



## CO-PARENTING CLASS

### Discussion Guide

Freedom 22 Foundation  
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## Learning Objectives for ProudToParent Co-Parenting Classes

- I. Our children have needs only we (the parents) can meet.
  - A. My children desperately need daily admiration from me, and I will find joy and happiness in admiring them. It's a natural match.
    1. My children need to hear me being grateful for them—and admiring and complimenting them daily.
    2. My children need me to use constructive discipline that *teaches*—and never *hurts* or *shames*.
  - B. My children need me to be respectful to my co-parent.
    1. Children experience attacks between their parents as attacks on them.
    2. Courtesy can be practiced toward anyone—and I absolutely owe it to my children to be courteous to their other parent.
  - C. My children are in true danger if I fail in A or B.
- II. My success in parenting—and in everything—depends on realizing I can change my *thoughts, feelings, and actions* about anything.
  - A. All success begins with being *responsible*—being *able* to choose my *response*.
  - B. Responsibility begins with emotional responsibility—knowing that I cause *all* of my own feelings, that I can change my feelings by changing the thoughts I have about any circumstance, and that in so doing I can change my world.
- III. Some specific co-parenting skills.
- IV. My own happiness depends on my excellence in living up to these responsibilities.
  - A. Parenting is challenging, but I may never again be this powerful—or have this much fun in anything else I ever do.
  - B. Happiness does not come from fun—it comes from heroically carrying through on important and difficult tasks.
  - C. I will find my own happiness in pursuing my children's needs, openly admiring these fabulous little miracles, and giving them my example of a caring growing adult.

## A. Family safety

## Introduction: A Friendly Quiz

This class will invite you to participate with your ideas—and to consider some that may be new to you. We'll begin with a friendly quiz that will help explain why the course covers what it does.

In the early 1990s an extensive study was done at Arizona State University to discover the topics most worth covering in co-parenting classes. (By the way, *co-parenting* refers to the level of cooperation between two parents in raising their children.) The researchers were looking for the topics that separated, divorced, and never-married parents could discuss that would actually help them, their co-parenting partnership, and their children.

One topic above all others turned out to be important in helping these parents do in the challenge of raising children between two homes.



Here are some choices  
(including the actual  
finding):

1. The power and joy in admiring a child.
2. The dangers that conflict between parents causes for children.
3. Children's developmental needs at different ages.
4. Disciplining children who grow up between two homes.

Note: After you think about your response, see the bottom of page 54 for the study's actual finding.

**Discussion:**

It turned out that discussion of this topic helped parents (whether they were members of the classes or presenters of the classes) to do a much better job of co-parenting.

Why do you think this skill of admiration would lead to better lives and outcomes for children and parents?

## **Exercise 1: Introducing Ourselves and Our Children**

*"Parents highest obligation is to enjoy their children."  
--Dr. Timothy Onkka*

Take some time to:

1. introduce ourselves (first names would be fine),
2. give the number of our children and their ages,
3. describe briefly what each of our children is into today and what we like to do with each.

Exercise 2: Who Admired Me?

***Who in your childhood satisfied this role more than anyone else?***

***1. What adult do you recall admiring you the most when you were young?***

***2. What exactly did this person say and do to make you feel admired?***

***3. What difference did this person make in your life?***

***4. At what moments have you thought you were filling this role in a child's life? What were you doing? What was the child's reaction?***



## Exercise 3: Nine Secret Admiration Skills

***Want to change a child forever?***

***Circle and try one or two ideas from each category of skills.***



### 1. Gratitude just for the chance to know you and be with you

- ✚ Reading and discussing books, seeing movies, dinner with no TV.
- ✚ Doing puzzles.
- ✚ Volunteering together.
- ✚ Making errands fun by doing them together.
- ✚ "Everything is better when I get to do something with you."
- ✚ "I'm so glad you're in my life."
- ✚ "I like you. I **really, really** like you."
- ✚ "You come too—it's always better with you."
- ✚ "I'm so glad you are with us."
- ✚ "You mean a lot to me. I'm happy just to know someone like you."
- ✚ "You make me laugh. Lordy, you make me laugh!"
- ✚ "You brighten my day."
- ✚ "You're a joy. I love all our times together."
- ✚ "You're a treasure."
- ✚ "You made my day. You make every day."

## 2. Admiring qualities in you

- ✚ "You're about the kindest person I know."
- ✚ "You have so much energy—I just love that."
- ✚ "I love how you watch out for your little brother and sister. You're so kind."
- ✚ "I love imagining all the great things you'll do with your life."
- ✚ "You're special. People just want to be with you."
- ✚ "You care."
- ✚ "Look at all you've done."
- ✚ "You're spectacular, darling, precious, important, and beautiful."
- ✚ "You are a good friend, a good listener, and a joy to know."
- ✚ "You're incredible. Who else could do that so well?"
- ✚ "You are exciting. What a joy to be with someone so full of life."
- ✚ "What an imagination! Maybe you'll make movies one day."
- ✚ "You are fun. You know that? Everybody has more fun with you."
- ✚ "You're unique. You don't have to color inside the lines."

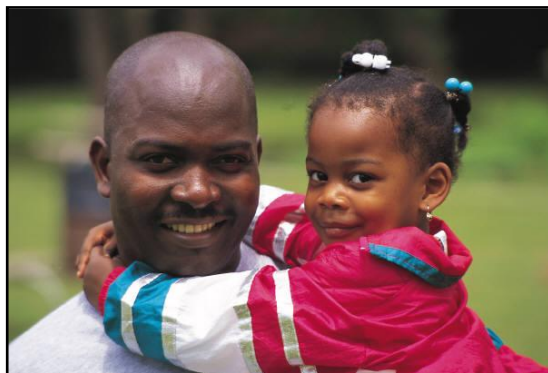


## 3. Admiring something you did

- ✚ "Nice game, you really played well!"
- ✚ "Super! Awesome—you did so well!"
- ✚ "Fantastic! Can you show me how you do that?"
- ✚ "Looking good—the best I've ever seen!"
- ✚ "Now you're flying! You're catching on!"
- ✚ "Now you've got it! Good for you!"
- ✚ "You're on your way! That's incredible!"
- ✚ "You've discovered the secret! You figured it out!"
- ✚ "You made a very wise decision. You're really growing up."
- ✚ "You've taken the first steps toward independence. I'm so proud of you."

#### 4. Letting you hear what I say about you to others

- ✚ "Grandma, see this little guy here? He means the world to us, doesn't he?"
- ✚ "I'm glad to hear she did so well in your class—she's special at home, too."
- ✚ "Pastor, do you want to know who's on the Honor Roll?"
- ✚ "Men, I brought my little man to our meeting. I think you should meet him."
- ✚ "Hey, everybody. Look whose award is in the Church Bulletin!"
- ✚ "Ladies, guess which young lady has learned how to bake the cookies with us."
- ✚ Putting your accomplishments in the church bulletin and letters to family.



#### 5. Physical demonstrations

- ✚ A huge smile and shout of your name as soon as I see you.
- ✚ Calling, writing, and leaving notes for you.
- ✚ A big excited gasp when you call on the phone.
- ✚ A big hug—especially on meeting or parting.
- ✚ A big kiss, lap time, smiles, high fives, pats on the back, holding hands.
- ✚ Loads of eye contact *whenever* we talk.
- ✚ Demanding a "Kid Fix"—a hug I can ask for at any time.
- ✚ Dancing with you—to the stereo or just our own humming.
- ✚ Chasing you, pretending to be a dangerous elephant or runaway train—just being totally ridiculous for you.
- ✚ Teaching you everyday things such as how to make a bed (and then being patient and tolerant while you learn to do it yourself—your way!).

## 6. Being totally there when we're together

- ✚ "Wow, you need to tell that story again!"
- ✚ "What happened next?"
- ✚ "Which do you like better, Saturdays or Sundays?"
- ✚ "How do you think people could solve that problem?"
- ✚ "What do you think you'll be like when you're as old as Dad and Mom?"
- ✚ "Do you think the project is on the right track?"
- ✚ "What would you do if you were president?"
- ✚ "I would really value your opinion."
- ✚ "I would love for you go with me on my errands."
- ✚ "Let's sit down together and work on your homework."



## 7. Saying what you get from Dad/Mom

- ✚ "You have the most beautiful eyes—just like Mom's."
- ✚ "You work so hard to finish things—you get that from Dad."
- ✚ "Wow! I think you're going to be a track star, just like Mommy was."
- ✚ "Daddy is so smart with numbers. I love how you do homework together."
- ✚ "You're kind—just like Mommy. When we met she had a kitten like Smokey."
- ✚ "You and Daddy are so much alike. I love how you care for each other."
- ✚ "Nobody knows how to write like you and Mommy! What a great job!"
- ✚ "I'll never forget the time you and Daddy went riding on that horse. I was so scared, but you guys weren't."

## 8. Special avenues of expressions

- ✚ Eating together—with no TV or other distractions from the chance to just talk.
- ✚ Taping congratulations notes on your desk at school conferences.
- ✚ Keeping a picture album of your life and showing it to you every so often.
- ✚ Supporting you by attending school events and even visiting you at work (like dropping by the McDonald's where you work).
- ✚ Wearing your name, number, jersey, or button to sporting and academic events so everyone knows you're my child.
- ✚ Placing an ad in your yearbook or school newspaper to say how proud I am of you.

- ✚ Just hanging out with you and your best friend; welcoming your friends.
- ✚ “Let me share with you our family’s history.”
- ✚ Describing all the exceptional people in your family (grandparents, great-grandparents, aunts, uncles, etc.).
- ✚ Disciplining with love and confidence in you—“I’m disappointed only because I know you’re better than that; you’re a caring/responsible/giving person.”

## **9. Assembling a team of at least 6 adults to admire you**

Our daughter called once, completely depleted from a day of watching over 16 kindergarten children. Her observation, we think, could be a remarkable help to parents. “Now I know why children are made so cute, Dad,” she told me. “It’s so we don’t strangle them.”

