She didn't say anything. I said, "Do you see how scissors ruin cloth forever?" She nodded, "Yes." I asked, "Will you do this again?" She shook her head, "No." "Will you tell me the next time you do something wrong?" She nodded her head, "Yes."

I concluded, "Since you were honest with me, realize what you did was wrong, and promise not to do it again, I won't take the scissors away. But I won't buy a new sheet, either. You'll have to sleep with this hole in it. Just think before you cut something again, okay?" She looked relieved and nodded her head "Yes." While we hugged, I said, "It can be hard to be honest sometimes. But you usually get in more trouble lying. I hope you feel better being honest." She nodded "Yes."

SUMMARY OF LYING

It's hard to lie if . . .

- the stakes are high.
- they respect the target of the lie.
- they are inexperienced in lying.
- the target of the lie is hard to mislead.
- others who know the truth will witness the lie.
- they will be disciplined for lying.
- the discipline for the misdeed is fair.

It's easy to lie if . . .

- the stakes are low.
- the target of the lie is harsh and unfair.
- they have successfully lied often.
- the target of the lie is gullible.
- the person can have time to plan ahead.
- there is no consequence for lying.
- they will get punished, not disciplined, for the misdeed.

SUMMARY OF PO PROBLEMS

This chapter has *two* summary pages. The first takes the universal process of handling PO problems and *compares* the goals of PO behavior at each step. The second summary page (with cartoons) lists each goal and the steps of identifying and responding to that type of PO behavior.

COMPARING PO BEHAVIOR GOALS AT EACH STEP

Step A: Prevent the behavior by meeting the positive goal

- **Attention.** Involve child in meaningful ways. Foster a sense of importance and belonging.
- **Power.** Promote independence, offer choices in limits, make requests in positive words.
- **Revenge.** Acknowledge feelings and teach assertive respectful communication.
- **Giving up.** Use descriptive encouragement and teach skills.

Step B: Identify and Acknowledge the feelings beneath the behavior.

- **Attention.** Children are usually feeling lonely, unimportant, rejected, or forgotten.
- **Power.** Children are usually feeling frustrated, disappointed or out of control.
- **Revenge.** Children are usually feeling hurt or angry.
- **Giving up.** Children are usually feeling deeply discouraged, frustrated, or confused.

Step C1: Set limits or state your concerns

STEP C2a: IDENTIFY THE PURPOSE

i. We feel . . .

- . . . annoyed, irritated, tired, or hounded, when the goal is **attention**.
- . . . others are challenging our authority, when the goal is **power**.
- . . . hurt, shocked, or disgusted, when the goal is **revenge**.
- . . . frustrated, discouraged, or hopeless, when the goal is **giving up**.

ii. We are tempted to . . .

- . . . remind, nag, and push away, when the goal is **attention**.
- . . . argue, punish, or give in, when the goal is **power**.
- . . . show hurt or hurt back, when the goal is **revenge**.
- . . . rescue, pressure, criticize, praise, or expect less, when the goal is **giving up**.

iii. If we do any of these, we either escalate the cycle or reward the behavior.

- We still give **attention** when we remind, nag, or show we are bothered.
- We feed the **power** struggle when we argue and reward it when we give in.
- We add to the **revenge** cycle when we hurt back and reward it when we show hurt.
- We discourage children who are **giving up** when we criticize and reward them by rescuing.

STEP C2b: AVOID ESCALATING OR GIVING MISBEHAVIOR A PAYOFF

STEP C2c: REDIRECT THE MISBEHAVIOR

Attention. Stop *once*; use PASRR. Offer positive attention. Ignore the behavior, not the child.

Power. Offer choices within limits. Disengage, emotionally and/or physically.

Revenge. Rebuild trust by resolving the child's hurt *first*. Offer acceptable anger alternatives.

Giving up. Break tasks into smaller parts. Focus on *any* effort or improvement. Express faith in the child's abilities. Use problem solving.

Step C3: Reveal Discipline

Only discipline *after* breaking the PO cycle. Immediate discipline, as a first response, escalates PO behavior or gives it a payoff.

- Immediate discipline gives negative **attention**, which is better than no attention.
- Children interpret discipline as a **power** play punishment and may seek revenge.
- Discipline becomes a **revenge** weapon of punishment. It feeds the cycle.
- Children who are **giving up** feel even more discouraged and incompetent.

RESPONDING TO



ATTENTION

Positive belief: Involvement, belonging, to feel important.

Negative belief: “I only belong if I’m noticed.”

Reinforce positive/prevent negative: Plan ahead. Spend time together. Give attention unexpectedly. Involve child. Recognize efforts.

