

If I Have to Tell You
One More
TIME...



THE
REVOLUTIONARY PROGRAM
THAT GETS YOUR KIDS TO
**Listen Without Nagging,
Reminding, or Yelling**

Amy McCready

Founder of Positive Parenting Solutions, Inc.

**Praise for
*If I Have to Tell You One More Time...***

"This is a brilliant book! Amy McCready understands what's really motivating our children and gives us a set of simple but effective tools we can use to satisfy their true needs and bring about an end to all the power struggles and acting out. Practical and wise, this is advice that will change your life—and the lives of your children—forever."

—Dr. Heidi Grant Halvorson, motivational psychologist and researcher and author of *Succeed: How We Can Reach Our Goals*

"I've always said that if parents do their job right, they eventually work themselves out of a job. Finally: the tools we all need to achieve 'parental unemployment.' And best of all, you never have to get mad."

—Wendy L. Walsh, Ph.D., human behavior expert on CNN's *Headline News* and mother of two

"A lot of parenting books promise a 'revolutionary program,' but Amy McCready's *If I Have to Tell You One More Time* actually delivers on that promise. To be a parent without nagging, reminding, or yelling seems the impossible dream, but McCready's well-developed approach combines information and intuition in a completely accessible manner. Every parenting scenario imagined is explained with an easy-to-understand solution provided. This book takes the guesswork out of everyday parenting dilemmas that may have derailed your family. Whether you have toddlers or teens, you'll benefit from the book—and so will your kids!"

—Lian Dolan, parenting expert, Oprah.com, and creator of chaoschronicles.com

"I love it: Amy McCready takes the frustration out of trying to get kids to do those boring but necessary tasks. She shows parents how to calmly and confidently—without nagging, berating, or punishing—inspire kids to make positive choices. Packed with clear direction—including really practical tips and simple strategies—for how to put an end to whining, tantrums, battles, and all the rest, this book will be a giant relief for parents who want to bring out the best in their kids."

—Christine Carter, Ph.D., author of *Raising Happiness: 10 Simple Steps for More Joyful Kids and Happier Parents*

"Amy McCready's *If I Have to Tell You One More Time* is a welcome guide for parents wanting to specifically address problem behaviors. Spoken like a real mom, this revolutionary program will help any parent address any problem...with calm."

—Hal E. Runkel, M.S., MMFT, LMFT, bestselling author of *ScreamFree Parenting* and coauthor of *ScreamFree Marriage*

"Just when you thought you had no need for another parenting book, along comes Amy McCready's invaluable guide to raising responsible, caring, well-behaved children. When it comes to helping parents with the day-to-day challenges of raising children—from managing meltdowns to getting kids to do their chores—few books can compete with this one in terms of practical, clear, and wonderfully wise advice."

—Annie Pleshette Murphy, ABC TV parenting contributor and author of *The 7 Stages of Motherhood*

"If you've ever found yourself screaming at your kids, wondering, 'How did I lose control?' this is the book for you. Amy McCready shows you how to be the boss without being a bitch."

—Lisa Earle McLeod, author of *The Triangle of Truth*, a *Washington Post* Top 5 Business Book

"This book should be required reading for parents of children of any age. Reasoned and reasonable, the ideas and strategies McCready offers provide a road map to raising resilient children. I will add this volume to the short list of books I recommend to parents and professionals."

—Sam Goldstein, Ph.D., coauthor of *Raising Resilient Children* and editor in chief of the *Encyclopedia of Child Development and Behavior*

"Amy McCready's encouragement and practical steps will work wonders for building, correcting, and strengthening a positive, healthy connection between parents and children. This book is a gift for parents everywhere."

—Amy and Marc Vachon, authors of *Equally Shared Parenting*

"As we all know, children don't come with an instruction booklet, and parenting can be a daily challenge. Amy McCready helps parents feel empowered, by arming them with easy-to-understand and effective parenting techniques. Her 'toolbox solutions' are just what all parents need to solve everything from day-to-day annoyances to long-term conflicts. I believe that we are not raising children, but are raising adults. Parents who utilize these tools will be giving their children a big step toward being successful grown-ups."

—Stacy Kaiser, licensed psychotherapist and author of *How to Be a Grown Up*

"*If I Have to Tell You One More Time* is packed with easy-to-use tools that empower both parents and children. Amy McCready reveals why many trendy parenting strategies fail and may even inadvertently teach exactly the opposite of what we're trying to instill in our children."