Your children are indeed cute. Consider finding others to help in admiring them. They could be a blessing to your children, you, and themselves.

## Exercise 4: My Strengths

Some people have been discouraged from thinking or speaking well of themselves. But to be valuable to our children, we need a more realistic and positive picture of ourselves.

So here's an interesting exercise. Think of the people who know you best. Then circle the qualities those people would say apply to you most.

Enthusiastic	Hard-working	Honest
Admiring	Imaginative	Diligent
Athletic	Artistic	Kind
Persistent	Reliable	Humble
Productive	Caring	Self-disciplined
Courageous	Responsible	Trustworthy
Fair	Respectful	Considerate
Resourceful	Creative	Independent
Inventive	Studious	Friendly
Intelligent	Fun-loving	Helpful
Adventurous	Cooperative	Ambitious
Happy	Loving	Witty
Curious	Cheerful	Thoughtful
Energetic	Well-mannered	Funny
Grateful	Optimistic	Encouraging

Now notice how much it would mean for any child to be admired by someone like you.

**Someone desperately needs to be close to you.**

And remember that there's both power *AND JOY*  
in admiring your child.

Don't forget *the joy!!!*

Sure, you'll never be this powerful again. But will you ever have so much reason:

- To laugh?
- To marvel?
- To see and feel hope?
- To learn not to sweat the small stuff?
- To remember that all hurt melts before this sight of life moving on?



“Parents’ highest obligation  
is *to enjoy their children.*”

—Dr. Timothy Onkka

## Discussion: The Myth of Parents' Dispensability

*Is it our imagination, or did parents at one time better understand their importance to their children?*

*If we're right, too many parents have been sold the message that they aren't important to their children. Do you think any of the following have contributed to this dangerous idea?*

- Do kids grow up so much faster today that they give the appearance of not needing our admiration?
- Does the popular entertainment culture paint a picture of parents as a pack of fools?
- Do new forms of electronic entertainment and education (television, videos, internet, and electronic games) create the impression parents' attention is no longer important?
- Has public assistance created the false sense that a parent can disappear without harm to a child? Instead of being seen as providing *partial financial* help, has public assistance come to be seen as a *total parent replacement*?
- Does the adversarial legal system (which seems to suggest one parent will "lose custody") create a sense that one parent can be discarded?

***Help us for future classes: How would you get across to parents how irreplaceable they (and their energetic admiration) are to their children?***





## Exercise 5: The Indispensable Parent: Why There Are No Substitutes

Which two or three of the following statements speak loudest to you about the power of parenting? Which would you use if you were trying to explain to a young friend the importance of parenting well?

### Some Thoughts On Parents and Parenting

“One generation plants the trees; another gets the shade.”  
—Chinese Proverb

"If you bungle raising your children, I don't think whatever else you do well matters very much."  
—Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis

Bitter are the tears of a child: Sweeten them.  
Deep are the thoughts of a child: Quiet them.  
Sharp is the grief of a child: Take it from him.  
Soft is the heart of a child: Do not harden it.  
—Pamela Glenconner

"Women know  
The way to rear up children (to be just)  
They know a simple, merry, tender knack  
Of tying sashes, fitting baby-shoes  
And stringing pretty words that make no sense  
And kissing full sense into empty words."  
—Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh*

“Fathering has saved my life. Twice. The first time it was by getting a father, and the second time it was by becoming a father. For at both points in my life, fathering—that need and potential in my soul to father and be fathered—had to be nurtured and made real.”  
—Thaddeus Goodavage

“I felt something impossible for me to explain in words.  
Then, when they took her away, it hit me. I got scared all over again and began to feel giddy. Then it came to me. I was a father.”  
—Nat King Cole

## Some Thoughts On Mothers

“A mother is a person who seeing there are only four pieces of pie for five people, promptly announces she never did care for pie.” —Tenneva Jordan

"The mother's heart is the child's schoolroom." — Henry Ward Beecher

"All that I am, or hope to be, I owe to my angel mother." —Abraham Lincoln

"God could not be everywhere, and therefore he made mothers." —Jewish proverb

"My mother was the most beautiful woman I ever saw.  
All I am I owe to my mother. I attribute all my success in life to the moral,  
intellectual and physical education I received from her."  
—George Washington

"Youth fades; love droops, the leaves of friendship fall;  
A mother's secret hope outlives them all."  
—Oliver Wendell Holmes

"I remember my mother's prayers and they have always followed me.  
They have clung to me all my life." —Abraham Lincoln



“Every mother is like Moses. She does not enter the  
Promised Land. She prepares a world she will not see.”  
—Pope Paul VI

"A rich child often sits in a poor mother's lap."  
—Spanish Proverb

“She made me a security blanket when I was born.  
That faded green blanket lasted just long enough for me  
to realize that the security part came from her.”  
—Alexander Crane

“Life began with waking up and loving my mother’s face.”  
—George Eliot

“My mother had a great deal of trouble with me, but I think she enjoyed it.” —Mark Twain

## Some Thoughts On Fathers

“I have always been told God is ‘generous’ and I thought I understood this.

But, a few years ago my father gave me something and then, a few weeks later, he offered me another of the same gift.

‘But you already gave me one, Daddy,’ I said.

‘I did?’ he said. ‘That’s okay. Why don’t you have another? You know I love you.’ And in that instant I understood—God is generous, openhanded, giving to us each day, not counting or tallying what has already been given, then giving again and out of love.”

—Gail Bowman

“I grew up in a neighborhood without dads. When any of my friends got time with his dad, that’s all he talked about. ‘We’re gonna do this. We did that.’ Maybe they only watched TV. It didn’t matter. That’s all he would talk about. The rest of us would be happy for him and jealous at the same time.”

—16-year-old boy, St. Joseph County Juvenile Justice Center

“As children we always sought our father’s approval far more than our mother’s. We especially wanted him to see the ‘As’ on our report cards, notice the rainbows we made from construction paper, watch the way we rode bikes with no hands. This continued well into adulthood. ‘Did you tell Daddy about my promotion?’ I’d ask my mother long distance.”

—Patricia Elam Ruff

“My dad left when I was six. There was a small tree across the street from our house. For almost three years I would climb up that tree after school and wait for him to come home. I believed if I stared at our driveway long enough and hoped hard enough, he would come home.

One day I just stopped climbing that tree.”

—G.H., age 29

“Daddy was a sure thing in a world of maybes, probables, hoped-fors, and failures.”  
—Kalumu Ya Salaam

"I cannot think of any need in childhood as strong as the need for a father's protection."  
—Sigmund Freud

"I watched a small man with thick calluses on both hands work fifteen and sixteen hours a day. I saw him once literally bleed from the bottoms of his feet, a man who came here uneducated, alone, unable to speak the language, who taught me all I needed to know about faith and hard work by the simple eloquence of his example."  
—Mario Cuomo

"My father died many years ago, and yet when something special happens to me, I talk to him secretly not really knowing whether he hears, but it makes me feel better to half believe it."  
—Natasha Josefowitz

“It is not flesh and blood but the heart which makes us fathers and sons.”  
—Johann Schiller



“Fathers, like mothers, are not born.  
Men grow into fathers and fathering is a  
very important stage in their development.”  
—David Gottesman

## Exercise 6: P.L.A.Y.\* ACTIVITIES WITH MY CHILDREN

*\*Praise, Laugh, Admire, and Yell out about them*



These are suggestions only! There are thousands of joyous admiring activities you can create with your children.

But find your children's ages and try two or three new activities. They might be as much fun as your children themselves.

### Age 0 ~ 1

1. Hold and cuddle my children.
2. Touch my children's tiny feet and hands by holding them in my palms.
3. Smile, smile, smile at my children.
4. Sing to my children.
5. Share in my children's laughter.
6. Play music that is soothing and comforting for my children.
7. Read to my children. They love the sound of parents' voices.
8. Give them a "fun" bath. Letting my children splash, play and relax.
9. Rock my children to sleep.
10. Make gentle, soothing sounds close to them (cooing and ahhing).
11. Sing lullabies to my children even in the middle of the day.
12. Rock my children just to hold them close.
13. Talk gently to my children all throughout the day.
14. Put my children next to me and snuggle with them on my bed.
15. Take my children for walks in their carriers or just holding them in my arms.
16. Show my children off... to the World!
17. Play peek-a-boo with my children.
18. Sing to them when they awake in the morning.
19. Show them with my sounds and expressions how I love them.
20. Kiss and hug my children every chance I get.
21. Lie down next to them on the floor.
22. Make a smile pile of soft pillows and blankets and let my children practice crawling.
23. Take my children to the zoo to visit the animals, sights, sounds.
24. Take my children to see their grandparents.
25. Visit our extended family with my children.
26. Hold my children when they eat to be closer to them.

***Ages 1 ~ 3: PRAISE, LAUGH, ADMIRE, AND YELL OUT ABOUT THEM***

1. Hold, hug, and celebrate my children.
2. Praise my children at least 3x per day.
3. From here on, they will need 4 hugs a day to survive, 8 to grow, 12 to thrive.
4. Explore the world with them—adults see 7 wonders in the world, children 7 million.
5. Dance with my children, holding them closely, twirling them around.
6. Take them to hear and explore new sights, sounds, sensations.



7. Count with my children using their fingers and toes.
8. Read to my children and ask them to repeat new words.
9. Show my children bright-colored pictures and explain what they see.
10. Take them to a lake and hold them while they splash their feet.
11. Brush their hair and then ask them to try to brush their own.
12. Tell my children I love them as soon as they awake in the morning and when they are tucked in at night.
13. Read poems to my children.
14. Sing songs to my children and ask them to sing with me.