Identify the goal of attention:

I feel . . . Annoyed, irritated, personal space violated, tired, frustrated.

I’m tempted to . . . Remind, nag, give undue service, “Stop,” “Leave me alone.”

If I do . . . reactions give negative attention (pay-off), behavior temporarily stops, escalates, or new behaviors keep parent involved.

Avoid: Reinforcing negative behavior or giving special service on demand.

Redirect: Stop *once*. In one sentence, use Universal PASRR formula. Offer acceptable activities. Then ignore the behavior, not the child. Involve child, if possible. Give attention for positive behavior. Use prevention tools above.

PO BEHAVIOR



POWER

Positive belief: “I want to make decisions and have some control in my life.”

Negative belief: “I only belong if I’m in control.”

Reinforce positive/prevent negative: Offer choices within limits. Ask for their help. Build teamwork. Word limits in positive words. Involve in decisions. Teach skills and let go.

Identify the goal of power:

I feel . . . Provoked, authority is challenged.

I’m tempted to . . . Argue, exert more power, or give in. “I’ll show you who’s the boss.”

If I do . . . Arguing escalates power struggle. Child passively or aggressively defies. Giving in gives a pay-off.

Avoid: arguing or giving in. Break the cycle before disciplining.

Redirect: Keep your cool. Be kind and firm. Use bottom line limits and offer choices one last time. Decide what you will do, not what you’ll make child do. Disengage, emotionally and/or physically. Use prevention skills above.



REVENGE

Positive belief: “Good deeds deserve repayment.”

Negative belief: “I must hurt others who hurt me.”

Reinforce positive/prevent negative: Use listening and communication to avoid hurting feelings. Teach assertive, respectful conflict resolution skills.

Identify the goal of revenge:

I feel . . . Hurt, physically or emotionally. Disappointed, disbelief, disgusted.

I’m tempted to . . . Show hurt or hurt back. “How could you do this to me?”

If I do . . . showing hurt gives a payoff. Retaliation escalates revenge cycle.

Avoid: Hurting back or showing hurt. Break cycle before disciplining.

Redirect: Disengage. Cool off. Rebuild trust. Acknowledge child’s hurt first, *before* addressing revengeful behavior. Brainstorm acceptable anger alternatives. Suggest child make amends for hurt. Use prevention tools above.



GIVING UP

Positive belief: Withdrawal. “I can avoid conflict when it’s healthy to do so.” “I want reassurance.”

Negative belief: “I don’t belong because I’m incompetent.” “Don’t expect anything from me.”

Reinforce positive/prevent negative: Describe any effort or improvement. Teach skills.

Identify the goal of giving up:

I feel . . . Frustrated, discouraged, hopeless.

I’m tempted to . . . Help, rescue, praise, give up, expect less.

If I do . . . Rescuing gives a payoff for giving up. Praise and pressure escalates. Child feels more incompetent and fails to respond.

Avoid: Praise, all criticism and comparisons. Don’t rescue, give up, or pity.

Redirect: Break task into smaller parts. Focus on any effort or improvement, no matter how small. Express faith in abilities. Build on interests and strengths. Use problem-solving. Use prevention tools above.

PRACTICE EXERCISES

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

A. Identifying Positive Goals. Each of the following situations is an example of a child using positive behavior to meet a positive goal of behavior. Write the letter of the positive goal in the left column next to the most appropriate example in the right column.

- | | | |
|-----------------------------|-------|---|
| a. Involvement/Recognition | _____ | 1. Bonnie's mother bought her a new outfit as a surprise, so tonight she washes the supper dishes and cleans the kitchen floor as a surprise to her mother. |
| b. Independence | | |
| c. Justice/Fairness | _____ | 2. Katie, 5, shows her Dad a picture she colored. |
| d. Withdrawal from conflict | _____ | 3. George, 5, is playing with his little sister, who's two-years-old. When she grabs the blocks he is playing with, he just uses what's left. He doesn't say anything and lets her play with the blocks she took. |
| | _____ | 4. Toby, 17, saved his money for a used bike. He purchased a broken bike for half the cost of most bikes. He wants to fix it himself, as a hobby. |

B. One Behavior, More than One Goal? Each of the following behaviors can serve more than one of the four goals of behavior: Attention, Power, Revenge, or Giving up. Explain how the behavior serves each purpose. Hint: Some don't serve all four purposes. Just write "n/a" if it does not apply.

