

THE TOP 5 SKILLS

that every parent should know
but was never taught

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It is our job as parents to do the best we can for our children.
They are relying on us to create an environment for them
that is nurturing and empowering.

And if you feel that deep down you know that you can do a
little better, no matter what, then you owe them that.

I want to make sure you can look your child in the eye and confidently
say that you did everything you could to give them the best
chance of success in life.

~Robin Booth

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Why these Top 5 Skills?

Discover yourself to be
a greater person
by far than you imagined
yourself to be!

~Patanjali



As an educator, as a life coach, as a parent coach, a teacher trainer, and as a parent, I believe this course below will outline 5 skills that will support you in dealing with most situations. You will find insight and understanding beyond those of other courses that may even offer very similar skills. In my experience of 2 decades of working with children, teachers and parents, each and every skill comes back to the same essential ingredients.

At times I thought I had come across an amazing new skill, only to find out that there is very little **NEW**, especially as parenting and communication is as old as our human race. But how we come to understand these skills is something which certain individuals can really make easier for us.

If you look hard, you will find similar interpretations of these skills repeated by experts countless times over the generations and I have never been able to find the source of each one as each expert seems to have based it on another expert.

And so it should be as they are really common sense skills but are applicable to everyday situations. Successful communication is essential to creating great relationships. But in this book there is a depth of knowledge which looks for simple solutions to some of our most challenging parenting and teaching situations.

Please feel free to visit my website at www.robinbooth.co.za.

Robin



I had had enough...then I got a breakthrough

I was a teacher before being a parent. And I had thought that being a teacher would enable me to give the children in my class the amazing gifts of love, acceptance, understanding and compassion. And who would not want those? A child is constantly wanting to fit in, be accepted and know that they are 'ok'.



My heart was big enough to give them all this. My first year of teaching was filled with dreams and wishes of making a difference to every child. I was hoping that by being in my class, each and every child would be so positively impacted that they would be able to handle the challenges of life.

My story is that my mother died when I was seven years old. She had cancer and it was only treated when it was too late. I have very few conscious memories or recollections of her but deeply know that her death has impacted me.

I also have the awareness that my passion for teaching young children was probably born out of my mother's death. As a child, I frequently felt different and left out. I was often singled out and pitied as 'the boy who lost his mother'.

I would watch other mothers collecting their children after school while I was collected by a childminder. I was also told that "I must be a big boy now and stop crying". I grew up within a belief system of keeping my feelings buried deep within. The words, "his feelings bottled up inside" were often overheard when I was surrounded by adults.

Sibling rivalry was also rife in my family. My brother, seventeen months younger than myself, was constantly in fights with me. Doors were broken, toys smashed, people locked outside and the amount of tears could have filled our swimming pool many times over. Come to think of it, no wonder we had a quick succession of so many child minders. We were known as difficult children.

As I grew up, I learnt that being myself was not enough. There was always someone who said I needed to do something differently. School reinforced that no matter what I had achieved, there was still something more and better to do next. So if being myself is not enough, how did I get what I wanted?

Out of this question, a simple solution emerged: "A **decision** to be whatever people wanted me to be".

I learnt to adapt. I was sensitive to people's needs, their wishes, their body language, their words. My big eyes watched the world. Cautiousness and introspection were the characteristics of my world.

But even though I adapted and people thought I was ok, I was not. So how could I be ok, when I wasn't? And out of that question emerged another simple decision. I pretended.

And now I succeeded in their world. I was confident, intelligent, a super achiever. But as an adult, I experienced this as unfulfilling. My confidence covered up my insecurities inside. What I wanted most was to experience being connected with others and a sense of belonging.

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The irony hit me much later on. While I had been growing up, I had thought it was just me who felt this way. I had thought that everyone else seemed to be having a great life. Everyone else seemed ok. They seemed happy. But I soon realised that they themselves were also pretending. They themselves also had experiences of not being good enough, or not being heard or seen.

Perhaps for them it was being invisible in amongst their siblings. Perhaps it was the sadness of not being understood or accepted. This is not to say that there are moments of deep connectedness and joy in our childhood. But there is a clear difference between people having good intentions in their interactions with us, and our actual experience of those interactions.

Just because our parents love us doesn't mean we always experience that love. Just because people say "Well done", it doesn't mean we feel we have accomplished anything. Just because our peers call us their friend, it doesn't mean they don't also tell lies and stories about us behind our backs.

My first year of teaching was therefore filled with insight and a room filled with a positive attitude that I could support children in navigating this painful part of 'fitting in'.

About 6 months into that year, I was confronted with a 5 year old boy who was not being very cooperative with me. I had talked nicely, been polite and tried really hard in making it work. I could feel the frustration turn to anger and the anger turn to rage. I was shaken by this experience. Not only was I totally confused and upset about what else to do, but my belief about me being the 'accepting and loving one' seemed turned upside down.

I could see it in his eyes, the fear, the rejection, the hurt. I could see the solution for him being 'not good enough' was slowly emerging. Very soon he would experience that his 'spirited and fully expressive self' was not enough. He would probably make a decision to dampen his needs, his wishes, his wants. His journey on being what I wanted him to be had begun.

And in that moment, I realised that my good intentions, dreams and well wishes were not enough.

I had assumed that in being an adult, I would instinctively know how to engage cooperation with a child in a respectful manner. I had assumed that just because I was a teacher, children would listen to me the first time. I had assumed that just because I had positive intentions, the children would understand and experience them. What I needed though, were skills.

I wanted to learn practical and universal skills which would align my positive intent with the children's experience of my words and actions. If I said I respected children, I wanted these same children to experience that. If I said I valued fairness, I wanted them to feel fairly treated. If I said I accepted and valued them, I wanted them to feel 'loved' in being themselves.

I began researching these topics. This was prior to the internet so in retrospect, research was slow. I came across the book, "[*How to talk so kids will listen and listen so kids will talk*](#)" by Faber and Mazlich. I was really inspired by their simple skills and researched their mentor, Dr Haim Ginott who wrote "[*Between Parent and Child*](#)". As a psychologist, he looked for the deeper reason as to how children respond to their parents.

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I was more interested in this as it enabled me to go deeper with the skills I had already learnt. Things started to make sense. I studied life coaching and found effective ways to engage children's cooperation and confidence. I realised that communication is a skill all human beings really need.

I continued to up skill myself and immediately saw the difference in the self esteem of the children in my class. I saw more smiles, heard more laughter and found our relationships deepening. I also saw that the relationships between the children themselves took on a new level. With the children feeling more accepted and acknowledged by myself, so they felt more secure with their peers. Fighting and negativity in my class decreased dramatically. Problems were no longer things that threatened us.

Instead of trying to avoid these problems, we could now work with them and solve them in ways before not possible. It did not take long for parents to notice changes in their children. They noticed that their children were more confident, more expressive and therefore more assertive. At first they thought this was exciting and positive. But soon they realised that they did not know how to handle and support an assertive and confident child.

They saw that they themselves did not have the skills nor the awareness of how to nurture their child's self esteem while still maintaining respect and dignity. They came to me, sharing that the skills they currently had were not enough. Their wish was to nurture the spirit of their children, but without good skills, the techniques they were using were crushing the heart and soul of their children. Good intentions were again not enough.

In that second year of teaching I started running parenting workshops to share with them the skills and insights I had learnt and developed. Over the subsequent years I ran more and more workshops, both for parents and for teachers.

In 2004 I opened up my own school (www.synergyschooling.com) so that our learning environments could be embedded in creating a skilled and nurturing environment. It was a 'normal' school, but it had a focus on the quality of relationships and the training of the teachers and parents in these successful skills.

My passion for empowering people also led me to qualify as a life coach and to complete a degree majoring in education and psychology.

As a result of this I was invited to talk at international conferences, be part of a TV panel and give interviews on Radio. I gave more and more workshops as parents began to see how they get learn new skills to create more flow in the house.

After a decade of running these workshops, there emerged a few skills that seemed to be the ones that made the most difference for the most people. As no child or parent is the same, there will not be one skill that will solve all situations or challenges. Every situation we find ourselves in will be different and will require from us awareness, skills and actions.

We will need awareness of what is going on, first within ourselves, and then for our children. We will need certain skills (self learnt or learnt from elsewhere) in order to be effective and efficient. We will then need to do something about what is not working.

The course outlined below is the collection of the most important skills which I feel every parent and teacher should know in their hearts and in their minds. It is difficult to attribute any skill to any person as we all seem to build on what we know already, and then are able to share it in different ways so different people can understand it easily.

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The use of cartoons to show a skill in action is widely used as a successful medium. The course below covers skills which can be used directly in most situations and can further be adapted to any other situation you find yourself in.

That is why it is called, *skills every parent and teacher should know but were never taught.*

Also by Robin Booth

Online Workshops

Nurturing of Self Esteem Series which covers acknowledging emotions, inviting cooperation, descriptive praise, punishment to guidance, supporting independence, encouraging autonomy.

Emotional Intelligence Series which covers setting effective boundaries, making your boundaries permanent, alternatives to “no”, how to be certain your child knows you love them.

For more information: www.robinbooth.co.za

EBooks

Top 3 Skills that every parent should know but was never taught

For more information: www.robinbooth.co.za



“The NSE workshop provided me with daily tools of how to deal with Cailin.

I have learnt how to be calm and not to react but to be in action.

I highly recommend Robin’s work to every parent who wants to make a difference to their family life.”