15. Make going to see grandparents a very special event.
16. Make time with both parents a very special event for our children.
17. Say rhyming words to my children and ask them to repeat.
18. Play peek-a-boo with my children.
19. Draw pictures with my children and praise their efforts.
20. Play with blocks and other toys with my children, joining them in play.
21. Walk through the woods to see wild flowers, animals, hear new sounds.
22. Make up happy and funny stories using my children's names as main characters.
23. Talk with my children softly while guiding them gently. Be their teacher!
24. Make animal noises and ask my children to name the animal.
25. Do finger painting with my children.
26. Make special pictures with my children and hang them on the wall.
27. Put funny hats and shoes in a pile in the middle of the room and let my toddlers dress up.
28. Take my children's hands in mine and pet an animal together.
29. Blow bubbles with my children.
30. Color with my children.
31. Play hide-and-seek with my children.
32. Sing to my children at bedtime.
33. Sing to greet them in the morning.
34. Dance to music while holding ("dancing with") my children.

**Ages 3 ~ 6: PRAISE, LAUGH, ADMIRE, AND YELL OUT ABOUT THEM**

1. Let them hear how they are a miraculous part of a miraculous world.
2. Hold, hug, and celebrate them.
3. Blow bubbles with my children.
4. Play hide-and-seek with my children.
5. Play hide the button with my children.
6. Make finger puppets with them.
7. Put on finger plays with them.
8. Sing songs with my children.
9. Ask my children to teach me their favorite songs.
10. Play tag with my children.
11. Collect rocks in a pail with my children.
12. Make an obstacle course out of pillows and furniture with my children.
13. Make a fort out of sheets and cushions or furniture with my children.
14. Camp on the living room floor with them.
15. Plan a family slumber party on the living room floor and have pizza.
16. Watch a special movie with my children—their favorite one.
17. Walk with my children.
18. Have a race with my children.
19. Go to the park with my children and slide with them.
20. Make a car out of a box with my children.
21. Take my children to the park and swing with them.
22. Play hopscotch with my children.
23. Play jump rope with my children.

24. Show my children what a hoola-hoop is and teach them how to do it.
25. Play with clay or Play-Doh together.
26. Make cookies with them.



27. Create a marching band with pots, pans and spoons.
28. Make birthday cakes with my children and let them decorate.
29. Make snow angels with my children—and talk about angels like them.
30. Carve pumpkins together.
31. Play “Simon Says” with them—and let them lead me.
32. Dance to music with my children.
33. Practice putting things in and taking things out of boxes and containers.
34. Sort laundry together.
35. Sort laundry by color, teaching my children their colors.
36. Make mud pies with my children using wet sand or dirt.
37. Roll a ball back and forth on the floor with my toddlers.
38. Play “freeze dance” with music.

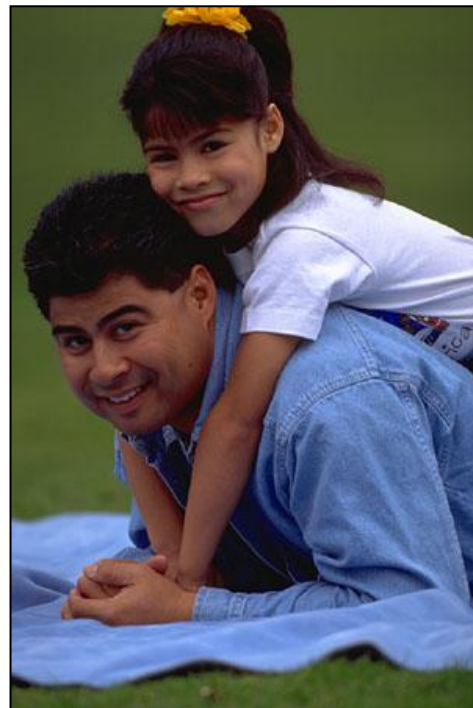


We flatter those we scarcely know,  
We please the fleeting guest,  
And deal full many a  
thoughtless blow  
To those who love us best.  
—Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Kindness is more important than  
wisdom; and, the recognition of  
this is the beginning of wisdom.  
—Theodore Isaac Rubin

39. Play paper basketball with the waste basket.
40. Make a drum out of an oatmeal container and wooden spoon.
41. Run through the sprinkler with my children.
42. Make a “kazoo” by covering a comb with wax paper. Share household chores with my children.
43. Talk often about our family’s idea of God and God’s love for them.

“The truth always turns out to be simpler than you thought.”  
—Richard Feynman, physicist/educator

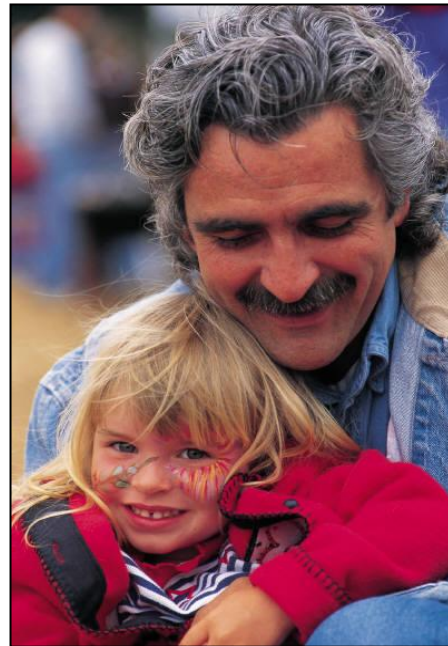


***Ages 7 ~ 10: PRAISE, LAUGH, ADMIRE, AND YELL OUT ABOUT THEM***



1. Hold, hug, and celebrate them.
2. Introduce my children to more about our family's idea of God—and, if it fits our beliefs, their creation in His image.
3. Ask their opinions. (Never stop doing this—they'll be giving me their opinions anyway, so why not ask and make it look like my idea? They'll listen to more of mine.)
4. Fill up water balloons and play catch with them.
5. Toss beanbags in a pail, moving the pail with each round of play.
6. Tape record my children singing and listen to it with them.
7. Camp in the backyard with my children.
8. Roast marshmallows with my children (make S'mores, too!)
9. Practice magic tricks with my children.
10. Ask my children to read their favorite poem or rhyme to me.
11. Ask my children to read with me, each taking part of a story to share.
12. Go fishing with my children.
13. Make puppets and then put on a show.
14. Make wind chimes with fishing line, branch and old keys.
15. Assign numbers to household chores and then draw numbers from a hat.
16. Ask my children to play their favorite song for me.
17. Play my favorite song for my children.
18. Share my favorite childhood movie with my children.
19. Collect wildflowers together and give a bouquet to a special friend.
20. Learn to play a musical instrument together.
21. Frost a cake/cookies together.
22. Climb a tree with my children.
23. Wash family dog with my children.
24. Walk our dog together.
25. Take a walk with each child, making that their special time with me.
26. Ask each of my children their favorite food and prepare that for dinner, making it that child's special night in the family.
27. Plant a vegetable or flower garden with my children.
28. Make special projects with each of my children, separately.
29. Shoot hoops with my children.
30. Fly a kite with my children.
31. Read to my children.

32. Awaken my children with a kiss and tuck them in with a kiss.
33. Play catch with my children.
34. Make a list of “The 10 greatest things” about each family member and share them together.
35. Write a story with my children, alternating turns writing a paragraph or more.
36. Play music and dance with my children.
37. Sit down with my children and talk with them about school, their friends, their teachers.
38. Take pictures of my children just because.
39. Ride bikes with my children.
40. Rake the yard together.
41. Hike together and write a journal about it together.
42. Pick a volunteer project to do with my children and share the project with them.
43. Speak more and more of the world’s miracles—like them!



“Making the simple complicated is commonplace; making the complicated simple, awesomely simple, that's creativity.”  
—Charles Mingus

**10 ~ older: PRAISE, LAUGH, ADMIRE, AND YELL OUT ABOUT THEM**

1. Hold, hug, and celebrate them.
2. Talk with my children, one-on-one, every day.
3. Invite them to be leaders in a family activity—or in helping another child.
4. Lie out in the backyard and look up at the stars naming shapes.
5. Ask my children to bring their favorite current event for a dinner discussion among all the family members.
6. Ask my children to write their favorite “childhood” memory and then we will share them . I will also share my favorite memory with my children.
7. Complete a puzzle with my children.
8. Make birdhouses with my children from scrap wood and paint them together.
9. Say meal prayers together and hold hands as a family.
10. Do the dishes together. Change linens together. Sing during the chores.
11. Play a card game with my children.
12. Play my children’s favorite board game.
13. Discuss current events and ask my children’s opinions about the events.
14. Hug my children “at random.”
15. Each day my children will get a new vocabulary word. They will look it up in the dictionary and share its meaning with everyone in our family.
16. Read news articles with my children and then encourage a discussion about the content.
17. Make ice cream sundaes with my children. Create crazy toppings to share.
18. Apologize sincerely to my children—show them how real adults handle mistakes.
19. Accept apologies from my children with support and grace for their courage.
20. Volunteer at an animal shelter and participate with my children.
21. Talk with my children about their best friends.



22. Sing Christmas carols all year 'round.
23. Share snowball fights (gentle!) with my children—and let them win.
24. Build snow forts with my children.
25. Ask my children their favorite jokes. Laugh with them.
26. Admire my children's clothes, even if it's not my taste.
27. Listen to my children's thoughts, feelings, opinions by stopping what I am doing to actively listen.
28. Play touch football with my children.
29. Walk along a shoreline and share special memories.
30. Hug my children every chance I get.
31. Ask my children their favorite dance and then ask them to teach me how to do it.
32. Have a "date night" with each of my children and make that night very special—with favorite foods, activities, music, games, movies, etc.
33. Praise my children whenever they have done their best at anything they try.
34. Admire my children for their individuality and tell each one how special they are in their own way.
35. Ask my children to share their biggest dream and tell me why.
36. Ask my children to share their deepest fear and tell me why.

“Children require guidance and sympathy  
far more than instruction.”

—Annie Sullivan

“Any intelligent fool can make things bigger, more complex,  
and more violent. It takes a touch of genius—and a lot of  
courage—to move in the opposite direction.”