- Refusing to talk (not a shy personality trait).
 - How can this behavior give the child more *attention*?
 - How can this behavior give the child more *power*?
 - How can this behavior help the child seek *revenge*?
 - How can this behavior show the child has *given up*?
- Running away.
 - How can this behavior give the child more *attention*?
 - How can this behavior give the child more *power*?
 - How can this behavior help the child seek *revenge*?
 - How can this behavior show the child has *given up*?
- Boredom, "I don't have anything to do."
 - How can this behavior give the child more *attention*?
 - How can this behavior give the child more *power*?
 - How can this behavior help the child seek *revenge*?
 - How can this behavior show the child has *given up*?

C. Identifying and Responding to Negative Goals. In each of the following situations, use the PO a-b-c process to identify the goal. Suggest ways to prevent the misbehavior and redirect it.

- Chelsea, 4, was told she had to play with a girl who came to visit with her mother. She does not like this girl. Chelsea tricked the girl into letting her paint her from head to toe. Now Chelsea has locked herself in the bathroom. She won't come out because she is sure she'll get punished.
 - What is the purpose behind Chelsea painting the girl?
 - Is there more than one goal involved?
 - What is Chelsea's motive for hiding in the bathroom?
 - How could her mother have prevented this from happening?
 - How can her mother respond helpfully?

2. A teacher accused Paul, 8, of cheating on a test. He says he didn’t cheat, which is the truth. The teacher doesn’t believe him, because the other child’s test answers are so similar and Paul did better on a test than usual. Paul said he studied much harder than usual for this test. The teacher gives him a zero on the test and won’t let him retake the test or make up the work. He will get a “D,” a failing grade. He figures a “D” is as bad as an “F,” so he stops studying and starts cutting this class.
 - What is the purpose of Paul’s behavior?
 - What can Paul and his parents do?
3. Jeff, 11, has a habit of running the heel of his hand up people’s backs and through their hair, saying “Zoom!” He laughs, but it irritates and aggravates others. Despite telling Jeff, “Stop it! I don’t like that,” he continues.
 - What is the purpose of Jeff’s behavior?
 - How could his family prevent this from happening?
 - When it does happen, how can they respond helpfully?
4. Shawn, 12, broke his collarbone the weekend before the summer school break. He can’t swim for three weeks or play sports for two months. Shawn was looking forward to an active summer. He doesn’t want to watch the other kids having fun, so he just hangs around the house. After one week, he’s going stir crazy. He walks to a friend’s house and rides the friend’s bike home—with one arm and no helmet! When Shawn’s parents express concerns about reinjuring his collarbone, Shawn argues with them.
 - What is the purpose of Shawn’s behavior?
 - Is there more than one goal involved?
 - How can Shawn’s parents respond helpfully?
5. Glen, 14, repeatedly ignores his stepfather’s requests, such as “Turn out the light before leaving a room.” Glen’s comment is, “You’re standing there, you turn it out.” His stepfather stands there with his jaw dropped, in shock. When his stepfather pushes the issue, Glen becomes angry, yells “You’re not my Dad,” and usually walks out of the house.
 - What is the purpose of Glen’s behavior?
 - Is there more than one goal involved?
 - How could his stepfather prevent this from happening?
 - When it does happen, how can his stepfather respond helpfully?

D. Breaking Misbehavior Cycles. In the following scenario, the parent is trying to prevent and respond to a situation using effective parenting skills. The child, however, is still trying to get the parent hooked into a PO goal. Answer the questions.

1. Maria, 13, and her mother used to get into a lot of power struggles and arguments before her mom took a parenting class. Now, even when Mom gives her choices or avoids threats, Maria still tries to argue with her. On Wednesday, Mom told Maria, “The laundry needs done by Sunday evening.” Maria interrupts her and reacts as though her Mom said it had to be done yesterday! She twists her words around, complaining “I can’t go out or do anything all week!”
 - What is the purpose of Maria’s behavior?
 - What can Mom say or do next, without making matters worse?
 - Is there anything Mom could have done differently to prevent this?
2. Since George, 12, entered junior high, his friends have changed. Last night, when he came home, his eyes were bloodshot and he was not acting like himself. His parents confronted him, insisting he had been using alcohol or marijuana. After a heated argument, George admitted he had tried both, but only once. His parents forbade him from seeing those friends again. George says his parents are overreacting and that they can’t stop him from seeing the friends, since they go to school together.
 - What is George’s goal?
 - Is there anything George’s parents could have done differently when they first confronted him?
 - What can they do now, to address their concerns?

Detailed Answers

A. Identifying Positive Goals.

1. Answer is c. Bonnie did the dishes to repay her mother's kindness, which is *justice/fairness*.
2. Answer is a. Katie is showing her picture to get her father's *involvement/recognition*.
3. Answer is d. George *withdraws from conflict* with his little sister.
4. Answer is b. Toby is excited about doing his hobby *independently*.