*Rene Venter
Mother of Cailin, 5 years old*

1

Choices that empower that show you value their input



The only difference between an empowered child and a disempowered child is that one BELIEVES she/he can, and the other BELIEVES she/he can't.

~Robin Booth

“Do you also find that you spend a lot of time and energy in getting your children to cooperate with you?”

“Have you also noticed that there are times that no matter how nicely you ask your children to do something they still seem to dig in their heels and say “**No!**”?”

“What would it be like for you to feel you are working together as a family, that there is teamwork happening?”

“How would you experience the family FLOW without the frequent power struggles?”

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Here are just a few of the everyday challenges that this chapter will provide you with solutions to:

- Your teenager does not want to keep her room clean.
- Getting children to tidy up (whatever the age range).
- Getting them up and dressed in the morning.
- Working together as a family.
- Diffusing power struggles.
- Getting cooperation without their resentment or without them fighting you to get things done. (avoiding the power struggle).
- Getting their cooperation in doing the household chores.
- Cooperating with the TV time limits.
- Resolving toddler defiance behaviour.
- Getting them into the bath and ready for bed at night.
- Getting them to practice their musical instruments and lessons.
- Making them feel empowered .
- Managing jealousy and sibling rivalry.
- **BASICALLY GETTING THEIR COOPERATION ON ANYTHING, WHATEVER THE AGE.**

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Getting children to cooperate is more about power dynamics than about the right or wrongness of a situation. When a parent needs their child to do something, they often just **TELL** their child what to do. This is a very **AUTHORITARIAN** approach to parenting where commands are more present and obedience is the desired result.

Children then often resist this as they don't really like to be told what to do. It makes them feel like they are not in control of their own lives and they end up resisting their parent's power more than the task they are asked to complete. Understanding this power dynamic allows you to gain the insight into resolving these challenging situations with ease and confidence.

At the same time, as parents, you need for things to get done, supper to be eaten, homework to be completed, and fighting to stop. And in being the parent you have a default authority over your children due to you being older, bigger and having more life experience. But being authoritative doesn't mean you have to be authoritarian. There are a wide range of respectful skills that can support you to get your children to cooperate with you.

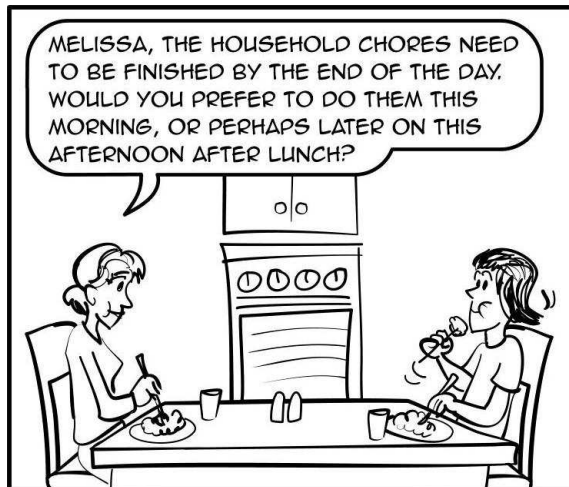
Even though you are ultimately the authority and the 'boss', you can still get your children to cooperate with while they remain feeling respected loved and valued. So the real magic trick here is to do both.

SKILL

1. Set the boundary of what you are needing them to do, and then give them choices within that boundary.
2. Introducing a third choice which they create.
3. Set the boundary and leave the choice of *HOW* to do it up to them.



GIVING EMPOWERING CHOICES WITHIN A BOUNDARY



It doesn't matter the age because whenever any person is offered a choice, they experience a degree of autonomy. In being offered a choice, you are given the opportunity to make a decision that directly impacts you and your life. No matter how small the choice is, it is still a liberating feeling opposed to being restricted to what you have to do.

In making a choice, a child asserts their will on the situation. **THEY** choose the one way opposed to the other. In making a choice, they feel more empowered. Therefore they spend more time and energy on deciding what they want, opposed to fighting with you about it.

When a child is told what to do, they feel backed into a corner and if they agree to do what you told them, then at that time it can feel like losing face, or giving in to you. The moment they also have the power to decide on something, it is as though they can retain their pride by still doing what they want to do, even if it is within the boundary that you set.

The most important thing about giving choices, is to see that this is not about giving a choice on **whether** the boundary stays or goes, but rather about what to do **within** the boundary you are setting.

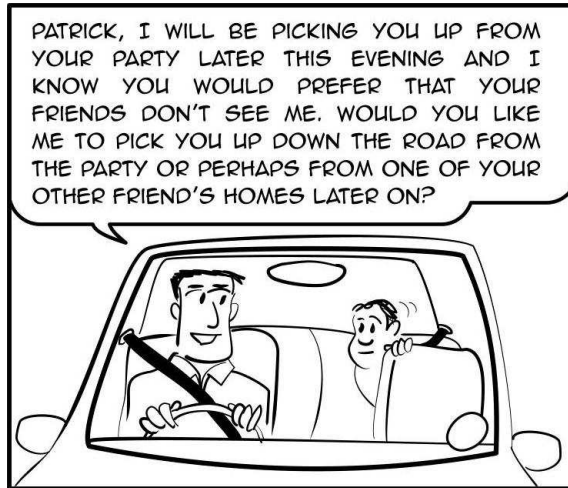
An important thing to remember is that whatever choice you are giving must be a possibility and ok with you. It won't help to say:

"Honey, it is supper time now. Would you like to eat at the table or have TV supper?"

meanwhile TV supper isn't actually an option.

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Another differentiation on choices is both choice options need to be empowering and positive. If you are wanting to get your child to pack away, then the following is not a cooperative choice: *“Michelle, it’s time to pack away. You can either pack your toys neatly or I’ll take away your toys for a week. You decide.”* This is an **ultimatum** and calls forth an attack more than it engages cooperation.

A more helpful response would be: *“Michelle, it is time to pack away your toys now please. Would you prefer to start with the dolls on your bed, or perhaps the pencils on your desk?”*

Instead of a threatening choice



Give an empowering choice



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For children who come across as **'strong willed'** and **'rebellious'**, giving two choices that you have predetermined is also a restricting factor for them. Any choice you give them will create resentment. In these cases, the clever use of **introducing a third choice of their making** nearly always dissolves the resistance.

This story illustrates how we can avoid many stand-offs and power struggles by giving choices within the boundaries that we set, opposed to confronting angry power struggles.

We were on a play date with my 5 year old daughter and her friend. Something had happened between the two of them and they went from best friends to worst enemies in an instant. I was asked to intervene and support them. I brought the two of them together and said: *"It looks like something happened between the two of you."*

The friend said: *"I don't want to talk about it now."* *"Ok, so can we talk about it in 5 minutes?"* I replied. **"No!"** she retorted.

I could see her resistance growing and the challenge was that we needed to go in 10 minutes time. *"We need to go in 10 minutes time and we need to talk about what happened before then. Would you like to talk about it in two or 8 minutes time? Or perhaps you have another time before then that would work better for you?"*

"Ok. Then in six minutes time." she replied.

What was really amazing about this is that both children actually didn't really understand the concept of time. So in replying **'six minutes'**, the friend didn't really know if six came after 'two' or before 'eight'. What mattered is that she could decide on the time herself and that made her feel she could save her pride and dignity.

We then met after the six minutes has passed and the issue was quickly resolved.

INTRODUCING THE THIRD CHOICE WHICH THEY CREATE



The more you dwell on what you don't have, the more you get what you don't want.

~Unknown

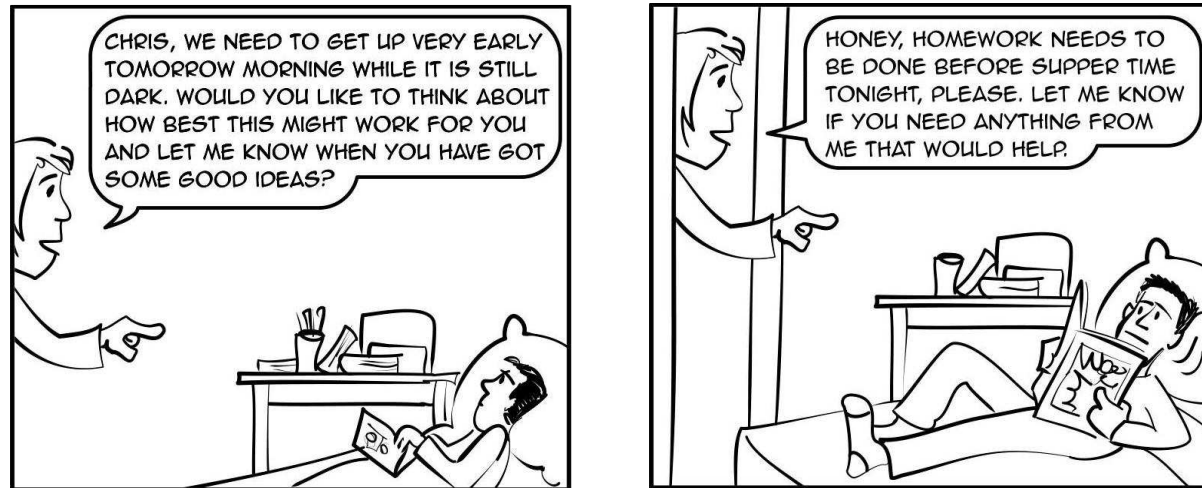
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Another variation on the choice skill is to say what **needs to be done (or set the boundary)**, and then leave the **choice of how to do it up to them**.