—Albert Einstein

## Exercise 7: Admiring Both Parts of My Child

***Children know they come half from their dads and half from their moms. And they need to know Mom and Dad affirm see things in each other. What would compliments and memories like these mean to a child?***

1. “I’ll never forget how much you and Mom would laugh when you rode your bicycle around the house with Mom chasing you all the way. ‘Policewoman Mom’ we called her—and (as you know) the name stuck.”
2. “Dad was always the best storyteller. In school he made all of us laugh. Now he loves to tell stories about you and how proud he is of you.”
3. “Mom and I get so excited watching you boys play baseball. You guys are just getting too good. (We all know that you get your baseball talents from Mom.)”
4. “Do you remember how hard Daddy worked to put together your bicycle? Do you remember how long it took him? We all had a good laugh when we found out that the only instructions were in Japanese. Nobody but Daddy could have done it.”
5. “I love watching Mommy give you one of her big wonderful bear hugs. Doesn’t she just make you feel that everything’s going to be fine? She hugged me on our first date back in high school, and I knew then I wanted her as mom to any children I’d ever have.”
6. “It’s so best that Dad helps you with your homework. He is so proud of how you’re doing in school, and he loves to be part of your success.”
7. “Mom gets such joy in seeing you both succeed in school. She’s at every possible school event. We’re your biggest supporters. And always will be.”
8. “You have such sparkling eyes—just like Dad’s.”
9. “I love how Mommy’s eyes light up every time she hears you talking about your soccer games. She was a great soccer player too. Really! Don’t laugh!”
10. “I love how Daddy has dreams and goals for himself. Do you know he went back to school twice to be the best at his work? I don’t know anyone else who can spend 20 minutes with the manual and run any computer or program. And I love how he encourages you to follow your dreams, too.”

I guess you can do it now, if you haven’t done so already, write out your list of 10 compliments and good memories you’ll be sharing with your children about their other parent.

**Discussion: Which Future Do I Want with My Co-Parent?**

**If you and your co-parent aren't together any longer, ask yourself which future you want?**

**Future A**

Angrily focusing on my resentments  
and arguing the past

Giving decision-making to others

Relating with my co-parent as an enemy

Seeing blame and fighting  
as the answer

Being a victim

Carrying on senseless wars that begin by  
destroying my children—and end by  
destroying me

**Future B**

Constructively focusing on my children  
and building the future

Retaking control of my life

Relating with my co-parent as a partner

Seeing healing and cooperation  
as the answer

Being a hero

Carrying on heroic peace-making that  
begins by saving my children—and ends  
by saving me.

**The Three Truths of Parent Conflict**

1. If you're in conflict, your children are in danger.
2. Only you—their parents—can protect them from that danger.
3. When you make protecting your children your focus, even you will be better off—financially, legally, emotionally, and parentally.

## Discussion: Some Thoughts of Children Caught in Conflict

### 1. “I’m so ashamed. I’m humiliated. Other kids’ families aren’t like this.”

“Children believe they are responsible for all of the major occurrences in their lives—including parental fighting.”—Edward Teyber, *Helping Children Cope with Divorce*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1992, p. 82.

### 2. “I’m scared to death. I don’t know what will happen next.”

“In a home marked by conflict and unpredictability, children do not have a deep and abiding trust in their caretakers.” —Elizabeth M. Ellis, *Divorce Wars: Intervention with Families in Conflict*. Baltimore: Port City Press, 2000, p.49.

### 3. “I need to fix this. It’s dangerous if I don’t.”

“Having lost the family as a unit, children are apprehensive about the future. . . . [S]ome youngsters feel they have lost any semblance of control over their lives. . . . Their fear and sense of powerlessness are heightened when children witness scenes in which their parents are at each other’s throats.”—Stanton E. Samenow, *In the Best Interest of the Child: How to Protect Your Child from the Pain of Divorce*. New York: Crown Publishers, 2002, pp. 19-21.

### 4. “This is MY mom and dad. I must have the faults they see in each other.”

“Parental conflict not only sends kids messages about love, marriage, and relationships, it speaks volumes to them about who they are. To a child’s ears, any comment about his parent—positive or negative—is a judgment of him. Any critical barb about your ex goes right to your child’s heart.”—M. Gary Neuman, *Helping Your Kids Cope with Divorce the Sandcastles Way*. New York: Random House, 1998, p. 202.

### 5. “I need to figure out who’s right and pick sides.”

“[C]hildren experiencing intense conflict have to take sides because they can’t manage the internal tension and anxiety they feel. . . . This psychological ‘splitting’ as it is called, . . . is the most destructive emotional symptom that children might experience . . . because of the confusion and anxiety it creates.”—Philip M. Stahl, *Parenting After Divorce: A Guide to Resolving Conflicts and Meeting Your Children’s Needs*. Atascadero, California: Impact Publishers, Inc., 2000, p. 20.

### 6. “I can’t talk about my real hurt and real fears.”

“Children also find it difficult to talk about sensitive topics and feelings . . . because they fear they might escalate the fight. . . . Instead, some turn inward, trying to make do with their own meager resources.”—Janet Johnston, Karen Breunig, Carla Garrity, Mitchell Caris, *Through the Eyes of Children: Healing Stories for Children of*

*Divorce*. New York: The Free Press, 1997, pp. xiv-xviii

### 7. “I need to tell people what they want to hear.”

“In the battle between you, they learn to be polished diplomats. They’ll tell each of you what you want most to hear—not because they’re liars but because they want desperately to soothe each of you, to calm you down, to reduce their fears that you’ll become enraged. They’re afraid of your anger, they pity you, and they want you to feel better.”—Judith Wallerstein and Sandra Blakeslee, *What About the Kids?* New York: Hyperion, 2003, p. 204.

### 8. “I will make one parent angry (or hurt) if I need or love my other parent.”

“In divorce . . . the choices that are put before children do not lead to a sense of control. Rather, they often lead to the child being placed in a position of feeling like they are betraying one parent or the other (or both).”—Jeffrey Zimmerman and Elizabeth S. Thayer, *Adult Children of Divorce: How to Overcome the Legacy of Your Parents’ Breakup and Enjoy Love, Trust, and Intimacy*. Oakland, California: New Harbinger Publications, Inc., 2003, p 61.

### 9. “If I weren’t here, this wouldn’t be happening.”

“Because they are often the centerpiece of their parents’ arguments with each other, to varying degrees, these children feel responsible for causing the disputes, yet must feel helpless to control or stop the conflict.”—Janet Johnston, Karen Breunig, Carla Garrity, Mitchell Caris, *Through the Eyes of Children: Healing Stories for Children of Divorce*. New York: The Free Press, 1997

### 10. “I can’t do anything right. I deserve whatever bad happens to me.”

“Children in high-conflict homes are more likely to view themselves . . . in overly negative and hostile ways.” —E. Mark Cummings and Patrick Davies, *Children and Marital Conflict: The Impact of Family Dispute and Resolution*. New York: The Guilford Press, 1994, p.5

### 11. “I’d do anything to feel better or to fit in.”

“Conflicts between parents are likely to cause self-destructive behaviors in children.” —Philip M. Stahl, *Parenting After Divorce: A Guide to Resolving Conflicts and Meeting Your Children’s Needs*. Atascadero, California: Impact Publishers, Inc., 2000, p. 25.

### 12. “I don’t care anymore. It hurts too much to care. The world doesn’t care about me—and I don’t care about the world.”

“Ongoing postdivorce conflict reinforces the child’s belief that bad things will continue to happen to him or her in the future and that he or she is helpless to do anything about it.” —Elizabeth M. Ellis, *Divorce Wars: Intervention with Families in Conflict*. Baltimore: Port City Press, 2000, p. 197.



### **Uniformity of Research on the Effects of Parent Conflict**

“Without question, the single biggest problem for children of divorce is being exposed to continuing parental conflict.” Edward Teyber, *Helping Children Cope with Divorce*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass (1992), p. 79.

“Empirical evidence consistently points to parental conflict as the factor that most consistently predicts maladjustment among children whose parents have separated or divorced.” Robert E. Emery, *Renegotiating Family Relationships: Divorce, Child Custody, and Mediation*. New York: The Guilford Press (1994), p. 13.

“[I]t’s clear that children of all ages regard fighting between parents as their number-one divorce-related problem.” M. Gary Neuman, *Helping Your Kids Cope with Divorce the Sandcastles Way*. New York: Random House (1998), p. 197.

“High conflict between parents not only causes children immense suffering, it causes serious problems in their development.” Judith S. Wallerstein and Sandra Blakeslee, *What About the Kids?* New York: Hyperion (2003), p. 204.

“The level and intensity of parental conflict is the most potent factor in children’s postdivorce adjustment.” Carla B. Garrity and Mitchell A. Baris, *Caught in the Middle: Protecting the Children of High-Conflict Divorce*. New York: Lexington Books (1994), p. 19.

“Conflict essentially stops kids in their tracks—they are less free to go about the business of being a kid, meeting the developmental tasks that are essential to forming a healthy self.” Mary Ellen Hannibal, *Good Parenting Through Your Divorce*. New York: Marlow and Company (2002), p. 58.

“Children who are exposed to more intense conflict between parents are more likely to suffer harm resulting from their parents’ divorce. The lower the level of conflict between parents, the more likely those children will emerge emotionally whole.” Andrew I. Schepard, *Children, Courts, and Custody: Interdisciplinary Models for Divorcing Families*. New York: Cambridge University Press (2004), p. 31.

“The thing that stresses children most, sometimes for many years, is lingering conflict between their parents.” Constance Ahrons, *We’re Still Family: What Grown Children Have to Say about Their Parents’ Divorce*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers (2004), p. 80.

“Our data show that the long-term consequences of interparental discord for children are pervasive and consistently detrimental . . . [and] have a broad negative impact on virtually every dimension of offspring well-being.” Paul R. Amato and Alan Booth, *A Generation at Risk: Growing Up in an Era of Family Upheaval*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press (1997), p. 219.

“One of the most important aspects of the family environment for children whose parents are divorcing is the level of parental fighting. In fact, parental fighting is actually a better forecaster of children’s function after the divorce than the changes in the parents’ marital status . . . and the children’s subsequent separation from a parent.” E. Mark Cummings and Patrick Davies, *Children and Marital Conflict: The Impact of Family Dispute and Resolution*. New York: The Guilford Press (1994), p. 9.