B. One Behavior, More than One Goal?

1. Refusing to talk can get extra *attention* when people fuss to get them to talk. They can have *power* by getting people to talk for them or by ignoring a request. It can be *revenge*, if it is the silent treatment. It could also be *giving up*, if they are afraid to talk or afraid of criticism if their speech sounds "funny."
2. Running away can be a way to get *attention*, if children feel neglected. It is a cry to "notice me!" Or "Show me you care enough to find me." It can be *power*, if it is a way to refuse to cooperate with rules, defy punishment, or show the child can't be controlled. It can be *revenge*, if done in retaliation for punishment. It can also be *giving up*, if children have tried to resolve the parent/child problem, but failed.
3. Boredom can be a way to get *attention*, if children want more parental involvement. It can be *power*; if children want the parent to be responsible for entertaining them. *Revenge* doesn't apply here. Boredom can also be used to *give up*, if children don't have skills to entertain themselves or really can't think of anything to do.

C. Identifying and Redirecting Negative Goals.

1. Chelsea, 4, resented that her Mom *made her* play with a girl she didn't like. She decided to get *revenge* on the girl. When she realized she'd be punished, Chelsea exerted her *power* by locking herself in the bathroom. Chelsea's mom can first acknowledge Chelsea's feelings, "I know you are upset and feel bad about what you did to _____. If you come out now and help clean up _____, you won't be punished. If you don't help clean up _____, you'll be in 'double trouble.' We'll discuss your discipline after she leaves." Mom can acknowledge the little girl's feelings and Chelsea's, while cleaning up the girl. She can encourage Chelsea to apologize, but not force the issue. If Chelsea helps clean her at all, she is showing her regret. After the child has left, Mom can discuss Chelsea's feelings further and what options she has when she doesn't want to play with someone. An appropriate discipline would be giving up play privileges for a brief period.
2. Paul, 8, was falsely accused of cheating on a test. Because Paul's teacher had labeled him a "poor student," she didn't believe his explanation. The fact that Paul studied extra hard and *still* can't succeed was incredibly discouraging, so he is *giving up*. Since Paul tried to work out this problem with the teacher directly, the situation is greatly affecting Paul, and the teacher's decision is incredibly unfair, Paul's parents are justified in getting involved. They can meet with Paul and the teacher, to verify that they saw Paul studying for this test. If the teacher didn't actually see Paul cheat and is still unwilling to let him do extra credit work or retake the test, they should talk to the principal. In all these meetings, Paul's parents want to serve as a mediator between Paul and the school personnel. If all attempts are unsuccessful, Paul's parents can write a letter of formal complaint (detailing the *facts*, not making emotional accusations) to put in Paul's record. Regardless of the outcome, the parents need to acknowledge Paul's feelings and encourage his efforts and improvement. They can use the F-A-X process to help Paul get in touch with his *self*-motivation again. They can ask helpful questions to help Paul consider the possible consequences of getting an "F," instead of a "D," and of cutting classes. They can also brainstorm other plans to further resolve this problem or prevent a similar incident in the future.

3. Jeff, 11, is trying to get *attention* with his “zooming.” Being 11, he may feel uncomfortable with hugging or other “childish” ways of showing affection. This might be a safer way for him to get the physical contact he wants. There are several options available. Mom can spend time with Jeff in the evenings, offering to scratch or rub his back. Maybe even playing sports would be a way to have physical contact. Mom doesn’t want to force Jeff to spend time with her; but can make it clear she is available. She can give positive attention to Jeff when he is not misbehaving or makes other, more appropriate attempts to get her attention. She might even want to say, “Do that again! I liked it!” If he really wants to aggravate her, he might stop if it isn’t working. Finally, Mom could just walk away, without saying anything, when she gets “zoomed.” No attention is less desirable than negative attention.
4. Shawn, 12, broke his collarbone and argues about taking it easy. Shawn is used to having more *independence* and this injury has unexpectedly ripped it away. He downplays the risks of reinjury and wants the *power* to do more than the doctors and his parents are willing to let him do. Shawn’s parents need to keep acknowledging his frustration, discouragement, and boredom, but not coddle or overprotect him. Since serious medical and safety issues are involved, they need to remain firm about the bottom line—following the doctor’s orders and wearing safety gear. They need to focus on Shawn’s choices within those limits. They can make an extra effort to help Shawn find interesting non-physical activities and help him get together with friends.
5. Glen, 14, ignores his stepfather’s requests. Anytime divorce or remarriage is involved, children probably have some underlying hurt feelings. If stepparents exert a parental role too soon or are too controlling, resentment and rebellion often follows. The purpose of Glen’s behavior is both *revenge* and *power*. His stepfather needs to build a relationship of trust and open communication before exerting his parental authority. If he uses the F-A-X Listening and Cooperation Toolsets, he can prevent some power and revenge struggles. When these fail, Glen’s stepfather needs to back up and acknowledge Glen’s perspective. “I know you don’t like me telling you what to do” or “It must be hard to feel you have to listen to someone you don’t consider your parent.” In blended families, more than most others, teamwork, family councils, and a united parental front are important. Autocratic parenting divides blended families and permissiveness prevents the new parent from taking his or her rightful place in the family. Mutual respect and balanced responses are essential if stepchildren are to develop any respect for a new stepparent.