—Jamie Woolf, author of *Mom-in-Chief: How Wisdom from the Workplace Can Save Your Family from Chaos*

"Finally, the instruction manual we've all been searching for to raise caring, responsible, empowered kids."

—Mike Robbins, author of *Focus on the Good Stuff*

"If you wonder whether the neighbors can hear you yelling at your kids day after day, it's time to read Amy McCready's *If I Have to Tell You One More Time*. Once you learn how to discipline instead of punish, with Amy's overflowing toolbox of tips, your kids will listen—and you'll get your voice back."

—Jen Singer, founder of MommaSaid.net and author of *You're a Good Mom (and Your Kids Aren't So Bad Either)*

"Amy McCready is one smart mama! From her advice to use words of encouragement instead of praise, to her suggestion that parents and children take Mind, Body & Soul Time, to her Toolbox Solutions, Amy's wisdom and experience shine through in *If I Have to Tell You One More Time*. This is a must-read for every parent—and every early childhood professional, for that matter!"

—Rae Pica, host of *Body, Mind and Child* (BAM! Radio Network)

"Amy McCready's practical tools help restore parental sanity while creating a higher quality of life for every family member. Recommended!"

—Amy Tiemann, Ph.D., founder of MojoMom.com and author of *Mojo Mom: Nurturing Your Self While Raising a Family*

"*If I Have to Tell You One More Time* is an absolute must-have guide for all parents who want to take their family from good to great. In a sensible and engaging way, Amy McCready debunks outdated parenting myths while equipping parents with practical solutions for successfully handling a variety of child-rearing challenges. Offering a blueprint for getting to the root cause of misbehaviors, McCready also provides a comprehensive array of tools to help parents understand when and why these strategies work, along with superb action-oriented tips."

—Christina McGhee, author of *Parenting Apart: How Separated and Divorced Parents Can Raise Happy and Secure Kids*

"Doesn't the most important job of your life deserve some fabulous training? Take the strife out of family life with this indispensable toolbox for parents who want to empower their children toward their own success. Bravo!"

—Dana Hilmer, host of *LifestyleMom Radio Café* and author of *Blindsided by a Diaper*

"So many times after reading parenting books we're left thinking, 'Sounds good. But now what do I do?' Amy McCready's simple, from-the-trenches tools provide a step-by-step process to deflect the negative power struggles you don't want, and give you more of what you do want cooperation, responsibility, respect, and family fun!"

—Robyn Silverman, Ph.D., child/teen development expert and author of *Good Girls Don't Get Fat: How Weight Obsession Is Messing Up Our Girls and How We Can Help Them Thrive Despite It*

"Destined to become a classic among parenting books, because it helps you parent from the heart—instead of trying to remember some obscure intellectual formula that vanishes in the heat of the moment. Give your children the connection they're longing for (yes, even teens!) and watch their misbehavior transform before your very eyes. I especially love how McCready emphasizes the need for parents to assess the effectiveness of their own patterns as well. If only I'd had this book from the very beginning!"

—Jennifer Newcomb Marine, coauthor of *No One's the Bitch: A Ten-Step Plan for Mothers and Stepmothers*

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Introduction

Long before this book came to be, there were times when I felt like the worst parent in history. One particularly memorable instance came at the end of yet another rough day, in a string of rough days, with my two young boys. My throat was scratchy.

“Great,” I thought. “Now I’m coming down with a head cold *and* I’ll have to figure out a way to convince the boys to go to bed without 18 stories and 45 drinks of water!” I wondered how it came to be that I, who for my career had effectively trained large groups of people, couldn’t get my own two small children to do what I’d asked without becoming a complete ogre.

And then, as I raised my voice to yell at one of the boys *again*, probably for not picking up his toys like I’d asked him to, or something monumental like that, a thought came crashing into my head and stopped me in my tracks. My throat wasn’t sore from a virus. It hurt because I’d been yelling so much.

Now I was really sick. Could this be me? I’d always hated the idea of yelling at my kids, and now here I was raising my voice on a daily—sometimes hourly—basis. Why was it so hard for me to parent two very typical preschoolers? And what would happen as they got older and we had to navigate issues trickier than bathtime and table manners? I’d pictured standing by my sons’ sides as they grew, and developing a respectful and communicative relationship with them, not being the person they put up with simply because I’d given birth

to them—but I knew in my heart which track I was on. I felt utterly defeated in the most important job of my life. I wanted a big change.