SET THE BOUNDARY AND LEAVE THE CHOICE OF *HOW* TO DO IT UP TO THEM



Of course giving choices like those mentioned above doesn't mean it will work every time. Sometimes it seems as though our children still don't listen to us even though we have given them choices.

“At what point will they take us seriously?”

“At what point do we need to make it clear that we mean what we say?”

“And then how do we do that to avoid the long lectures and the rolling eyeballs?”

That is what the next lesson will be about



Examples across the Ages

1 Giving choices empowers children

-this is about giving them practice in the skills of making choices

AGE	GIVING CHOICES
3-7	What bed time story would you like: <i>Timmy the Lion</i> or <i>Harry and the great stone wall</i> ?
7-12	What would you like to do this weekend, go surfing or for a walk on the mountain?
12-18	You have a whole lot of school sports to choose from. Which are your top 2 choices for the next few months?

2 Set the boundary and give empowering choices within the boundary

AGE	BOUNDARY	SET BOUNDARY AND GIVE EMPOWERING CHOICES
3-7	Leaving from a play date	<p>Honey we need to go in five minutes. Would you and your friend like one more time with the bike or would you both prefer a last turn with the toys?</p> <p>Or if you have to leave right away:</p> <p>Honey we need to leave now. Would you prefer to say goodbye here in the house or when we are by the car?</p>
7-12	Eating at the table	Suzy it's supper time. Come to the table please. Would you prefer to sit here next to me or perhaps over there next to dad?
12-18	Doing house chores	Patrick our household chores need to be completed by the end of today. Would you prefer to start with your room first or perhaps the cleaning of the rubbish might be easier?



3 Set the boundary and give empowering choices, including a choice which they create

AGE	BOUNDARY	SET BOUNDARY INCLUDING CHOICES THEY CREATE
3-7	Getting dressed in the morning	Nicole I see we only have 10 minutes to get dressed for school. Would you prefer I stay and help you or is there any other way of getting dressed quickly that would work better for you?
7-12	TV time limits	John, the one hour of TV per day has finished. Would you prefer to find something else to do here with me, or is there anything else you would prefer to do now?
12-18	Listening to me the first time	Jackie I would like to make sure I am being heard when I talk to you. Perhaps you can look me in the eyes, or repeat what I have just said, or perhaps there is another way that I will know you have heard what I said that would work better for you?

4 Set the boundary and leave the choice of how to do it up to them

AGE	BOUNDARY	SET BOUNDARY BUT LEAVE THE 'HOW' UP TO THEM
3-7	Getting ready to leave in the morning	Guys when I say it's time to go I really need for us to get going. Please can you let me know what we need to do so this can happen every day?
7-12	Doing what I asked them to do without them resisting me	I need to know that when I ask that certain things get done that they will be done. At the same time I want to make sure this is also fair to you so can you please come up with some good ideas on how we can make this happen?
12-18	Stopping siblings from fighting	I still see some upset children fighting with each other. Please think about what agreement you can come up with that seems fair to you both that will support you in getting along with each other?

If this doesn't work?

Don't worry or panic. There is always a skill and a solution to each and every problem out there. I have not come across any situation that we have not found a solution to.

Remember that the skill of giving choices is not just about getting cooperation. The greater the variety of choices you give, the more skilled your child will be at making discerning choices. With making choices on a routine basis, your child will also experience that you also have their best interest at heart which will diminishing the overall feeling of the power dynamic.

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In spite of all the above, if you find that giving choices doesn't seem to be getting the cooperation you wanted, consider the following:

- It is normal for children to be less cooperative when they are tired. It is usually best to factor this in rather than you getting really upset by what is happening (**and consider that you are also less flexible and tolerant when you are tired.**)
- Children will be less cooperative the greater the power struggle in play. This point is essential. If you are finding that the power dynamic is moving into a standoff, what really will unlock this is your skills in being able to make your child feel heard and understood.

This doesn't mean that you have to give in or back down. It means that you are giving your child the experiences of really being listened to and taken seriously.

When a child feels really heard, then the softness returns and cooperation is easily achieved. If you don't do this, then the standoff continues and your child will develop strong rebellious characteristics (classic scenario is the rebellious teenager).

To learn the amazing skills of working with and acknowledging emotions, get the workshop sessions on:

"Unlocking the power struggle in 3 basic steps" or
"Acknowledging Emotions (NSE series)" or
"Conscious Conflict Resolution".

- Children are also receiving the meta messages of your communication. Your attitude that underlies your words speaks greater volumes than just the words you choose. The attitude behind the skill of giving choices is: **"I want to see if I can also meet your needs and make sure you also get what you are wanting."**

If your children are very sceptical of your choices, it probably highlights their suspicion that you are trying to trick them into something. As soon as they begin to experience your genuine desire to make this work for them as well, their suspicion will dissolve and they will step up to cooperate in a whole new set of ways.

- If you spend more time on stating the boundary and telling your children what they are doing wrong, their resistance will increase. Go back to the basics: **"It looks like the ideas I have come up with don't seem to be working for you. Have you got any other good ideas that would work better for you while (state the boundary)....."**
- For ongoing or repetitive challenges, a more powerful and dynamic skill set is needed. Get the session on:

"Alternatives to saying NO you can't!" or
"From Punishment to Guidance"



Advice from other parents on how to learn this skill

Take a look at the last few days and see where there has been resistance and struggles in getting your children to cooperate. Perhaps getting them up in the morning, getting dressed, eating breakfast, going to school, doing homework, watching TV, less time on the computer, coming to the supper table, having a bath, going to bed and of course, getting up in the middle of the night.

Below is a step by step process on how to make a table like this one that will support you in being a master of this skill. Take a look at how this parent is getting clear on what the boundary is, and then is able to come up with a variety of choices that will empower her child within that boundary.

SITUATION	BOUNDARY	5 STATEMENTS OF DIFFERENT CHOICES
Bath time	Honey, it's bath time in 5 minutes	1) Would like to you have a red bubble bath or a green bubble bath? 2) Would you like to bring your toy ducks or your super heroes with you? 3) Would you like me to put some music on for you? Maybe your favourite nursery song, or perhaps the radio? 4) Would you like to put the water in yourself or would you like for me to do it for you? 5) In the bath would you like to play the ugly duckling game, or the crocodile game today?

Follow the steps below to create your own one.

1. Write down those situations that you are finding challenging on the left hand side of the table.

SITUATION	BOUNDARY	5 STATEMENTS OF DIFFERENT CHOICES
		1
		2
		3
		4
		5

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SITUATION	BOUNDARY	5 STATEMENTS OF DIFFERENT CHOICES
		1 2 3 4 5

- Next to each situation (**in the middle column**), get clear on where your boundary is with these and how it would be positively expressed. (i.e., we eat supper at the table, TV is for when we have finished homework, Lights out at 7:30pm). Your statement of these should be **non threatening**. There is a big difference between being authoritative and authoritarian. You are the parent, but you can still engage your children with dignity.
- Next to each statement of the boundary (**on the far right column**), write down a number of choices (**at least five**) that your child could choose from that fall within this boundary. You will find that the more choices you come up with, the less attached and emotional you will be when sharing this. You will also experience that creativity is a huge component of successful parenting.
Remember that you can always add the third choice of your child's choosing if you feel it will work better.
- If you can, practise a few times by saying your boundary and the choices out loud (**or to your spouse or partner**). Get used to you hearing yourself saying these lines. The more you say them, the more familiar you become with them, and the less **'threatening'** they sound. Make it sound like this is normal and how things are, opposed to **'look guys, I'm trying a new skill and I don't know if this will work. I hope it will though.....'**
- Plan the next three situations when you know the situation will arise. In other words, you know that certain situations have been repeating themselves. Think about when they do, and be prepared for them with your new skills.

Remember, awareness plus skills, plus action opens up a new world of possibility for you.



Summary: Empowering Choices

- Making a choice is a skill, so giving a choice supports your child in learning how to make good decisions **(and supports them in being independent)**.
- When a child is told what to do, they resist this more due to the power struggle of independence opposed to actually **what** they have to do.
- In giving choices, it makes a child feel more in control of their situation which therefore diffuses the power struggle.
- Set the boundary **(or what needs to be done)** and then give a choice of what can be done within the boundary.
- If you are dealing with a strong willed and resistant child, give the third choice:

“or is there any other way that you can do this that will also work?”

- If there is no choice on what to do, give a choice on *how* to do it.

Give empowering choices

1. ***Choices empower as they give the child a sense of autonomy and an experience that you are not trying to control them (avoids most power dynamics).***

“Would you like the grey shirt or the blue one?”

“Would you prefer to have a bath now or after dinner?”

If you need them to do something....

2. ***State what you need (the boundary) and then give choices that empower the child within that need.***

“We need to have a bath now. Would you like green bubbles or red bubbles in your bath?”

3. ***State what you need and give choices within the boundary, including one which they create.***

“We need to leave the swimming pool in 5 minutes to go back home soon. Would you prefer one more jump off the diving board, or perhaps there is something else you would like to finish off with before we go?”

4. ***State the boundary and leave the HOW to do it up to them.***

“Homework needs to be completed by dinner time every evening. Please think about what you feel we need to put in place so that this will work smoothly for everyone.”