“Some parents desperately hold onto the belief that children are not affected by the parents’ conflicts. Sadly, this just isn’t true. Unhappy homes make unhappy children, and every divorce will take its toll unless some corrective steps are taken.” Archibald D. Hart, *Children and Divorce: What to Expect—How to Help*. Dallas: Word Publishing (1982, 1989), p. 121.

**Exercise 8: Listening to “3 Sisters”**

Listen to the “3 Sisters” from the “Parents Corner” of [www.UpToParents.org](http://www.UpToParents.org) or a CD or DVD.

Do any of their statements help to illustrate the painful thoughts listed on the prior page?









**Exercise 9: Avoiding the 9 Myths of Separation and Divorce**

Watch the 5-minute video on the “9 Myths of Separation and Divorce.” Then put a checkmark by each that seems particularly important to remember.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>#1: We have a competition.</b>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>#2: We have legal problems.</b>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>#3: We have a custody dispute.</b>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>#4: The judge will solve the problem.</b>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>#5: This is complicated.</b>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>#6: To protect my children, I must fight.</b>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>#7: Focusing on my children will hurt me.</b>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>#8: I'm not sad, just mad.</b>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>#9: Divorce is inevitable.</b>

## **Exercise 10: Noticing the 8 Hidden Keys You Can Use Today to Succeed**

Watch the 5-minute video on the 8 Hidden Keys—keys you already have to succeed. Check the ones you will use starting today.

-  **Living by the Child Safety Zone**
-  **Keeping our children out of adult roles**
-  **Sharing 10 good things about their other parent**
-  **Celebrating what they get to do with their other parent**
-  **Cheerfully encouraging calls to their other parent**
-  **Promptly sharing child-related information**
-  **Staying out of legal combat**
-  **Enjoying and admiring our children**

## Discussion: Some Hints for Good Co-Parent Interaction

1. Remember that if you and your co-parent are in conflict, your children are in danger. Make it your goal to save your children!
2. Be respectful and courteous. Avoid blame, criticism, and anything that wouldn't be received well. The idea isn't to crush someone—it's to save your children!
3. Instead of worrying about who will "win" and who will "lose," remember that you will either win together or lose together.
4. Keep each other informed about important events in the children's lives.
5. Ask for your co-parent's opinion. Not only will you then have more information to make better decisions, but you'll be building the goodwill everyone in the family needs you to have.
6. Focus on the future.
7. If you have an issue to discuss:
  - a. Schedule a time to talk when the children aren't around.
  - b. Make requests rather than demands.
  - c. Listen to your co-parent without interrupting.
  - d. Search for solutions that help everyone.
  - e. If your co-parent makes a request, see if you can honor it. You're more likely to get a favorable response when you make a request. Build your "emotional bank account."
8. If a conversation gets too emotional, stop and try later. Agree to honor a simple request like, "Let's maybe talk about this later when we've had more time to think about it."
9. Remember that every interaction you have will either build or destroy a piece of goodwill. For your children and everyone's peace of mind, choose to build goodwill.
10. Be a peace-making hero and give your children a safe place to live their one and only childhood—*you'll never do anything you can feel more proud about.*

## Exercise 11: Some Icebreaker Statements

Look over these statements. Check the ones you think would help co-parents' interaction the most.

*What if our children heard their parents speaking like this?  
What if parents could hear themselves speaking like this?*

(1) *"I bet if we think about it together, we can come up with a good answer. I'd like to hear your ideas."*

(2) *"Thanks! That was a big help."*

(3) *"Is there something I can do?"*

(4) *"That was great what you did for the kids, and I really, really appreciate it."*



(5) *"I'm glad you thought you could ask. Let me see if I can change plans so you can have Joey then. If it's important to you, it's important to me."*

*Constant kindness can accomplish much.  
As the sun makes ice melt, kindness causes  
misunderstanding, mistrust, and hostility to evaporate.  
—Albert Schweitzer*

(6) *"I'm sorry we're late. The traffic was a nightmare."*

(7) *"Don't worry about it—it just means I'm all the happier to see the kids now that they're here."*

(8) *"Jessica really got a kick out of your present. Thanks so much."*

*Courtesy is the one passport that will be accepted without question  
in every land, in every office, in every home, in every heart in the world.  
—George D. Powers*

(9) *"I have a problem I could use your opinion about. Do you have a few minutes?"*

(10) *"I'm so grateful for what you're doing for our children. They're lucky to have such a great parent."*

## **Discussion: Yeah, But You Don't Know My Co-Parent**

One of the most common things we hear is, "I want to be cooperative, but my co-parent doesn't!" Here's help with that difficult challenge.

### **1. Give yourself credit.**

Remember to honor yourself for everything you've done to protect your children from conflict. It ain't easy.

### **2. Remember the goal.**

Always remember to give your helpless children a safe place to live their one and only childhood. Your goal isn't to win a fight—it's to stop a fight to save your children.

### **3. Appreciate the difference you can make alone.**

Your children are helped by having even one parent who gives them a safe sanctuary from a storm. You can help your children by:

- Living by the Child Safety Zone Pledge—a promise to keep all conflict away from your children.
- Writing 10 compliments and good memories about your co-parent—and making these kinds of comments the theme of everything you say to your children about their other parent.
- Celebrating the things your children get to do with their other parent.
- Cheerfully encouraging them to call their other parent
- Making it easy for your children to love their other parent.

### **4. Understand the need for you to pick up the slack.**

The more your co-parent messes up, the more your children need you to excel.

### **5. Use good resources.**

Visit the "Parents Corner" on UpToParents.org, spend time with people who have good divorces, and take advantage of child-focused mediation or counseling.

### **6. Consider the subjectivity of it all.**

It's impossible to be completely objective in the middle of difficult family circumstances. The job of co-parents is to accept each other as they are and merge the strengths they bring to the table.

### **7. Focus on those who really can't go it alone—your children.**

Remember that children don't have the resources you do. Let their helplessness be the final irresistible call to your heroism.

### **8. Remember the joy.**

You owe it to your children—and yourself—to enjoy your children.

Discussion: Who's Responsible for My Success —  
Including My Success in Protecting My Child?

**Do you think a major task lies before us? If so, let's start by remembering what almost all wise people say is required for success in anything.**

"I'm a great believer in luck, and I find the harder I work, the more I have of it."  
—Thomas Jefferson

"People who soar are those who refuse to sit back, sigh,  
and wish things would change. They neither complain of their  
lot nor passively dream of some distant ship coming in."  
—Charles Swindoll

"We cannot direct the wind, but we can adjust the sails." —Unknown

"Each of us is an impregnable fortress  
that can be laid waste only from within."  
—Timothy Flynn

"I never knew an early-rising, hard-working, prudent man, careful of his earnings, and strictly honest, who complained of bad luck. A good character, good habits, and iron industry are impregnable to the assaults of all the ill luck that fools ever dreamed of."  
—Joseph Addison

"The best years of your life are the ones in which you decide  
your problems are your own. You do not blame them on your mother, the  
ecology, or the president. You realize that you control your own destiny."  
—Albert Ellis

"I don't think of myself as a poor deprived ghetto girl who made good.  
I think of myself as somebody who from an early age knew  
I was responsible for myself, and I had to make good."  
—Oprah Winfrey

"A grandfather was talking to his grandson about how he felt.  
He said, 'I feel as if I have two wolves fighting in my heart. One wolf  
is the vengeful, angry, violent one. The other wolf is the loving, compassionate  
one.' The grandson asked him, 'Which wolf will win the fight in your  
heart?' The grandfather answered, 'The one I feed.'"  
—North American Indian story

"Any time you think the problem is out there,  
that very thought is the problem." —Stephen Covey



“You have to expect things of yourself before you can do them.”

—Michael Jordan

“If you could kick the person responsible for most of your troubles, you wouldn't be able to sit down for six months.”

—Gordon Gray

“A man can fail many times, but he isn't a failure until he begins to blame somebody else.”

—John Burroughs

“When I was a young man I observed that nine out of ten things I did were failures. I didn't want to be a failure, so I did ten times more work.”

—George Bernard Shaw

“In the long run, we shape our lives, and we shape ourselves. The process never ends until we die. And the choices we make are ultimately our own responsibility.”

—Eleanor Roosevelt

“We must exchange the philosophy of excuse—what I am is beyond my control—for the philosophy of responsibility.”

—Barbara Jordan

“When you blame others, you give up your power to change.”

—Dr. Robert Anthony

“Whenever we seek to avoid the responsibility for our own behavior, we do so by attempting to give that responsibility to some other individual or organization or entity. But this means we then give away our power to that entity.”

—M. Scott Peck

“The block of granite which was an obstacle in the path of the weak, becomes a stepping stone in the path of the strong.”

—Thomas Carlyle

“The golden opportunity you are seeking is in yourself. It is not in your environment; it is not in luck or chance, or the help of others; it is in yourself alone.”

—Orison Swett Marden

“People who do not succeed have one distinguishing trait in common. They know all the reasons for failure and have what they believe to be air-tight alibis to explain their own lack of achievement.”

—Napoleon Hill

**YOU WILL NEVER, EVER FIX YOUR PROBLEMS  
BLAMING SOMEONE ELSE.**

That is for losers. Don't be a sucker just because it hurts to admit the truth. You're the one screwing up, if anybody is. The sooner you accept that, the sooner your life gets better. Let's face it. No matter who you might want to blame:

You made the choice.	You decided you weren't worth it.
You said the words.	You quit.
You settled too cheap.	You let them come back.
You got mad.	You sold out your dreams.
You chose the job.	You went to the game instead.
You treated yourself like dirt.	You bought the Twinkies.
You wanted to move.	You ignored the consequences.
You left it in the refrigerator.	You said it was all right.
You wanted the damn dog.	You bought the damn thing.
You trusted the salesman.	You ate it.
You let him in.	You let them talk you into it.
You asked her.	You didn't wait.
You scratched it.	You didn't think it through.