That night, I asked myself the tough questions: I couldn't possibly love these two kids more, so why did I yell at them when I knew in my heart it was the wrong thing to do? My efforts to "demand compliance" fell on deaf ears and the "time-out" and "counting 1-2-3" strategies didn't work after the first few times. It seemed that there was nothing left but to raise my voice—at least they'd know I was serious. And so I religiously followed the vicious cycle of: ask, remind, repeat, remind, repeat, explode.

I realized I'd turned into *that* parent—the one we all swear we'll never become.

Maybe you're familiar with *that* parent, too: the mom who bribes her 3-year-old with candy and toys just to make it through the grocery store. The dad whose 5-year-old has disrupted an entire restaurant with her insistence on skipping laps around the family's table. Or even the duo that takes turns cleaning the kids' rooms for them every Saturday morning because they can't figure out how to get their 8- and 10-year-old to pick up after themselves.

We see *that* parent everywhere. Before we have our own kids, we get really annoyed with *that* parent—the one who can't control their own child. "When we're parents," we promise ourselves, "we will do better." After all, how hard can it be?

And then a year or two after we bring a bundle of joy into this world, we become *that* parent. We yell, threaten, remind, beg and finally give in, all in an effort to control our little cherubs. On our best days, we walk on eggshells, relying on little more than luck when it

comes to ensuring good behavior from our kids. On our worst days, we turn into monsters ourselves and consider boarding preschool for our “terrible two-year-old.”

Without the right tools to get the job done, parenting is no longer fun. And that’s sadder than a seven-year-old who really, truly is the *only* kid in the *entire* world who doesn’t own the latest space dinosaur action figure (or whatever).

The problem is, we’ve always known what we *don’t* want to be as a parent, but we have no idea how to be the parent we *do* want to be. And we resort to *that* parent’s tactics, because, well, they *must* work if so many parents rely on them! And sometimes we just have to get the grocery shopping done no matter what it takes. But in reality, *that* parent’s tactics are only quick fixes—if that—and they don’t work any better for anyone else than they do for you.

You’ve heard the first part of my story, now let me tell you how I turned my parenting style on its head—and made a huge, positive difference in my household in just a couple weeks.

After that night—the one when I resolved to stop all the yelling—I realized that there had to be a better way. Inspired, I admit, by George on *Seinfeld*, I felt that “If everything you’ve done is wrong, then the opposite must be right.” I enrolled in a parenting class that focused on positive discipline principles brought to life by early 20th-century medical doctor and psychologist Alfred Adler.

My world changed completely. When I began to implement Adlerian principles in my family, things started to get better very quickly. And the more I used Adler’s theories, the more pleasant and cooperative family life became. My kids were happier, I was happier and my relationship with my husband was stronger.

I continued studying, and realized that while these principles sounded very good, a lot of parents were left saying, “That’s interesting. Now what do I do?” There was still a need to translate the theories into a step-by-step, easy-to-implement process that parents everywhere could use in their own families.

I wanted to help other parents find the peace that my family and I enjoyed, so I employed my background in developing training programs in Fortune 500 companies to create my own parenting course, called Positive Parenting Solutions. *If I Have to Tell You One More Time* is born of this course, which has already changed the lives of thousands of families worldwide.

I wrote this book to give you the ability to manage the frustrating misbehaviors you see in your kids, and replace them with positive actions that will endure for a lifetime. I want to help you regain a sense of control of your family life so you can empower your children to learn the lessons and behaviors they’ll need for future success.

Each chapter holds a wealth of psychologically grounded information, examples and strategies for addressing misbehavior, including how to train positive behavior in your kids. But at the heart of the book are 23 tools that include specific, step-by-step guidelines for directly applying the principles you’ll learn. There’s no more guesswork—you’ll soon know exactly how to handle just about any misbehavior your children can dream up.

You’ll learn how to eliminate annoying misbehaviors such as whining, negotiating, not listening and interrupting. You’ll also learn how to ward off power struggles and temper tantrums, or stop them in their tracks. You’ll be able to get your kids to brush their teeth, remember their lunchboxes and do their homework without reminding, yelling or arguing.

And you'll discover ways to improve family dynamics, from fostering healthy sibling relationships to promoting togetherness.