What to expect in the next chapter

The degree to which you will be taken seriously is the degree to which you take yourself seriously

~Robin Booth



The next chapter is in getting your children to take you more seriously:

Making sure they hear you loud and clear.

The skill of **Short and Sweet** is all about decreasing the lecture and the stories that make your children feel bad and wrong, which in turn increases their resentment of you, and decreases their willingness to cooperate.

This skill will provide solutions to some of the following challenges:

- Getting them dressed, doing their homework, brushing teeth, household chores done, pets looked after, etc.
- You find yourself repeating your words over and over again but your children still ignore you.
- Your children seem to roll their eyes at you when you are talking to them.
- You need to get them to do something but don't want it to sound like a Military commander.
- You don't feel heard nor taken seriously.

2

Short and Sweet – ensuring they listen to you!



Welcome to the next chapter on *“The Top skills that every parent should know but was never taught.”*

Do you feel that there are times when your children choose not to listen to you?

Or perhaps while you are talking to your children they roll their eye balls at you?

Are you struggling to get your children to come to the dinner table, to tidy their rooms, to brush their teeth?

The next chapter will support you in resolving some of the following kinds of challenges:

- Getting your children to listen to you the first time.
- Getting them dressed in the morning, coming to the table, getting their rooms tidy, brushing their teeth.
- An alternative to lectures and shouting when you feel your children are ignoring you.
- Avoiding scaring your children by your shouting.
- Alternative to laying the guilt trip on them.
- Not making your children feel bad and wrong.
- Giving you an alternative to sounding like a whining stuck record.



Let's recap chapter 1

We looked at the power of giving choices

- Making a choice is a skill, so giving a choice **supports** your child in learning how to make good decisions (and supports them in being independent).
- When a child is told what to do, they resist this more due to the power struggle of independence opposed to actually **what** they have to do.
- In giving choices, it makes a child feel more in control of their situation which therefore diffuses the power struggle.
- Set the boundary (or what needs to be done), and then give a choice of what can be done within the boundary.
- If you are dealing with a strong willed and resistant child, give the third choice:

“or is there any other way that you can do this that will also work?”

- If there is no choice on what to do, give a choice on how to do it.

But what do we do when we ask our children to do something the first time and they don't seem to have heard us?

Or what if we feel they *did* actually hear us but are purposefully ignoring us?

Example

Have you had a similar situation where you go into your child's room to get him to pack away as it is time for supper? You ask him to do so, *"Honey, it's time to pack away please. We are having supper soon."* He nods his head and says, *"Ok"*. You go back to the kitchen to finish supper and to lay the table.

After five minutes, you go back to your child's room and notice that nothing has changed and he is still playing with his toys.

You end up saying, *"Five minutes ago I asked you to pack away your toys and you agreed that you would do so. It's supper time now and I don't see that you have done anything about it. How many times do I have to tell you? The trouble with you is that you just don't listen."*

As you say this, you can feel your frustration levels rise. It would be so much easier if he just listened to you the first time and would do what he said he would do.



THE TOP 5 SKILLS

that every parent should know but was never taught



In the above scenario you can see how the frustration levels rise and with that, the accusations, the blame and the lectures. As parents we seem to have a tendency to lecture our children when they don't listen to us.

At times, we even use the moral perspective to get them to do what we want:

“Boys, how would you like it if we gave your toys away to the poor children who don't have toys? Maybe then you would look after them better.”

When placed in such situations, parents respond in ways which are most familiar to them. Those ways are often those of their own parents and caregivers. What other means of getting children to cooperate with us are there if we have never been taught other more effective techniques?

Most traditional ways of getting children to listen to us are nearly always based on making them feel bad or guilty. Even though this may not be our actual wish or intention, these are the techniques that countless generations of parents have used, and still use.

Blaming them for not listening, accusing them of not doing what they said they would and making them feel so guilty for their actions: these are a few of the traditional methods used to get children to listen to parents and for them to take you seriously.

The skills looked at in the previous session engage cooperation in a far easier and respectful manner. But what happens when you have asked them to do something and they still don't listen? How do we get them to take us seriously?

There is a basic rule of thumb for determining how seriously our children take our requests.

The degree to which you take *your* need seriously will be the degree to which your child will take it seriously.

Now this may look a bit shallow at first but it portrays a deeper insight. Have you noticed that your children push the boundaries that you are most uncertain about? You say one thing and they argue back or they don't listen or they do something else. Then when they really push you too far, then the boundary comes down with crystal clarity.

The challenge is that the boundary now becomes clearer for everyone but it is implemented with an emotional charge of anger and frustration. Those emotions of our anger and hurt are what the children pick up on and react to. But we don't want our children to ***finally*** take us seriously because they fear our anger.

The skill of **'Short and Sweet'** is the ability to say what you need in one word, but with the clarity of you taking the boundary seriously. This skill is used when you have already asked your children to do a certain task. But if you find they are not listening to you, then use this skill.

In the example above of packing away the toys, the mom had already asked the children to pack away, and they had agreed. Now, when she goes back and sees that they have not started packing away, instead of giving them a long lecture, she says it short and sweet: ***“Boys, the toys.”***

SKILL

Say what you need in one word with the clarity of you taking the boundary seriously

THE TOP 5 SKILLS

that every parent should know but was never taught



There is a big difference between saying:

“The toys!” **coming from a threatening space.**, (meaning *“if you don’t pack away the toys this instant you are going to get in big trouble!”*)

and coming from a space of certainty and clarity:

“Toys.” (meaning *“toys will be packed away before supper.”*)

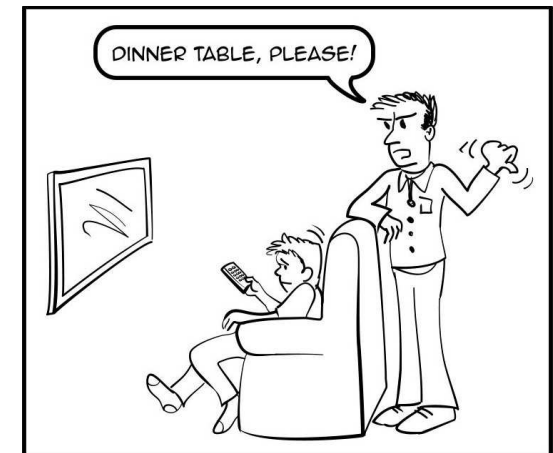
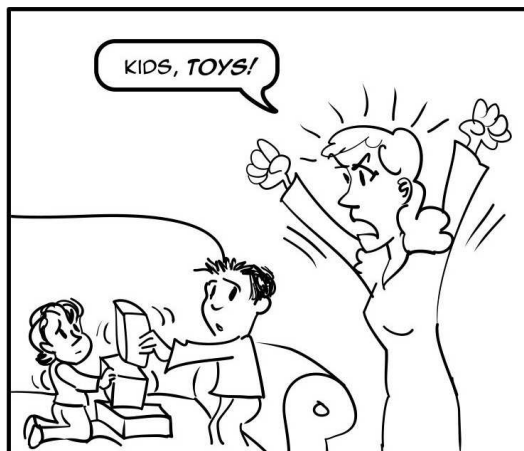
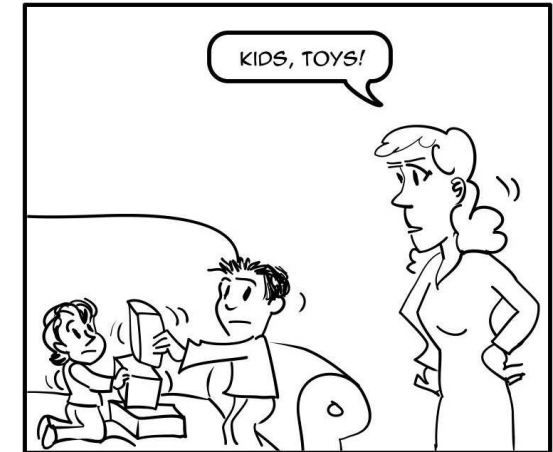
When you come from a deep space of certainty and clarity, your children get your seriousness of the situation and respond to you in mostly cooperative ways.

When you communicate with a lot of anger, your children learn to fear you.

SAY IT SHORT AND SWEET

Instead of the long lecture

Say it short and sweet



THE TOP 5 SKILLS

that every parent should know but was never taught



Instead of the long lecture



Say it short and sweet



No one likes to hear lectures and long explanations. The shorter the better.

Our future depends on our ability to provide children with opportunities to become 'different individuals'- individuals who know how to listen, who acknowledge and respect diverse points of view, who work with others to solve problems, and who can interpret and understand the world in increasingly complex ways.

~Educator

One of the best ways to understand this is to think back to your own schooling experience. You got the teachers who you knew you could take for a ride, and then there were the teachers who seemed to have a presence of certainty and clarity. The moment they walked in the door, you knew that their boundaries were firm and clear. They were not necessarily strict, but you knew that they could not be pushed far.

In this case, **'less is more'**.

Children don't respond well to lectures and long explanations. Remember this is more of a reminder of what needs to be done rather than your venting session. For them, the shorter you keep the reminder, the better.

When you say it with just one word, you penetrate through your child's 'non-listening'. In doing so they hear your word and then think about what that word means for them.

In doing so, they are more likely to remind themselves of what they need to do, opposed to feeling stupid that you have to remind them. It keeps their dignity in tact.

In using the **'short and sweet'** skill, it also prevents you from lecturing and blaming. Just by doing this alone you increase the chances of their cooperation.