You chose the feelings.

—Dr. Phil McGraw

HOW DO I DO WHAT MY CHILD NEEDS EVEN WHEN I'M FULL OF ANGER?

***Well, remember the lessons on every adult's chance to succeed (pp.40–42)? Here are some special insights about how adults cause and are in charge of every one of their feelings as well:***

“I shall allow no man to belittle my soul by making me hate him.”  
—Booker T. Washington

“We who have lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from man but one thing: the last of human freedoms —to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances — to choose one's own way.”  
— Victor Frankl

“The greatest day in your life and mine is when we take total responsibility for our attitudes. That's the day we truly grow up.”  
—John Maxwell

“Most people are about as happy as they make up their minds to be.”  
—Abraham Lincoln



Remember that it is **adults** who are 100 percent in charge of their feelings.

Children can be **and are** hurt by harsh words and deeds.

## Exercise 12: Seeing Responsibility as the *Ability* to Choose My *Response*

"Responsibility is the *ability* to choose one's *response*."  
—Stephen Covey

**Successful people take responsibility for everything in their lives.** They blame no one. Not ever. They don't feel bound by outside circumstances (such as what someone else has done or said, what the weather was like, how good they think their luck has or hasn't been, etc.).

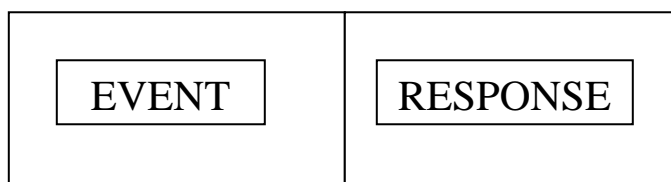
One of the most important parts of that outlook is an awareness that **we as adults cause all our own feelings.** In a society where so many people foolishly talk about someone "pushing their buttons" or having been "made mad," this can be a hard concept to grasp. But it happens to be absolutely true.

What if together we did an experiment? Suppose we agreed to walk down the street and compliment the first three people we see about the shirts they are wearing. Well, obviously, each could have a different response. The first might be happy, the second angry, and the third frightened that we were about to rob him.

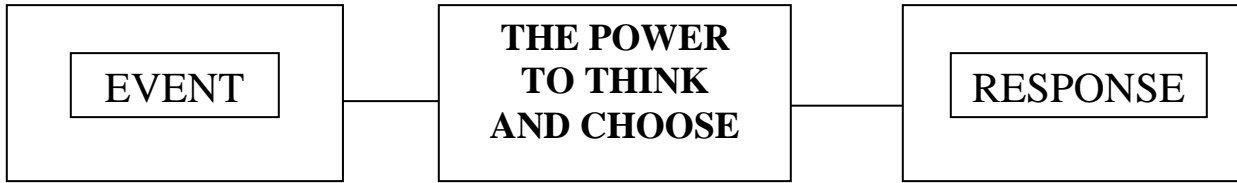
But wait. How could the same event produce three such completely different reactions? The answer is simple: The event didn't produce the reactions—the people's *different thoughts* did. The first carried a contented thought ("My kids bought me this shirt"); the second an angry thought ("Why does this guy think this is any of his business?"); and the third a fearful thought ("Strangers talk to you only if they're up to something").

**Feelings are the products of thoughts, and no one can make us think anything.** We can choose and shape our own thoughts. Even between a painful event (the loss of a job, an angry comment from a friend or loved one, bitter news) and our response is *the freedom to choose*. *Responsibility* is indeed the *ability* to choose one's *response*.

The response of an emotionally *unintelligent* person looks like this:

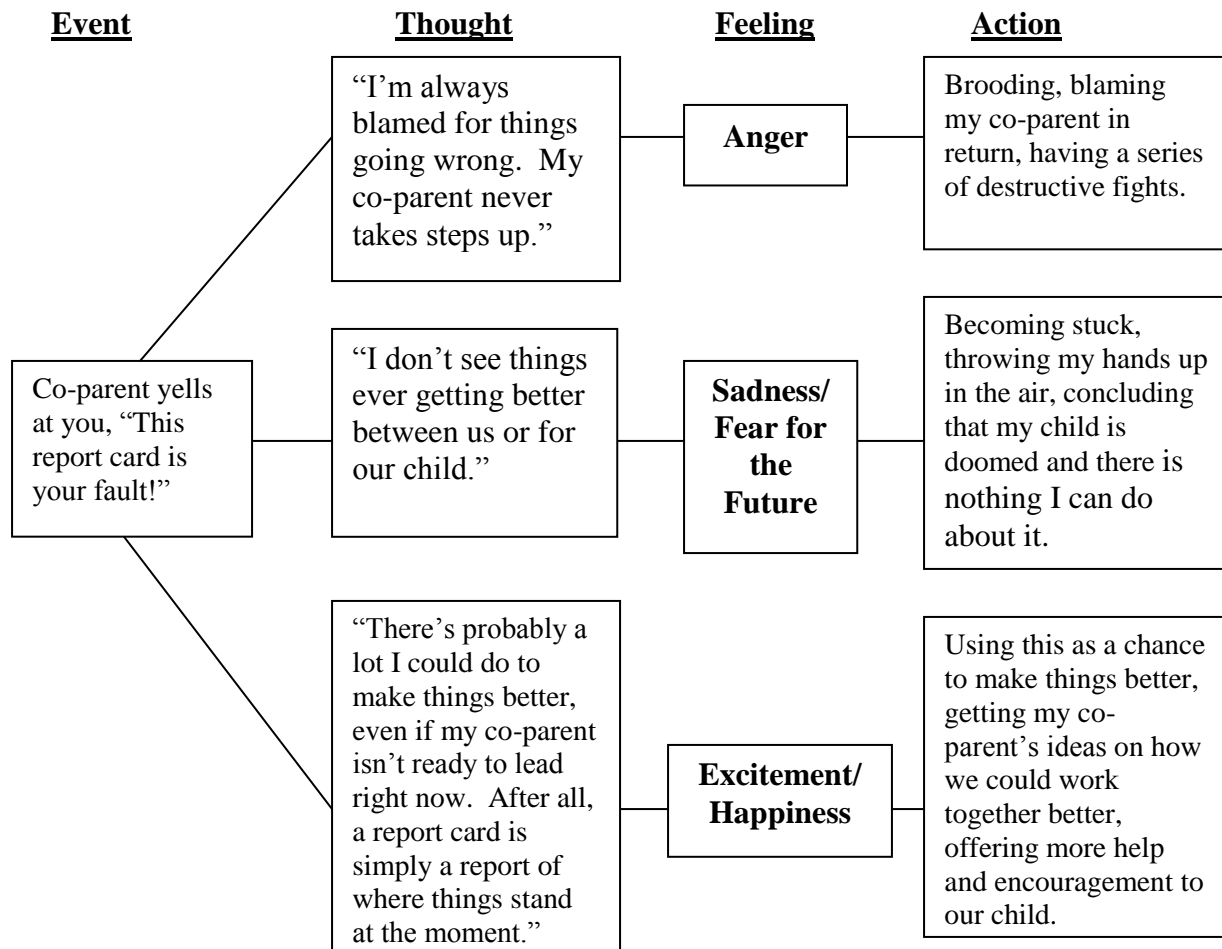


For the emotionally mature person, those two boxes exist further and further apart:

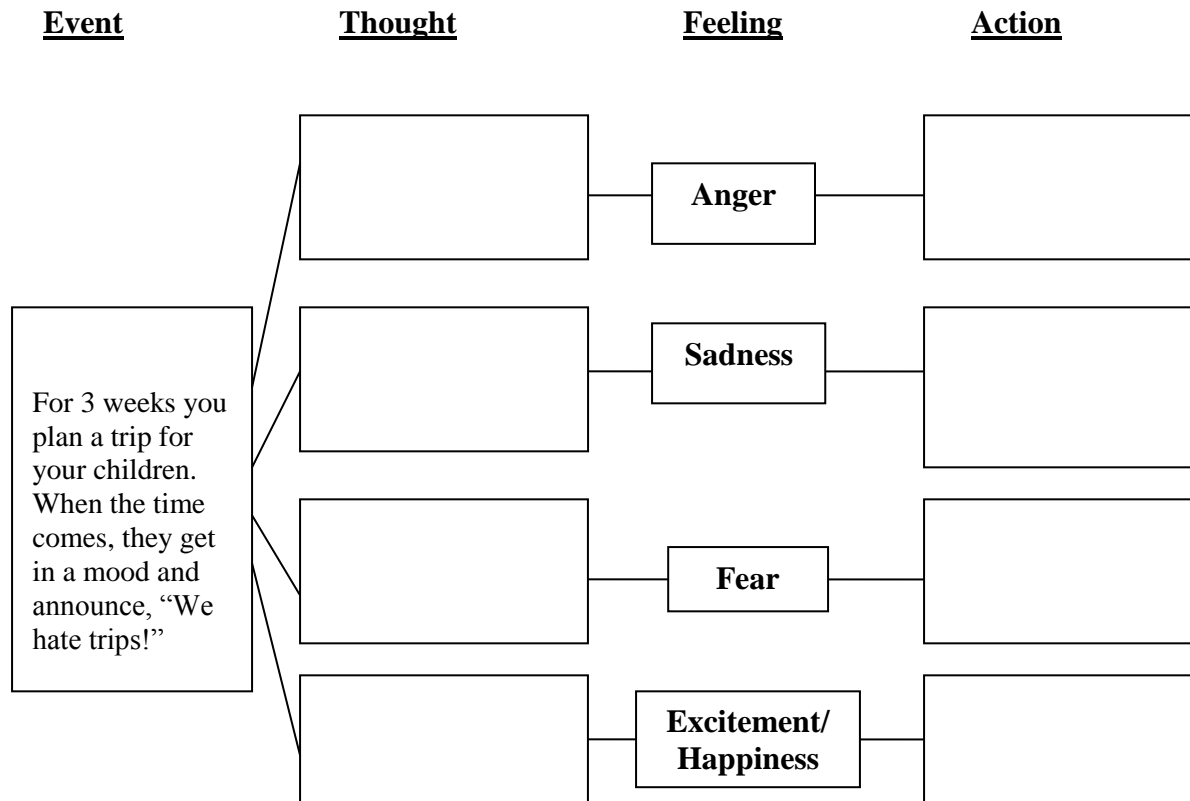


A great exercise to learn this is to ALWAYS replace “\_\_\_\_\_ made me mad/happy/etc.” with, “I feel mad/happy/etc. over \_\_\_\_\_.” OWN your feelings.