If you find you've become the parent you never wanted to be, please read this book. Use the tools in your own home. One day, you'll look up and realize it's been a few days since you've raised your voice at your kids, or bribed, negotiated or badgered them to do something. And pretty soon, you won't remember the last time you yelled, reminded, begged, or treated your kids with anything but respect. You'll smile as you realize that you've gotten the same respect in return.

Best of all, your world is going to change, just like it has for thousands of parents around the globe. Parenting stress will be replaced with parenting peace. You're going to spend more time enjoying your kids, marveling at how independent and self-sufficient they've become right before your eyes. You'll be amazed at how they graciously cooperate without eye rolling or complaining, work out their own disagreements with their siblings, and complete household tasks without needing so much as a reminder. Of course, they'll still be your kids, and the occasional misbehavior will still pop up, but you'll finally have the tools you need to address the misbehavior and help them succeed in family life and beyond.

My suggestion is to read this book start to finish, and put each tool to use as you come to it. Life will be better for you within the first few days of implementing the first tool and you'll continue to see improvement with each new tool you introduce into your home. Then, since it'll take some time and practice to change lifelong habits (the ones, like yelling, that aren't working so well right now anyway), go back and read the book slowly, one chapter at a time, as a refresher. After that, you may find yourself picking up this book every few weeks

as your kids grow and develop the propensity for new behaviors, both positive and negative.

I'll leave you with one final thought. When your kids are grown, how would you like for them to remember their childhood? As a time when any mistake or misbehavior was met with yelling, nagging and threats? Or as a time when they were taught appropriate behavior by a mom and dad who were calm and relaxed, within a family that just loved being together?

Join me in giving your kids the best childhood they could possibly dream of. Join me in preparing them to be successful adults. Join me in *loving* the hardest job you've ever had—being a wonderful parent.



1

SOMETHING'S NOT WORKING

The living room is so quiet you can hear the clock tick. *Tick. Tick. Tick.* The tiny, rhythmic sound would be peaceful, if it weren't for one thing: You're waiting. Mentally counting the seconds. You've just told your 8-year-old to do her homework (or turn off the TV, or get ready for school, or go upstairs for bed), and she hasn't responded. Five year-long seconds have gone by. You know she heard you. And now, for what seems like the eighty-fifth time today, you have to decide what to do.

Already weary from the ensuing battle, you lamely resort to repeating yourself. *This will never work*, taunts the voice inside your head as you speak your original request a little higher and a little louder.

And it doesn't. Your daughter continues dressing up the dolls she has scattered across the floor. *Tick. Tick. Tick*

You add a threat that you know you'll regret later: No seeing friends this weekend unless she does what you ask. This garners the response of "In a few minutes."

And finally, all quiet in the house is shattered as you explode, yelling at the girl in your best "If I have to tell you one more time!" tone of voice. She finishes what she's doing and then calmly trudges off to do as she's told. Silence fills the room again, but there's no air of satisfaction to go with it.

Well, that's over. You got what you wanted. But did you? What happens the next time your child misbehaves, acts out, talks back, dawdles or ignores you? The remind-repeat-threaten yell cycle will start all over again. You'll feel angry and frustrated that you had to resort to such tactics.

You've tried everything. Time-outs. Yelling. Reminding. Nagging. Taking away privileges. Counting to three. And none of them work. Like most parents, you're fed up. You're tired of asking your kids to do the same simple things again and again. You're sick of hearing your own voice. You ask yourself (and even the occasional coffee shop barista!): Why is it so difficult to get children to do what they're supposed to do?

At times you may not feel like it, but parents today are smarter and better equipped than ever before. We can readily discuss the merits of omega-3's, we interview pediatricians and preschool teachers in depth, and we even warmed our baby's wipes to comfort a tender little tushie. There's not a challenge we can't tackle with the help of the Internet, from natural remedies to soothe sunburn to how to sneak spinach onto pizza. We're pros at quick fixes and tricky maneuvers—as long as we don't have to convince our 10-year-old to empty the dishwasher.

You'd think we'd have the whole parenting thing figured out, too. But one look at the average parent's frustration level—whether brought on by siblings who can't go five minutes without arguing or a preschooler who flat-out refuses to put on clothes in the morning—shows us that most moms and dads need help with parenting, and fast.