An important point here is not to use your child's name as the one word statement.

We do not want our children to associate their names with our levels of frustration and intensity.

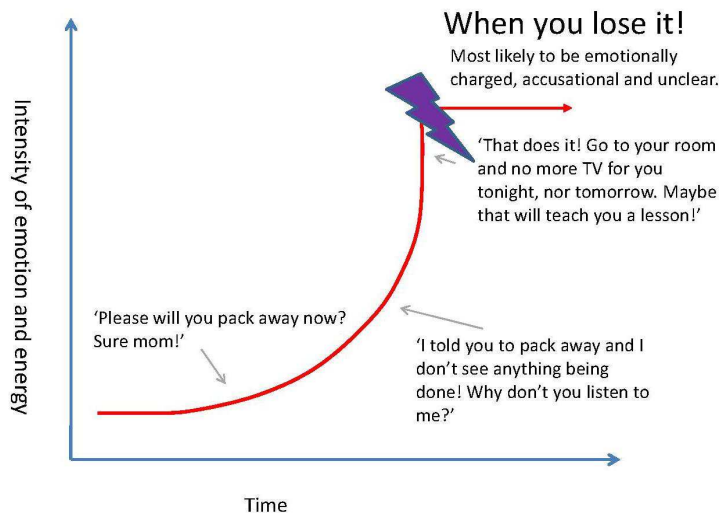
THE TOP 5 SKILLS

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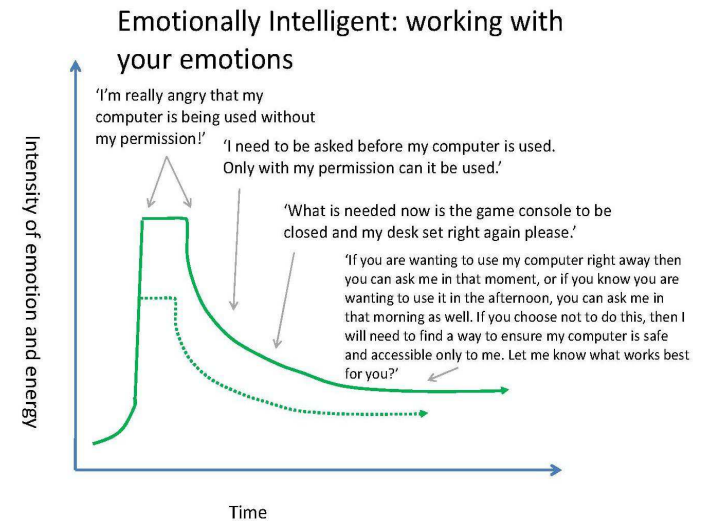
Another variation of this skill is the one I use more often but it requires a high level of emotional intelligence. What I mean by this is it requires you to be aware of the amount (or level) of 'charge' your communication has, and for you to be able to vary it according to your needs.

Take the example we have already looked at.



Here you can see that your 'emotional charge' increases exponentially as time goes by. You get angrier and angrier and if this continues, at some point you will 'lose it'. Remember that my definition of emotional intelligence is 'being able to work with your emotions'. Therefore in this skill it means the awareness and skills to see in which direction your interaction is going, and then your ability to do something about it.

And this next skill is about what that 'something else' could look like. When you find yourself in a situation where your 'emotional charge' is escalating, be the *source* of decisiveness and clarity like in the *short and sweet'* skill.



But notice now that once you have shared what is needed, you start decreasing the intensity of that charge. This is why you need to be able to work with your emotions. You need to be able to convey your seriousness without being threatening or making them fear you.

Here's how this works: When you increases the energetic intensity of your communication (without shouting or threatening), you immediately pierce through your children's non listening.

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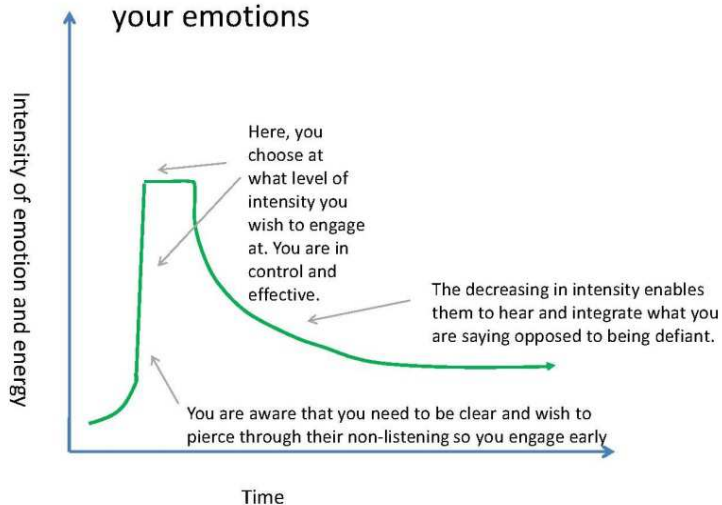


But if you keep increasing the intensity charge from here on, they will begin to feel spoken down to, and will either step up to fight, or begin to fear that you are going to lose it. Either way you will both end up regretting the outcome.

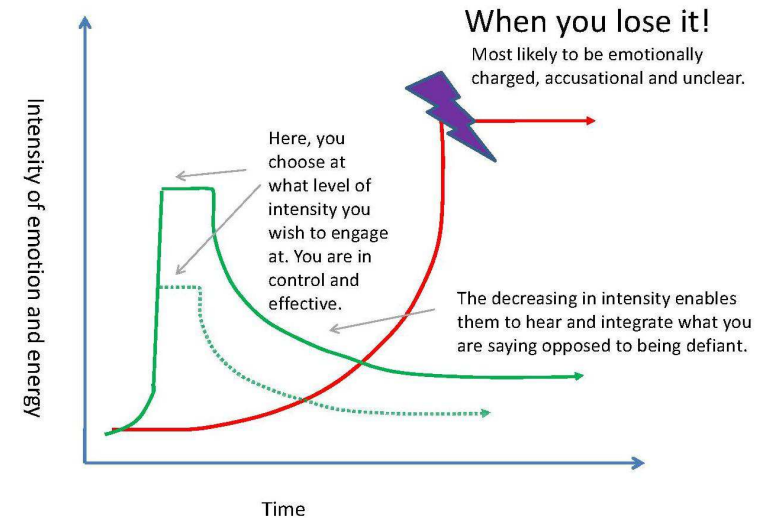
But if you can decrease the intensity charge as shown in the graph below, your children realise that you are still conscious and will hear you are not threatening nor undermining them, but just conveying what needs to be done to get things back on track. They will be able to hear what is needed from you.

That is why it is so essential for you to be conscious and aware of your emotions and what you are communicating to your children. Then by being able to work with those feelings, you can pierce through their non-listening and get fantastic, non threatening results

Emotionally Intelligent: working with your emotions



When you lose it!





Examples across the Ages

1 Say it Short and Sweet

In the table below I have inserted the word "please" after each one word statement. It is not essential to include the word but I would always say it the first time.

The penetrating emphasis should be on what is needed.

AGE	YOUR NEED	STATEMENTS
3-7	Getting them to the dinner table to eat.	Dinner time please.
3-7	Getting them to brush teeth.	Teeth please.
7-12	Time for bed.	Bed time please.
7-12	Ensuring that their homework is done now.	Homework please.
12-18	Doing house chores.	Chores please.
12-18	Packing away the dinner dishes.	Dishes please.



If this doesn't work?

Don't worry or panic. This skill is the simplest on paper but the one that expresses your intent that you are not even aware of. You would be amazed at how many subliminal messages what just one words conveys. And there is always another solution if you can't master this one.

- If this doesn't work, don't think it is because your child is not listening. What seems like such a simple skill is actually an incredibly rich resource of communication layers of intent. Instead of thinking this is about your child, consider the learning that this is about you.

- If your children glare at you with resentment consider this: Many parents can't see the distinction between this skill being a **command**, or that of a penetrating **reminder**. If the 'one word' is used with an attitude of a command, then the power struggle will increase.

The purpose of the one word is to convey to your children the clarity of what is needed now, such that this supports them in taking the action of what is needed.

- You may be waiting too late to use this skill which means that it is too highly charged and emotional. Try using it sooner than later, with the energy of clarity opposed to the energy of anger.
- You say your one word, your child looks at you, and then they carry on doing what they were doing. If this happens it means that your child has an experience of you not taking what you say seriously.

Instead of getting angrier or more upset, use this as an emotionally intelligent opportunity to see what you need to change in your intent and boundary setting.

- If your child chooses to defy you (and you are sure of this) what also helps in these situations is to be clear on what you are going to do as your next strategy. Look for natural consequences opposed to punitive ones (see the session "[From Punishment to Guidance](#)." ([Nurturing of Self Esteem series](#))) to get clear on the distinction between Punitive consequences and Natural Consequences.
- If you are not getting the result you want, video tape yourself and see what you look like and how your communication style sounds. This is what your children would be hearing and this will probably give you the reason as to why your children don't listen either.
- For taking a deeply insightful look at why we punish and what the costs of punishing are, get the session on "[From Punishment to Guidance](#)." ([Nurturing of Self Esteem series](#)) or "[Setting Effective Boundaries](#)." ([Emotionally Intelligent Parenting Series](#)). This session also includes really powerful exercises in how to train yourself to master the "Short and Sweet" skill (only 7% of our communication is in the words, and another 93% in meta-

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that every parent should know but was never taught



The solution is to make sure our communication is powerful the first time around by not sending mixed messages. If the short and sweet skill is not working for you, you are probably sending mixed messages.