D. Breaking Misbehavior Cycles.

1. Maria, 13, is used to baiting her mom into arguments and having it work. Although Mom isn’t biting the bait, Maria is still going to try to start an argument, especially if she can get out of her responsibilities. Mom needs to ignore Maria’s dramatic performance. She can restate the choices and limits, “The laundry needs to be done by Saturday. That’s three days from now.” It’s your choice if you stay home until the laundry’s done. As far as I’m concerned, you can play all you want, *if* the job gets done.” At this point, Mom can ignore any further attempts by Maria to argue. Maria may not get started on the laundry immediately, but she has three days to get it done. Mom has time to wait and see if Maria chooses to accept her responsibility.
2. George, 12, has experimented with drugs and his parents are justifiably concerned. By late elementary school, most children have been exposed to drugs (either directly or they are simply aware of their presence). Experimentation usually begins as a way to gain acceptance from peers. Parents can help children find other ways to feel *accepted* by their peers. When involvement with drugs grows from experimentation to regular use, it is usually one of three reasons (or a combination of them): (1) peer acceptance (*attention*), (2) a way to prove the child has some *power*, or (3) to cope with an overwhelming problem (a Child problem). Drug use is always an indication of an “onion”; it masks some underlying issue.

George's parents recognized the signs of his drug use and were wise to discuss their concerns. Unfortunately, they took an autocratic, controlling approach to the problem. This caused George to shift goals. He originally tried the drugs because he lost his childhood friends (a Child problem) and was seeking peer acceptance (attention). Now, because his parents *forced* an admission and *forbid* him from seeing these friends, George is exerting his power. He might sneak to see his friends and to use drugs, and he will probably get better at hiding the symptoms from his parents. George's parents could have described the physical symptoms they saw and stated their concerns. They could have used the Child Problem Toolbox to determine the real issue behind George's use and help George find more acceptable ways to meet his goal. Drug experimentation and use can quickly become problematic or addictive. It is important for parents to be educated and skillful when they first discuss the issue with their young teens. Their reactions at the early stages greatly determine whether the problem is resolved helpfully or becomes a more serious problem. Parents should seek professional consultation if they have *any* concerns.

WHAT'S NEXT?

We can practice identifying PO behavior daily, with children and adults. As we practice using *all* the tools in *The Parent's Toolshop*, we more easily prevent and redirect PO behavior.

At this point in the book, many parents are already successfully redirecting many problem behaviors. Nevertheless, there are times we still need to go to the next step in the Universal Blueprint—discipline. When children make poor behavior choices, discipline helps them learn from their mistakes. Chapter 13, “Discipline Toolset,” defines the difference between discipline and punishment. It outlines the four important parts of effective discipline. The chapter then offers a variety of discipline choices available to us and details each tool's proper use. When we use respectful, effective, healthy discipline tools, we reach two of our most important parenting goals—our children become *self*-responsible and *self*-disciplined.

REFERENCES

1. *Parenting Young Children: Early Childhood S.T.E.P.*, by Donald Dinkmeyer, Gary McKay, and James S. Dinkmeyer (American Guidance Service, 1989) p. 34.
2. For more information about Dreikurs' goals of behavior, see *Children: The Challenge*, by Rudolf Dreikurs, M.D. with Vicki Soltz, R.M. (E.P. Dutton, 1964); *S.T.E.P.: Systematic Training for Effective Parenting*, by Donald Dinkmeyer, Sr. and Gary McKay (American Guidance Service, 1982); *Positive Discipline*, by Jane Nelsen (Ballantine, 1987, Revised 1996); or *Active Parenting*, by Michael Popkin (Harper Row, 1987).
3. The “Lying” section summarizes some of the key points in *Why Kids Lie: How Parents Can Encourage Truthfulness*, by Paul Ekman, Ph.D. (1989, Penguin Books). Dr. Ekman's book is a comprehensive, detailed report. I highly recommend reading this book for more information about lying.