What about you? Because you're reading this book, it's probably safe to assume that things could be better between you and your kids. You may face whining, temper tantrums and homework battles on a daily basis. Even though you love your kids more than anything in the world, there may be whole weeks you really don't enjoy being a parent. You might be at—or nearing—your wit's end. To add insult to injury, you're probably already working

your hardest to put your household in order and raise respectful, responsible kids. And yet, all your hard work hasn't paid off. Your kids continue to misbehave despite all your best attempts.

The good news is that it's not just you. You'll probably take comfort in knowing that parents all across the country are experiencing the same thing. The better news is that there's help. There are lots of reasons for your children's misbehavior—from societal shifts to strategies you're probably using that are fundamentally flawed. Fortunately, by following the methods outlined in this book, you can employ a solution for each of your challenges, and your family life will get much better, and soon.

You'll find you can implement the techniques you need with more confidence and success if you first understand the basics. We'll start with an explanation of the difference between two fundamental parenting terms to set the stage for the strategies and techniques that follow.

Punishment Versus Discipline

Parents instinctively know that discipline is a necessary part of raising children. However, many parents and experts confuse *discipline* with *punishment*, using the two words interchangeably in reference to correcting misbehavior. In fact, their real meanings vary considerably. A short overview of the terms will help give you some insight into various parenting approaches, and what makes them work (or not).

When 4-year-old Emma throws lima beans at 2-year-old Benjamin during dinner, your first reaction is likely to jump straight into applying a *punishment*. You reason that if you answer her negative behavior with a negative response, she'll learn her behavior was wrong. She may be banished from the table, scolded harshly or forced to eat all the rest of

the lima beans on her plate—plus Ben’s as well. Punishment is something we’ve had ingrained in us since childhood, whether through fairy tales or in the schoolyard: A misdeed deserves a little bit of justice. The mis-doer needs to feel the effects of her wrongdoing, usually something to make her “pay,” like a swat on the bottom or a hurtful remark. Of course, you’d never want to inflict actual harm on your child. But consciously or unconsciously, you want to sour the misbehavior for her so that she never wants to do it again. The problem with punishment, however, is that it puts the child in a mode of self-defense. Instead of learning from the misdeed, the child focuses her energy on avoiding future punishment. Punishments even promote lying—after all, what child would confess to an offense knowing that she was only going to be punished?

Discipline, however, is a much more positive, not to mention effective, way of responding to misbehavior. The word comes from the Latin *discipulus*, which can be translated to mean a student, one who is learning, or a willing convert. Instead of administering punishment, which is simply a negative reaction to a negative behavior, we want to make good use of every misdeed, as well as hold the child accountable for her actions. Each time your kids act out, it’s an opportunity to teach important life skills that will guide your miniature adults-in-training to live up to their potential as capable, contributing members of society. By disciplining your children with relevant consequences and accountability, you ensure they won’t want to repeat their misbehavior—because you’ve allowed them to learn from it, and not because you scared the daylights out of them.

As you react to misbehaviors using the strategies and tools in this book, remember that you’re training your kids for long-term good behavior and, ultimately, success as adults. It’s your job, using appropriate discipline techniques, to encourage them to be willing converts to the skills they’ll need to function responsibly. A well-disciplined child is a well-trained child, and negative punishments don’t have a place in this system. While your children may

not enjoy the discipline process, they can keep their self-respect: Discipline doesn't involve physical pain, humiliation or crippling guilt. Instead, as we'll discuss later on, you'll use consequences as positive learning tools—even when there are lima beans scattered across the room.

Now that we know about the concept of discipline, let's take a look at what kind of discipline doesn't work—and a few reasons why your kids don't behave, even when you're trying your hardest to make them.

Changing Times Mean Changing Children

One of the most common complaints from parents today is “My kids just don't listen!” Moms and dads often tell me that when they were young, they knew to listen—or else—anytime a parent shot them the “look.” So why isn't there an equivalent of the “look” today? Why would our best attempts at the “look” be more likely to meet with an eye roll than a child who jumps into action?

It's not that kids are different today. They have the same biological and emotional makeup as generations past, the same DNA. But they are raised in a new time, and a new environment, with unique social influences. These changes—many of which have happened in the past few decades—greatly influence how effective we are as parents.

Just take a look at kids' lives nowadays: With the information age in full force, children even in early elementary school are in constant contact with each other via social networking tools, namely cell phones and computers. They're bombarded with what everyone else does, wears, buys or has. Children and parents hold to busy schedules, with little time left over for family or for kids just to be kids. And in the face of it all, there's more

pressure on youth to succeed in academics, sports and the arts from an early age. In short, it's a lot harder being a kid today. Which makes it a lot harder to be a parent.