- You find the **'one word'** works well but find you still have to use it more times than you wish for. To resolve this, we use the amazing conscious skill of problem solving.

This skill is the master of every other parenting skill and is the ultimate parenting solution. To learn more about this skill, get the session on *"Problem Solving: Your ultimate problem solution."*

A useful starting point with the above situation might look like this.

"Honey, I notice that at times you are really busy with what you are doing and may not hear me when I say something to you. I am also aware that at these times it is difficult to get your attention. What do you think would work for you so that when I need your attention I can get it quickly and respectfully?"



We listen carefully and deeply with acceptance and say our point of view as clearly as we can. We pay attention to the changes generating within us as we interact. We let go of any truths we consider to be absolute. We give value to negotiation as a "strategy of the possible."

~Unknown

Advice from other parents on how to learn this skill

This may sound strange but it is well worth the challenge. Ask another person to stand opposite from you. Then choose the one word statement you wish to practice and say it to them. Ask them to feedback to you how seriously they felt you took yourself. In other words, they are measuring the degree to which they feel you take yourself seriously, which will impact the degree to which **they** will take you seriously. Say the word a few times, and then ask for feedback. Perhaps the most important thing to do here is not get bogged down by getting it right the first time, but by experiencing that a single word can convey a huge amount of energy and information.

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Ask the person helping you to give you feedback on the following criteria:

- 1) How clear and firm you sound (opposed to being threatening).
- 2) How certain you came across that the boundary was the *actual* boundary and not just a *possible* boundary.
- 3) If it sounded as though you were pleading, opposed to being clear about what was needed. (You will find it often comes across as a plea, or a question opposed to it being clear and firm).

Another possibility is for you to video tape yourself. In doing this you will also become aware of your facial expressions, your body language and your tone of voice. All of these things impact the **'quality'** of the message you are conveying. Remember that the message we are wanting to convey is that of respect, dignity and clarity. We wish to avoid the threats, the belittling, the manipulation.

You will find that like any other skill, this may take a while to become part of your everyday language opposed to a **'try on'** technique.

Effective communication is mostly non-verbal. So if you are looking for everything to be a quick fix, then you may really miss the power of aligning your belief systems and your attitudes with your words.





Summary: Short and Sweet

Short and Sweet

- Our levels of frustration and anger rise the more we feel we are not listened to. So we usually revert back to the only techniques we know to engage cooperation: those of our own upbringing (**blaming, accusing, morals**)
- **The degree to which we take our own requests seriously is the degree to which our children take them seriously.**

So if they are not listening the first or second time, check to see how clear and consistent **YOU** have been in the first place.

- Instead of blaming and accusing, say it shorter and sweeter. Keep the reminder to one word, and in that statement convey the clarity and certainty of your request, without being authoritarian.
- Avoid using your **child's name** as a one word statement.

1. **Avoid Long lectures.**
(your reasons and your story and all the things you have done).

Try say it in just one word.

2. **This is not about you. It is about supporting them in taking responsibility and moving into action. This also avoids you getting too emotional.**
3. **Focus on what you are needing achieved and not the rising emotions you may be feeling inside. We don't want our children to be in action because they fear us.**
4. **When you can see that things are not going well and you are going to lose it, 'source' the energy of clarity, share what you need or feel, and then decrease the energy charge as you explain what needs to be done.**



What to expect in the next chapter?

In the last two chapters we have looked at what we can do with greater emotional intelligence when we need something to be done or are requesting our children's cooperation.

But what do we do when our children ask us for something, and we need to say **"no"**? How can we avoid the long faces, the teary eyes, and the responses of:

"You're so unfair!"

"You always say 'no' to me when I also want to have fun!"

Coming up in the next chapter:

The skill of sharing what you need **(instead of what you don't need)** so that your child can solve their own problems.

This next skill set will support you in dealing with the following kinds of challenges:

- The end of 'don't do this, ' or 'don't do that'.
- Setting a boundary in a respectful way.
- Rewording all your household rules to more respectful and empowered statements that will result in greater cooperation.
- All the inappropriate things like jumping on the bed, splashing in the bath, spitting, whining, shouting, stealing, making a noise, fighting, swearing etc.
- Getting them to listen to you without the resentment and back chat.

3

Share what you need – Problem Solving



Welcome to the next chapter on *“The Top skills that every parent should know but was never taught.”*

Are you aware that according to research you may be saying the words **"No"** over 400 times a day?

Don't shout, don't run inside, don't spit your food out, don't fight with your brother, don't waste water, don't lie and steal, etc.

Nearly every family's house rules start with the word **'Don't'**. And the impact of our children continuously hearing negative statements lasts long in their adult lives, costing them.

Studies which have investigated the relationships between statements made by significant others and self-perceptions have found that positive interactions and statements made by significant others were related to high self-esteem and that negative interactions were associated with low self-esteem.

So in this next skill set, you can expect some solutions to some of the following scenarios:

- Getting your children to change their behaviour without making them feel bad.
- Decreasing the number of times you say **"no you can't"**.
- Increasing the respect when requesting something you need.
- Getting your children to listen to you without a struggle and have a positive relationship with you.
- Supporting problem solving.
- Decreasing sibling conflict.
- Eliminating negative lectures.



Share what you NEED

Let's recap chapter 2

We looked at saying it Short and Sweet

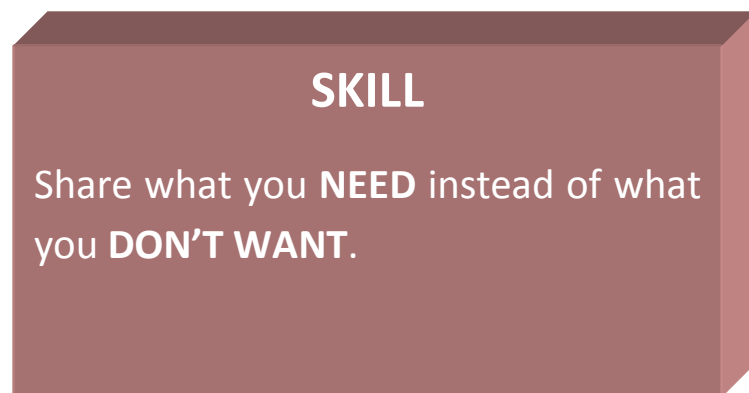
- Our levels of frustration and anger rise the more we feel we are not listened to. So we usually revert back to the only techniques we know to engage cooperation:

Those of our own upbringing (blaming, accusing, morals)

- **The degree to which we take our own requests seriously is the degree to which our children take them seriously.**

So if they are not listening the first or second time, check to see how clear and consistent **YOU** have been in the first place.

- Instead of blaming and accusing, say it shorter and sweeter. Keep the reminder to one word, and in that statement convey the clarity and certainty of your request, without being authoritarian.
- Avoid using your **child's name** as a one word statement.



It was Einstein who said that the solutions to our current problems need to come from a different kind of thinking that created those problems in the first place. By now, if you have been trying the previous techniques, you should have seen different results.

If we keep doing what we have always done, we will keep getting what we have always got. When we do something different, we immediately see a different result.

And it doesn't mean that the result is now the one we were hoping for, but it still is a different result than we were getting before. If it is not the result you were wanting, then do something different again and see if that takes you closer to what you were wanting.

Perhaps one of the greatest changes you can make in your communication pattern with your child is by applying this next simple skill.

We have all been brought up surrounded by people who keep telling us what **NOT** to do:

"Don't splash water. Don't run inside. Don't bite. Don't fight with your brother. Don't steal. Don't cheat on your tests. Don't mess on your clothes. Don't be late."

And so the list goes on.

One of my favourite experiences of really understanding this next skill was watching another teacher disciplining her class. The children were coming inside after running around at break time.

"Boys and girls, don't run inside!"

THE TOP 5 SKILLS

that every parent should know but was never taught



Some of the boys looked at her, then they started skipping instead. The teacher again said, *“Don’t skip inside!”* They stopped, looked at her again, and then started hopping along to their desks. The teacher said again, *“No hopping inside! All of you will stay in after school for being disrespectful.”*

What would have been the difference if, as the boys and girls were coming into class, excited and energetic after their break time, she had just said, *“Boys and girls, we walk while we are inside please.”*

The next skill is:

Share what you need instead of what you don’t want.

In saying what you need, you are sharing with them the actions and behaviour that you require, or that are appropriate at that time. What is important to realise is that it doesn’t mean that what they are doing is necessarily wrong.

It doesn’t attack the children’s personality. It just conveys to them what the appropriate behaviour is that is required. When you share what you need without attacking their character, children step up with an attitude of cooperation nearly all the time.

This simple change in wording and mind set will literally change your world. It is not always easy as you have probably had 20 – 40 years of negative programming to undo.

Our habits are so deeply engrained into saying what we don’t want. But I have been amazed at how quickly teachers and parents have changed this pattern when they keep being aware of what they are saying. And then soon enough, this pattern becomes habitual and they don’t have to think about it again as the words flow naturally.