So, let’s say your co-parent angrily claims it’s your fault your child earned a poor report card. Here are three different thoughts you could have about that accusation—leading in each case to a very different feeling and action.



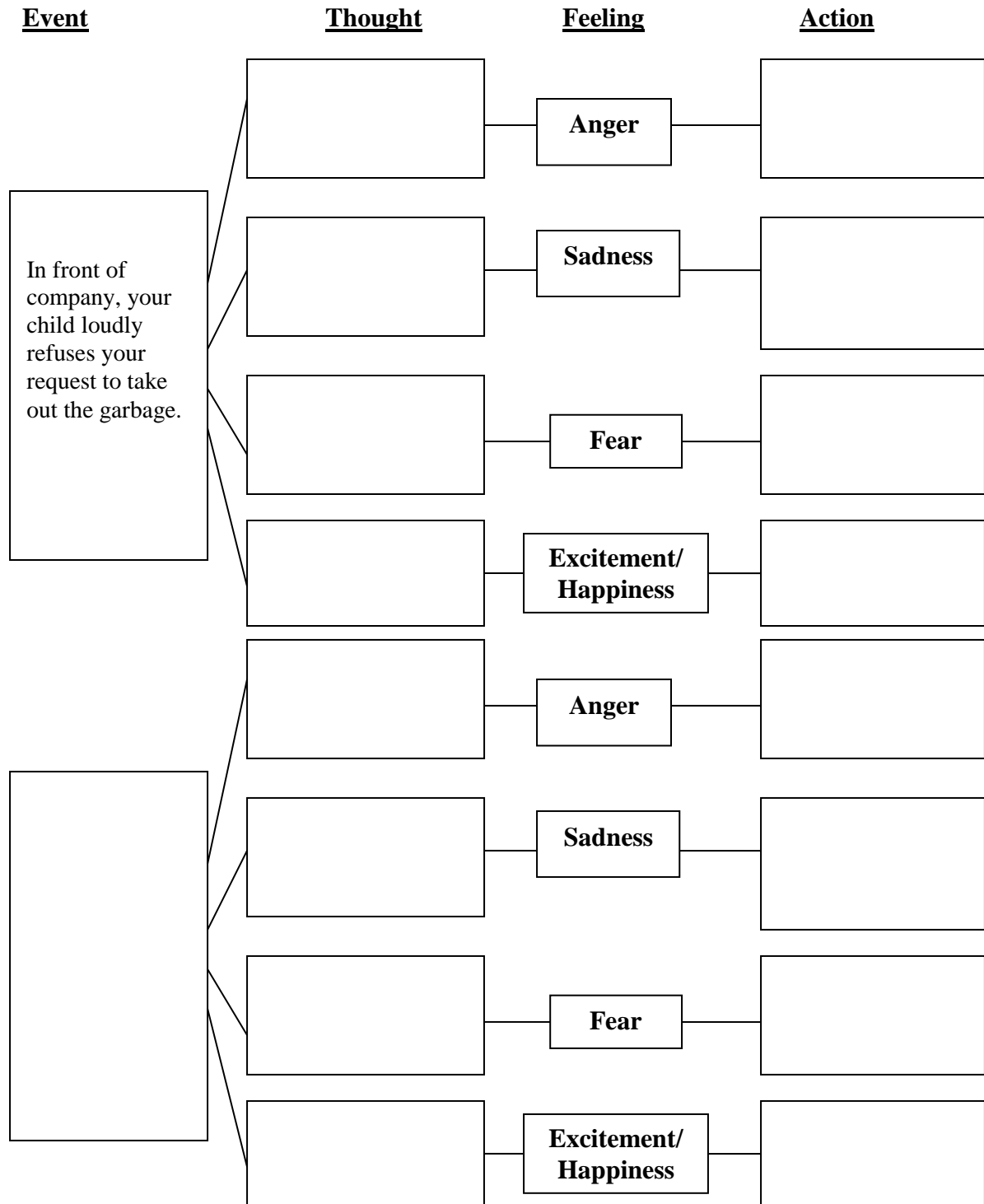
Here’s one more example, but you can fill in the thought in column two leading to each feeling—and the action likely to follow in column four.

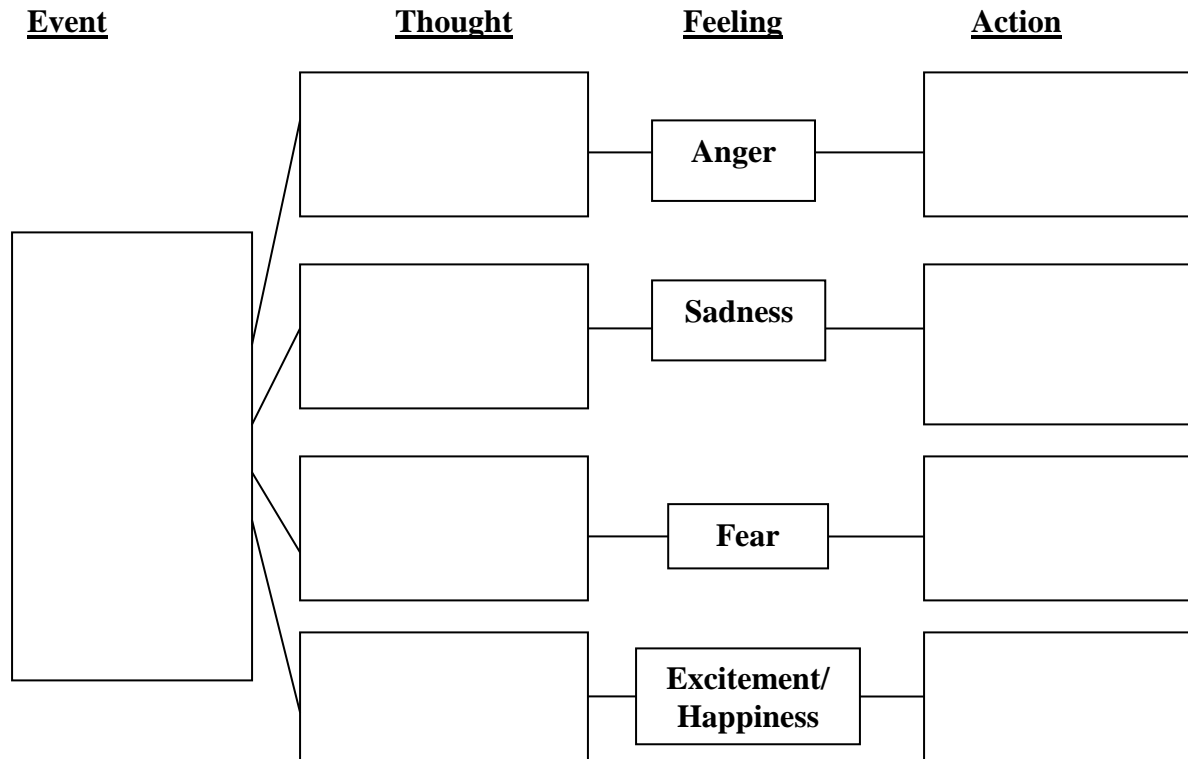


Now try this exercise. In the first column on the diagram on the next page, fill in an event that a person would not ordinarily choose (the loss of a job, news that a loved one is critically ill, a heated disagreement with your co-parent, etc.).

In the third column, the feeling that you take away from the experience is already written (anger, sadness, fear, excitement, or happiness). Your job is to fill in a thought in column two that would lead to each of those four separate feelings—and then fill in the action in column four that would likely follow from each of the four feelings.

Use the additional diagrams to build an awareness of how you cause—and can change—your feelings about anything.





***Remember: the basis of adulthood—the defining difference between children and adults—is the willingness to acknowledge causing one’s own feelings.***

***To believe and speak as if others can cause our feelings is to live at the mercy of people and things entirely outside our control. We would still be causing all our own feelings (because they’d be the results of our thoughts), but we’d live forever in the miserable state of believing others had control of our most personal and important possessions—our thoughts and feelings.***



## Discussion: Discipline

Judging from the dozens of books and thousands of articles written every year on the subject, disciplining children can start to look like the world's most impossible task. With help from three terrific books you might want to check out (Dr. Grace Mitchell's *A Very Practical Guide to Discipline for Young Children* and Dr. Spencer Johnson's *The One-Minute Father* and *The One-Minute Mother*), here are some helpful guideposts.

First, here are some core ideas to remember to make everything simpler and better.

1. *Discipline is not about punishment but teaching.* The word *discipline* comes from the Latin word for teaching—*disciplina*. (What's a disciple?) Our goal isn't to run our children's lives, but to teach them how to run their own lives, even when we're not around.
2. *No one cares how much you know until he knows how much you care.* A child who is regularly “caught being good” and is openly valued and hugged has every reason to be a happy, caring, and cooperative child—just one more benefit of admiring a child. (A highly successful school principal we know is a great believer in this lesson: she requires that children be sent to her office three times to celebrate good behavior for every one time they are sent for behavior problems.)
3. *Even when children's behavior is a problem, we'll have the most success in steering them to a better way if we remember that it's the behavior—and not the child—we want to disapprove.* As Dr. Johnson writes, “When I discipline my children, I want them to feel bad about their misbehavior but good about themselves.” After all, who behaves destructively? People who feel bad about themselves. And who behaves constructively? People who feel good about themselves and their place in their social network.
4. *Though they might try to say differently, children want to fit in, they want boundaries, and they want to behave in ways that will make them feel like valued members of their families.* Children may slip—and they will test to see what limits and loyalties are present—but at rock bottom they want what we all want: to fit in and feel valuable and valued.