Sorry, Mom and Dad, but It *Is* a Democracy

As if blossoming technology and newfound pressures on kids aren't enough to throw a wrench into your plan of raising perfect children, another factor that's rarely discussed is how society and, as a result, parenting have changed over the last several generations. Our homes have followed the outside world in becoming a democracy—with as many opinions as there are seats around the dinner table.

This fundamental shift in control and relationships began outside the home, with governmental institutions, companies and organizations realizing that an aura of mutual respect is better for everyone than the authoritarian model of the past. For instance, it's hard to imagine a workplace environment in our society where a boss threatens an employee with "Have that report on my desk by the end of the day or you're fired." It's inconceivable to picture kids sitting at their school desks for hours on end learning reading, writing, math and history under the threat of corporal punishment or long minutes spent standing in the corner. It's laughable to imagine Dad ordering Mom to have dinner on the table when he walks through the door at six p.m.—or else. These scenarios would never fly today. Why? Because the norms of society and how we behave and interact with others have changed dramatically. The top-down, authoritarian approach to managing workers, teaching students and communicating with spouses isn't viewed as appropriate in today's society.

Instead, the workplace, the school and society in general are very different; they have moved in a more *democratic* direction. At work, input from employees is valued, actively

solicited and considered at performance review time. A manager who continually harasses or yells at a staffer will be called to human resources, or even shown the door. Educators speak to children in respectful voices, corporal punishment is banned, and children participate in the learning process through projects and group activities. A teacher who hits or verbally abuses a child will be in the principal's office before you can say "Recess." The dictatorial "Do it because I said so" approach to education and to management is a thing of the past.

It's societal changes like these that have fostered how we parent today. They're the reason that the "look" or the "Because I said so" approach doesn't work with today's kids. And these relational shifts are a *good* thing. All of us benefit from a more democratic, respectful environment. This is the very atmosphere that will help us foster responsibility, kindness and success in our children. We can't do anything to change how things are for the sake of easier parenting, but if we really think about it, we wouldn't want to.

Let's examine home life in greater depth. Two generations ago, most families included a father who worked outside the home and a mother who stayed with the children. The husband provided the income and often made the rules, while the mother and children obediently followed. Husband and wife were not equal partners in marriage or when it came to raising children. Dad's word was the final word—many of us can remember the fear that coursed through us when we heard the phrase "Wait until your father gets home."

Today, most families look very different. Often, both parents work outside the home. Most husbands and wives view marriage and parenthood as a partnership with equal contributions (financial and otherwise) and input into family decisions. The result is that both Mom and Dad can lead productive and fulfilling lives—whether at work or at home—and model healthy attitudes for their children.

With this system, though, parents frequently disagree in front of their children instead of behind closed doors. Children observe this behavior and quickly learn that they, too, can share a different opinion (usually not as diplomatically as their parents do!). After all, why should kids listen to their parents when their parents frequently seem not to listen to each other? No matter how responsibly Mom and Dad handle disagreements, children still see that they exist.

As observers who are even more sensitive to their environment than adults, children understand that Mom doesn't simply obey Dad's orders, or vice versa. They hear their teachers and coaches speaking to them and to one another respectfully. They *intuitively* comprehend that the norms of society are democratic. And so, when we demand compliance with the "Do it because I said so" or "Don't question me, young man" response, children instinctively see something wrong, or out of place, with that way of thinking. Kids quite naturally ask, "Why should I have to do what *she* says?" or "Who made you the boss of me?"

Such responses infuriate parents. They think back to their childhoods and, fondly or not, remember how they would never cop that kind of an attitude with their parents. I hear all the time, "I would never talk to my parents the way my kids do to me. What's wrong with these kids today?"

So, is there something wrong with kids today? What's a parent to do when the strategies they probably grew up with, such as the "look" or "Because I said so," don't work?

With these changing times, discipline methods within the family unit are due for a major shift. Although an authoritarian parenting style worked when past generations were growing up, it just doesn't fly today.

Take note that just because the old strategies don't work doesn't mean that kids today are "bad" or "disrespectful." They simply have a different outlook. As inhabitants of a

democratic society, they inherently sense the need to push back when family life gets too constraining. When Mom says, “You’ll do it right now, young man,” her son’s immediate instinct is to push right back with an “Oh no I won’t!” And guess what: For better or worse, he’s learned it from you. And likely every other adult he comes into contact with on a regular basis.