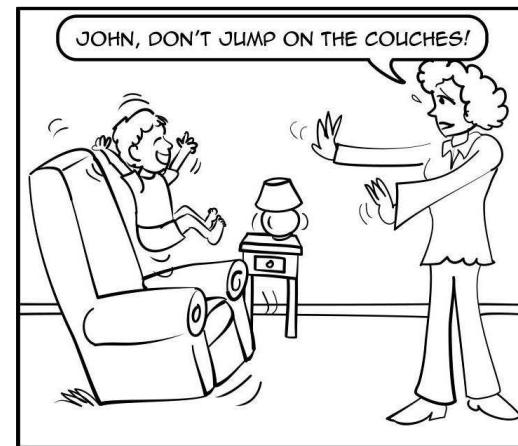
And the amazing thing is to see how quickly children learn this way of communicating with their own peer group. Our children **‘are learning us’**, while we are teaching them.

Imagine the impact of this life long gift you are giving them?

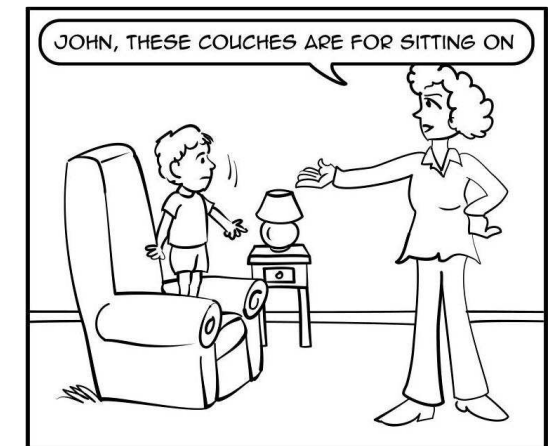
Believe that when they are parenting their own children, and they default to the words they were brought up with, your children will talk an emotionally intelligent language as a natural default.

SHARE WHAT YOU NEED

Instead of what they must not do.....



Share what you need them to do

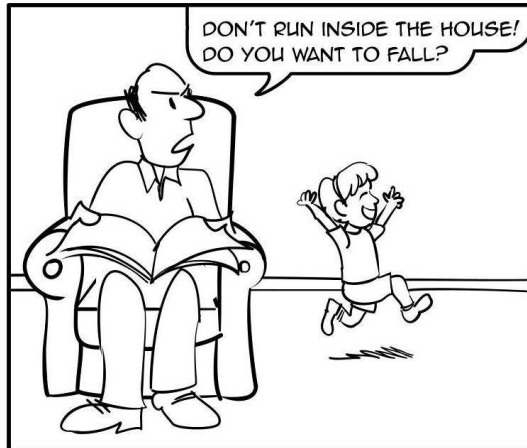


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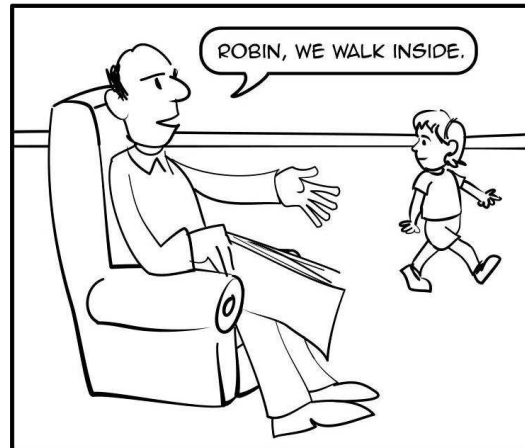
that every parent should know but was never taught



Instead of what they mustn't do.....



Share what you need them to do



We could stop there with this skill, but it can get even better and far more powerful.

Perhaps the most useful and simple skill out there is an extension of the one mentioned above.

Consider the following situation.

You walk into your lounge and see your child (age 5) is jumping up and down on your couches. Instead of saying the following:

“Don't jump on the couches. They will break. That's being naughty.”

SKILL

1. Share what is needed at that moment (or how it should be done).
2. Then share where/when they can do whatever it was they were doing before.
3. Then give them a choice of what to do now.

What the above skill does is very clever. When a child is accused or blamed for something, their defences go up and they resist whatever you are going to say after that.

If you are wanting your children to change their behaviour from jumping on your couches, then you need to ensure they are listening to you without wanting to start a fight.

THE TOP 5 SKILLS

that every parent should know but was never taught

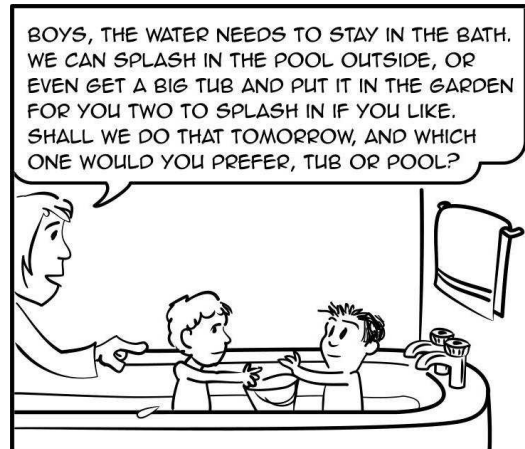
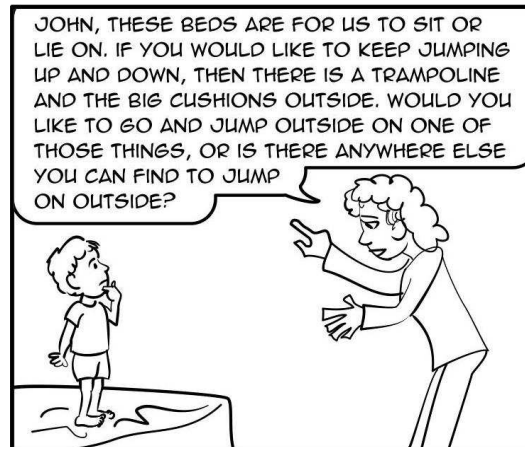


SHARE WHAT IS APPROPRIATE FOR NOW AND THEN WHERE THEY CAN DO WHAT THEY ARE CURRENTLY DOING

Instead of saying what you don't want



Share where they can do it



By sharing where they can do what they are wanting to do now, you are conveying to your children that you still wish for them to have fun. It respectfully conveys that what is happening now is not wrong, just inappropriate at this time and in this space. By re-directing their actions, without making them wrong, children step up to cooperate in a whole new set of ways .

By stating that *'couches are for sitting on'*, you are conveying what that object is intended for. You are not saying that what they are now doing is wrong, but that jumping is appropriate outside with a different object (trampoline, cushions).

More importantly, it conveys that you are not wanting them to stop having fun, but are wanting them to have fun in ways which are appropriate.

Your children then realise that you are not out to get them, or to make their life bad, but are supporting them to still have the fun they were having.

The result is that they will nearly always listen to you, remember what you have said, and carry on their activity were it is far more appropriate.

Going back to the teacher's classroom and the children coming in from break:

The teacher could have expanded her skill by saying:

"Boys and girls we walk when we are inside. It looks like you all still have a lot of fun energy inside. How about if we do our work quickly you can go out at the next break early?"

That kind of response conveys to the children that she is **'hearing'** them and that she does not want to crush their spirit or fun. She is just needing something different and is offering a possible solution to getting there. When children are shown respect, they give it back twofold.



Examples across the Ages

1 Share what you need them to do

AGE	INSTEAD OF.....	SHARE WHAT YOU NEED THEM TO DO
3-7	Don't throw things inside (like balls).	Joshua, we holds balls carefully while we are inside.
3-7	Don't whine.	Please speak clearly to me so I can hear what you are needing.
7-12	Don't steal from your friends.	We value and respect other people's property and toys. We ask them if we want to play with their stuff.
7-12	Don't play computer games now.	Playing computer games is for (weekends, after homework etc).
7-12	Don't scream at me when you are upset with me.	Please make sure you still speak to me respectfully, even when you are upset.
12-18	Don't be late from the party.	Please be back home by the time we have agreed.
12-18	Don't be rude to me!	We still speak respectfully to each other even though we may be upset or disagree with what they are saying.

2 Share what you need them to do and then where they can do what they are currently doing

AGE	WHAT THEY ARE DOING	STATEMENTS (share what is needed and then where they can do what they are currently doing)
3-7	Bringing in sand (or outside stuff) from outside.	Sand needs to stay outside please. If you are wanting to carry on playing with sand, then perhaps we can go outside again after lunch.

THE TOP 5 SKILLS

that every parent should know but was never taught



		<p>Or if this is about bringing things inside.....</p> <p>Sand needs to stay outside please. If you are wanting to bring something else inside, let's have a look to see what we can bring in so you can carry on playing with it here.</p>
3-7	Eating food with fingers opposed to eating with cutlery.	Guys we eat these kinds of foods with forks or spoons. Hotdogs and pizza are foods we can eat with our fingers. Shall we make sure next week we get to eat some of those?
7-12	Skipping inside the house (and assuming that you don't want them skipping inside).	Skipping needs to be done in a place where there is lots of space please. Perhaps the garage is a good place, or maybe the patio, or is there any other place with lots of space where you would also enjoy skipping?
7-12	Watching too much TV and films	The limit is an hour of TV per day. Then there are also special days when we can watch a whole bunch of films back to back. Shall we discuss when we can plan such a special day so you can watch lots of TV and films on that one day?
12-18	Skateboarding inside the house.	<p>Samantha we walk while we are inside. If you are wanting to carry on skateboarding, then there is space in the garage or perhaps in the driveway.</p> <p><i>If you have already shared where they can skateboard, then just share the first part as the rest they know and they may feel stupid if you remind them again.</i></p> <p>Samantha, we walk while we are inside. Skateboarding is for outside spaces please.</p>
12-18	Listening to loud music which disturbs others.	While we are all here, the sound level needs to be appropriate for all people please. If you are wanting to listen to louder music, perhaps you can use earphones, or maybe listen in your room with the door closed, or perhaps when we are all out and you have the house to yourself?