## Discussion: "To Spank or Not To Spank"

If there's anything as emotional and stressful as parenting a child, it has to be the topic of whether or not to spank a child. All we can do in a short class is offer an important caution.

The caution begins with remembering that the word ***discipline*** means ***to teach***. In fact, the word shares with *disciple* the Latin root *disciplina*, meaning "teaching" or "learning."

Discipline isn't about adults' supposed right to lash out: it's about adults' duty to responsibly teach.

So, here are six things to consider about good adult discipline.

- First, good adult discipline guides a child in the long run, but hitting usually causes long-term anger and acting-out in children for the sake of short-term results.
- Second, good adult discipline is about changing children from the inside out (meaning making them better decision-makers when we're not around), but hitting makes children poorer decision-makers, just more frightened when we're present.
- Third, good adult discipline is about the child's needs, but hitting almost always runs the risk of being about adults' anger and frustration.
- Fourth, good adult discipline sends a message of respect to children about their ability to make better and better decisions in the future, but hitting sends the message that a child is so unteachable that words won't work.
- Fifth, good adult discipline invites children to trust and confide in us, but hitting does anything but encourage children to come to us.
- Finally, good adult discipline never sets an example that would be unhelpful or dangerous, but hitting does precisely that by showing that people are allowed to hurt someone weaker than they are.

Think about leading with wisdom and persuasion.

We know both you and your child can handle the challenge.

*Someday, maybe, there will exist a well informed, well considered  
and fervent public conviction that the most deadly of all possible sins  
is the mutilation of a child's spirit.*

*--Erik Erickson*

## Discussion: **NEVER** Shake a Child

Remember, there is no such thing as a perfect parent. Parenting is not easy. But please NEVER shake your baby.

Not to get your baby's attention, not to get your baby to stop crying, not to revive your baby! Not ever!

### **Shaking a baby can cause:**

- Brain damage
- Cerebral palsy
- Blindness
- Epilepsy
- Speech difficulties
- Learning problems
- Poor coordination
- Death.

### **Babies have:**

- Necks too weak to stop their heads from snapping back and forth.
- Soft, fragile brain tissue.

Your baby cannot survive shaking. Period.

Try to find out why your baby is upset. Try to comfort your baby. Wrap him in a blanket, rock or walk him, hum, sing, smile at your baby.

But even if your baby continues to cry, put him on his back in his bed—and calm yourself. Call a friend, a helper, or, if necessary, your doctor or the hospital.

**Never be rough with your baby!**

## Discussion: Some Final Thoughts on Guiding Children

1. **Admire, admire, admire.** The chief reason children misbehave is the same reason adults misbehave: they don't feel valuable or valued. Praised children are well-behaved children. Try noticing what your children have done that is funny, clever, helpful, and inspiring.
2. **Affirm the child while correcting the behavior.** Remember, you want your children to feel good about themselves while appreciating the foolishness of the behavior.
3. **Anticipate and avoid trouble—never invite it.** Especially with small children, make your life and theirs easier by keeping away from situations that come with problems. Babies and toddlers need a child-proofed home. Don't take children places they can't handle. If your child goes berserk over wombats, don't raise wombats.
4. **Make sure your children have healthy outlets for their energy.** We probably expect the impossible when we ask healthy excited children to sit quietly like worn-out adults. Shut off the TV, start a game, get them outside.
5. **Bait and switch.** Redirect children's behavior away from temptations. If they say they simply have to jump into the elephant cage at the zoo, try asking them who wants to win the race to the hot dog stand.
6. **Use routines.** Consistent bedtimes, bedtime rituals (reading and prayers, for example), and similar routines can carry the day.
7. **Timeouts.** If you use timeouts, try one minute for each year, no more.
8. **Speak softly and mean it.** Yelling and hitting will usually only add to the chaos. Power lies in quiet, in whispering, in loving eye contact. Have fewer rules, explain them, and let your children know you think highly enough of them that they'll follow the few rules you make.

9. **Don't discipline while angry.** We have to be self-disciplined before we can teach restraint to anyone else.
10. **Discipline in ways leaving no doubt about your respect and love.** Enough said.
11. **Relax! Don't fantasize that children should never misbehave, and don't take misbehavior personally.** It's *NOT* a reflection on you that you don't have the world's first perfect child. You're not a bad parent just because your children are acting like, well, children. It's their job. It's our job to love them and their minor imperfections.
12. **Remember: You don't try to win every battle.** Ask yourself first if this is really worth a battle. Don't let anything get in the way of your relationship—one that's admiring, fun, and wondrous.



Enjoy this fleeting time. You'll miss it one day. Soon.

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## Quick Review

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### **So, can we agree on at least four things?**

1. Growing up healthy today is no sure thing for our children.
2. Some children will win and some will lose—based on the admiration they receive today.
3. There's a world of things to admire about our children—including things we may forget to share with them.
4. We may never have as much power—or as much happiness—as when we admire our children.

The answer to the question posed on page 5: topic #1.

## Discussion: "The Secret of True Happiness"

by Dennis Prager



I live in the land of Disney, Hollywood and year-round sun. You may think that people in such a glamorous fun-filled place are happier than others. If so, you have some mistaken ideas about the nature of happiness.

Many intelligent people will equate happiness with fun. The truth is that **fun and happiness have little or nothing in common.** Fun is what we experience during an act. Happiness is what we experience after an act. It is a deeper more abiding emotion.

Going to an amusement park or a ballgame, watching a movie or television, are fun activities that help us relax, temporarily forget our problems, and maybe even laugh. But, they do not bring happiness, because their positive effects end when the fun ends.

I have often thought that if Hollywood stars have a role to play, it is to teach us that **happiness has nothing to do with fun.**

These rich, beautiful individuals have constant access to glamorous parties, fancy cars, expensive homes, everything that spells "happiness." But in memoir after memoir, celebrities reveal the unhappiness hidden beneath all their fun: depression, alcoholism, drug addiction, broken marriages, troubled children, and profound loneliness.

Yet people continue to believe that the next, more glamorous party, more expensive car, more luxurious vacation, fancier home will do what all the other parties, cars, vacations, homes have not been able to do.

The way people cling to the belief that a fun-filled, pain-free life equals happiness, actually diminishes their chances of ever attaining real happiness. . . . More times than not, **things that lead to happiness involve some pain.**

As a result, many people avoid the very endeavors that are the source of true happiness. They fear the pain inevitably brought by such things as marriage, raising children, professional achievement, religious commitment, civic or charitable work, self-improvement.

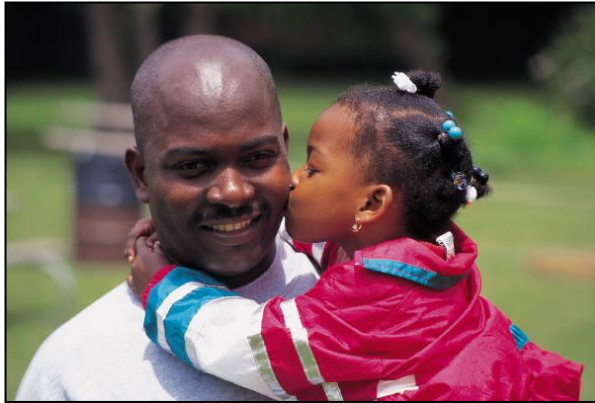
The single life is filled with fun, adventure, excitement. Marriage has such moments, but they are not its most distinguishing feature.

Similarly, couples who choose not to have children are deciding in favor of painless fun over painful happiness.

They can dine out whenever they want, travel wherever they want and sleep as late as they want. Couples with infant children are lucky to get a whole night's sleep or a three-day vacation.

But couples who decide not to have children can never experience the pleasure of hugging them or tucking them into bed at night. They never know the joys of watching a child grow up or of playing with a grandchild.

Of course I enjoy doing fun things. I like to play racquetball, joke with kids (and anybody else), and I probably have too many hobbies.



But these forms of fun do not contribute in any real way to my happiness. More difficult endeavors - writing, raising children, creating a deep relationship with my wife, trying to do good in the world - will bring me more happiness than can ever be found in fun, that least permanent of things.

Understanding and accepting that true happiness has nothing to do with fun is one of the most liberating realizations we can ever come to.

It liberates time: Now we can devote more hours to activities that can genuinely increase our happiness. It liberates money: Buying that new car or those fancy clothes that will do nothing to increase our happiness now seems pointless.

And it liberates us from envy: We now understand that all those rich and glamorous people we were so sure are happy because they are always having so much fun actually may not be happy at all.

The moment we understand that fun does not bring happiness, we begin to lead our lives differently. The effect can be, quite literally, life-transforming.

*“In about the same degree as you are helpful, you will be happy.”  
—Karl Reiland*



## Exercise 13: By Our Next Class

**It might be a stretch to complete all these tasks, but we hope you will. Several are fun. All are powerful. And we'll want to hear from you next class how they went.**

1. At every chance I'll have fun with my children this week. I'll have fun trying out some of the admiring statements and activities on pages 9-13. I'll look for my children's reaction. I'll come to our next class ready to say how the experience was for my children—and for me.

2. I'll spend 5 minutes just quietly looking at each of my children with one purpose: to notice something magical I haven't paid attention to in a while.

3. I'll finish the work on the [www.ProudToParent.org](http://www.ProudToParent.org) website—and circle 2 or 3 Commitments that will be especially important to my child and me. I'll do an excellent job finishing Exercise C on the website: making a list of 10 compliments and positive memories to share with my children about their other parent. (I'll come ready to share these in the next class.)

4. I'll laugh at something that I used to find annoying, and I'll use the lessons on pages 43-48 to choose a new thought and a new feeling. I'll practice changing my thoughts to change my feelings about a situation.

*“A man's work is nothing but this slow trek to rediscover, through the detours of art, those two or three great and simple images in whose presence his heart first opened.”*

*—Albert Camus*