Let’s face the facts: Society isn’t getting any less democratic. Debates over everything from the environment to vaccines surge across our airways—and our carpools. Individualism is at an all time high, and the thirst for knowledge is unquenchable. It’s an environment that’s ripe to foster future success for our kids and their world. But it’s up to us to help our children live up to their potential, to train them to live responsibly within our democratic society as contributing, respectful adults.

To effectively correct misbehavior and create harmonious, cooperative relationships with our children, we must learn to think, act and react in a more democratic, egalitarian direction. And there’s no need to panic. Don’t think for a moment that you will be giving up or losing your parental authority. Democracy in the family doesn’t mean that every decision is up for a vote. Parents are still the parents, the guides and certainly the presidents of their families.

The Positive Parenting Solutions principles and tools in this book will help your family move in a more democratic direction. You’ll learn respectful discipline methods that are far more effective than demanding compliance. You’ll learn how to get your kids to listen—and to do what they’re supposed to do—but without nagging, reminding, yelling or commanding. All this while building stronger relationships with your children, who are becoming more capable, independent, self-sufficient and responsible, right before your eyes.

So, what’s not working about the way you parent?

The Tried-and-True Strategies That Are Anything But

Society is full of prescriptions for handling a child's misbehavior. There's no escaping nanny shows on television, running commentary from a well-meaning neighbor or the outspoken advice from your childless coworker every time he hears you talking to your 7-year-old's teacher on the phone. You've probably tried time-outs, counting 1-2-3, various forms of punishment and offering rewards to keep your kids in line. In fact, you may have stuck to these routines consistently, and administered them exactly as you've been told. These strategies may even seem to work for other parents you know. And they probably worked for you—for a while. So what's the problem?

Take heart: It's not you. It's also not your kids. There are very good reasons why some of the most popular parenting strategies fall short—and I can just about guarantee that the other parents who use them struggle as much as you do, whether they realize it or not. Each strategy is fundamentally flawed, teaching our kids things we don't want them to learn and taking the focus away from helping them make better decisions in the future. In the previous section, we discussed a few reasons why punishments don't work, and rewards will be covered later, in chapter 4. Let's look at the two other popular techniques individually for more insights.

The Time-Out: Why Its Time Is Up

It's hard to find a parent nowadays who hasn't used a time-out at one time or another. For many, it's a staple of the discipline diet in their household. The time-out is featured on just about every nanny show on television, as well as in books, magazines and other media. Part of the reason for the time-out's popularity could be attributed to the fact that it became

the primary alternative to spanking once parents learned that physical punishment is hurtful emotionally as well as physically.

But the time-out's predominance as a parenting tactic doesn't guarantee it's actually effective in correcting misbehaviors long term. Instead, this tried-and-trusted tool has two fatal flaws that may explain why most parents fail to report long-term success with it:

1. Time-outs invite power struggles.
2. Time-outs neglect to teach important life lessons.

What does a time-out have to do with power struggles? After all, aren't they supposed to help defuse power struggles by separating a child from the situation? The problem arises when any strong willed or spirited child is put onto the time-out chair (or in the naughty corner, or his room, or wherever the sentence is to be served) and expected to stay there for the prescribed period of time. Now the parent's job is to keep the child on the chair for the duration of the time-out, while the child's job is to try to escape. Each escape attempt adds fuel to the situation, exploding it far beyond the scope of the offense. A five-minute time-out turns into a fifty-minute ordeal that leaves parent and child bedraggled, with both parties likely forgetting what the problem was in the first place. Not to mention the fact that most of us don't allow this kind of time in our schedule for handling a simple misbehavior. No matter who "wins" the battle, everyone loses. At its best, the timeout becomes a meaningless game; and at its worst, the time-out disrupts the entire household.

The second problem with time-outs is that they merely represent a punishment, and not a teaching tool, meaning they don't do anything to correct behavior long term. Even compliant children who are willing to sit patiently in a time-out through its duration have most likely learned nothing by the end of it. After all, do you know any 4-year-olds—or 10-

year-olds, for that matter—who really use the time-out chair to think about what they’ve done and plan to change their ways in the future? This is the root of why parents often find themselves applying time-outs on a daily basis: They don’t solve the underlying problem. The child may eventually learn how to endure sitting on a chair for a few minutes (or how to wear Mom down enough to end the time out prematurely), but not the important lessons she needs for acting responsibly next time. A more effective form of discipline would allow consequences and other life lessons to train kids to consider their future actions more carefully. We’ll talk more about consequences and applying them to misbehavior in chapter 7.

It may help to think about a time-out from your kid’s point of view. Eight-year-old Aiden is playing contentedly with his trains and his blocks. He’s just finished building a fabulous tower, resplendent in reds and greens and blues, and twelve blocks tall, for his train to drive through. The track is a perfect large figure eight with two hills and a tunnel. He can’t wait for the first trip around.

The dubious smells of leftover meatloaf and green beans waft through the door as Mom walks in. “Aiden, please put away all your toys, it’s time for dinner,” she instructs.

“But, Mom, I just finished putting together this tower!” he (admittedly) whines.

“It’s dinnertime,” Mom replies. “Your toys have to be put away and you need to come to the table and eat. Do it now.”

“I’m not even hungry, I just want to play with my toys. Five more minutes?”

“I said no!” Mom exclaims.

And yet Aiden stands his ground. Until dinner is burning and Mom has had enough.

“That’s it, time-out!” decides Mom. “Ten minutes in your chair.” Aiden trudges to his designated time-out chair and plops down on it. The second Mom turns her back while

setting the table; he dashes over to his train. If only he can get the train around the track and through the tower—cool!

Mom, unfortunately, spots him out of the corner of her eye and is back on the scene in an instant.

“What are you doing out of time-out? I told you to stay there!” she exclaims.

And back into the chair Aiden goes.

Forty-three minutes later, Aiden has finally served his whole time-out. He did manage to get his train through the tower, but only after six tries. By the end of it, neither he nor his mother is much in the mood for now cold leftover meatloaf and green beans. The impressive tower is destroyed, and Aiden has learned only that the most effective way of escaping from the time-out chair is by creating a distraction using the family dog and a stray bit of meatloaf he managed to snatch.

Poor Aiden. All he wanted was a little more time to play with his trains. And poor Mom. All she wanted was to help Aiden learn to respect dinnertime rules. So if a time-out doesn't work, for either Mom or Aiden, what does? We'll talk more about alternative ways to handle situations like these in chapter 2 and the rest of the book.

Why You Can't Count on 1-2-3

Another popular parenting technique recommends counting as a way to put a stop to misbehavior, theoretically allowing the child time to correct her errant actions. This may work the first time, but soon you'll find yourself going past three and up to five, and then ten, and then one hundred (to be brutally honest), as your child learns to tune you out.

The main problem with the 1-2-3 technique is that instead of training your child to reconsider her actions, you're actually teaching her to ignore you multiple times before finally (if you're lucky), listening and obeying. The script goes something like this:

Mommy: "McKayla, please don't run off in the store. Come back here."

McKayla, age 3½, ignores Mommy.

Mommy: "McKayla, I'm going to count to three."

McKayla ignores Mommy.

Mommy: "One." *Long pause.*

McKayla ignores Mommy.

Mommy: "Two." *Long pause.*

McKayla ignores Mommy.

Mommy: "Two and a half." *Longer pause.*

McKayla starts to slowly head back to Mommy, having gained herself an extra few minutes of play, which happened to be enough time to pull the sparkly purple jump rope off the store's "summer fun" display.

Mommy: "Thr—" *Long pause.* McKayla runs the rest of the way, Mommy having given her plenty of time to make it back successfully. The two share a big hug (after all, McKayla came back to Mommy before she finished saying "three") and McKayla is reminded not to run off again.

While you certainly need to give your child enough time to correct misbehavior or to respond to your reasonable requests, the 1-2-3 technique instead shows kids that immediate action is never necessary. They're actually rewarded by ignoring you for as long as possible.

Time-outs and counting 1-2-3 represent two specific parenting strategies that don't work for fundamental reasons. If you've used these with discouraging results, there's no need to worry. Just ditch them, and read on. Even if they seem to work for you, I'd recommend against using them—neither will accomplish the goal of training your kids for adulthood.

While some strategies work better than others, there are other factors at play when it comes to your child's behavior namely, you. Before you can expect positive changes from your children, you may need to evaluate your child's needs, your parenting style and your interactions—and possibly make some changes of your own.



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