If this doesn't work?

Don't worry or panic. This skill has many facets and variations which you will learn to adapt to any situation you may find yourself in. But it is well worth becoming the master of this skill. In my view this is the most respectful and powerful way to get cooperation from your child and to guide them to the behavioural patterns you desire.

- You know you don't want to say the negative statement, but can't find the alternative wording. This is the most common initial stumbling block for parents.

Finding the words for what you are needing can take some time, and careful thought. But if you find yourself stuck, then just share that:

"I need for you to be doing something else at the moment but can't seem to find the words to say it. So I am going to think about it and then will let you know the next time."

- It is really worth your while to practice saying the alternatives out loud so they are at the tip of your tongue when you really need them. In that way, the words flow without your hesitation being interpreted as your uncertainty of what you need. Your children will pick up on your decisiveness by the clarity of your quick responses.
- If you are finding that this skill alone isn't keeping your boundaries intact, then definitely get the session on **"Setting Boundaries"** to find out the 3 step formula for making your boundaries work. In the session on boundaries you will take the boundary test and find out the reason why you are not getting the result to need, and then be able to fix that so you get back on track.

- Sharing what you need is a powerful skill to use as it keeps respect. But what we need is often only superficial and what we see on the surface.

Getting to the deeper **CORE** needs is a far more powerful tool. Just ask yourself, what needs to be in place for your child to be able to do the thing they are currently doing. Then share this with them. The session on **"Alternatives to saying No you can't!"** not only goes into depth on the core need, but gives so many other amazing solutions to getting the cooperation you need while keeping the smiles on their faces.

- This is not about saying the whole process all the time. More often than not, the shorter **"we keep the water in the tub"** is better than giving options of swimming pools or buckets outside.

My way of determining what skill to use is based purely on whether I am getting the results I need. I also go for the simple and easy options first, just sharing what I need is nearly used all the time instead of anything else.

But if I am not getting the result I need, then I add on a further layer to the skill. The extended skills are used more when there is greater resistance, or if there are groups of children.

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A rule of thumb is to keep it shorter than longer. Often your children know what you mean.

At the same time each child is different, as is each parent. Now you have many skills to choose from and see which ones work best for you and for them.

- You find it works the first few times but then it loses its power and now you are tired of repeating yourself. If you find this is turning into an ongoing pattern, then the skill of problem solving is required. Problem solving is the Ultimate skill as it really will resolve any situation.

It is best used with ongoing challenges that require a shared participation and support to change those patterns. The structure of problem solving is really simple and easy to learn but requires you to really up your game. Get the session on "[Problem Solving](#)" to find out how to unlock this.



Advice from other parents on how to learn this skill

Make a list of the things you frequently ask your children not to do, i.e. don't fight, don't spill, don't mess etc. Look at your house rules and see how many "Don'ts" there are.

Next to these statements, write down the opposite wording.

In other words write down what is required instead of what isn't. If you wish to take this even further, give the list to your spouse or partner, and they call out the negative statement, and you immediately give back the intelligent one in stead. This gets you a good response time and will get you achieving a natural intelligent language very soon.

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THEY SAY	YOU REPLY WITH THE MORE APPROPRIATE WORDING
Don't run inside	We walk when we are inside
Don't throw balls inside	We throw balls outside please.
Don't splash water in the bath	Bath water needs to stay in the bath.
Don't tell lies	In this house we speak the truth.
Don't hit your brother	We treat each other's bodies respectfully
Don't rock your chair	Chairs are for sitting on, with all four chair-legs touching the floor.
Don't swear at me.	We say respectful words to each other

The list is as long as the things our children do. Some of the statements are easy to find while others take a little longer. I have watched teachers and parents master this skill in a very short period of time, even to the point where they are not aware they are using the skill in the first place. And the results are clear in the cooperation they get back from their children.

You change your words, and you change your world!

The next chapter taps into the things we can do when we see our children give up on persevering.

It's that heart breaking, *"But mom, I can't do this. It's too hard."* And they either ask you to do it for them, or they simply won't even give it a go.

"But honey, don't give up, it's really simple. Look. I'll show you. Put this there, and then it's done!"

But their teary eyes are not convinced by your words. So now what?

See the next lesson for the magical skill on how to respect your child's struggle such that they begin to believe they can. Remember, the only difference between an empowered child and a disempowered child is that the one believes he can, the other believes he can't.



Summary: Share what you need

Share what you need

- If you keep doing what you have always done, you will keep getting what you have always got.

If you don't like what you are getting, do something different!

- Often all you need is the first skill (just sharing what is needed). If you find they are resisting you, then use the expanded skill.
- The expanded skill:

Share what you need and where they can do what they are currently doing and give them a choice of what to do next (the transition question)

- Sharing what you need avoids the rightness and wrongness of any situation. It simply states what is needed to be done.

We have all been brought up using negative language. Focus on what you need them to do, and not what you are not wanting them to do.

1. Share what you need.

“Boys, we walk while inside”

“Books are for reading”

2. Share what you need, where they can do what they are doing and give a choice of what to do next (the transition question).

“Boys, we walk inside. If you are still wanting to run, then perhaps at break time we can go out onto the field or if you prefer, we can run around the playground instead. Which would you prefer?”

“Susan, books are for reading. If you wish to tear paper or something else, then over here is the scrap paper and other things that you can tear. Would you like to carry on reading that book, or would you prefer to tear up some more paper over here?”

What to expect in the next chapter?

Success can only be achieved by those who never gave up.

And giving up before achieving the goal is mostly an attitude.

Having an attitude of *'I can..'* instead of *'I can't...'* paves the way for perseverance, stamina and courage.

The following skill set on *'respecting their struggle'* supports you in creating an environment for your child to step up to the challenges, instead of feeling like a failure.

It will provide solutions to some of the following common challenges:

- Accelerating the learning of new skills (tying shoe laces, getting dressed, learning for tests, driving a car).
- Allowing you to share your advice and wisdom without them feeling stupid they didn't know it in the first place.
- Gives them courage to persevere through their struggles.
- Develops the skills needed for autonomy and independence (doing things on their own so you have more time to do other things).

- Making your child feel supported and valued.
- When your child feels tired, how to give them encouragement to persevere.



4

Respect for their struggle – creating independence



Welcome to the next chapter on *“The Top skills that every parent should know but was never taught.”*

"My son gives up before he has even started."

"I want my child to at least try something before she says she doesn't want to do it."

Maybe your questions are:

"How can I get my child to persevere and not give up easily?"

"I want them to have stamina to persevere and know that can surmount any challenges they are presented with."

If you wish for your child to have an attitude of "I can..." then this next skill is a real must for you.

So in this next skill set you can expect solutions to some of the following scenarios:

- Supporting them in learning new skills (tying shoelaces, learning to read, learning to ride a bike, drive a car, type on the computer).
- Knowing when to step in to support them in their struggles.
- Inspiring them to persevere and achieve their goal (weight loss, learning for tests).
- Creates a space for you to **offer advice and suggestions** in such a way they will accept them and not just say 'NO' back to you.
- Give you words that will enable you to coach them through the challenge.
- Supports them in becoming independent without them feeling you have abandoned them.



Let's recap chapter 3

We looked at sharing what is needed opposed to what we don't need.

- If you keep doing what you have always done, you will keep getting what you have always got.

If you don't like what you are getting, do something different!

- We have all been brought up using negative language. Focus on what you need them to do, and not what you are not wanting them to do.
- Often all you need is the first skill (**just sharing what is needed**). If you find they are resisting you, then use the expanded skill.
- The expanded skill:

Share what you need and where they can do what they are currently doing and give them a choice of what to do next (the transition question).

- Sharing what you need avoids the rightness and wrongness of any situation.

It simply states what is needed to be done.

Creating Independence

There is no way that a person can go through life without any challenges or problems.

Happiness is not the absence of problems, but our ability to deal with them.

And our ability to deal with our problems is directly linked to our past experiences of being successful at solving our problems. If we have had positive experiences in resolving challenges, then we would have come to believe that we can solve challenging situations.

We develop an attitude of **"I can"** opposed to **"I can't"**.

It was Henry Ford who said:

"Whether you think you can or whether you think you can't, either way you are right!"

It can be a frightening insight when you realise that most people give up on something important to them purely because they **think** they can't.

So it is really important for us to nurture our children's self esteem in ways that will give them an **'I can'** attitude. Imagine what your child will achieve in life with an empowered attitude that is firmly and securely rooted in experiences of overcoming difficult situations?

Do you also wish your child the characteristics of perseverance, courage, stamina and determination?

Well if you do, then the next skill is going to bring you this possibility.

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If your child is older than 6, do you remember the situation of trying to teach them to tie their own shoe laces? What seems so easy for you, just seems painstakingly slow and difficult for them.

Or what about getting them to write (or colour in) neatly?

I recall a grandmother coming to me and complaining that her grandson (age 5), just could not colour in neatly and kept going over the lines. She felt that he must be stupid to not get it right.

I got out a piece of paper, and asked her to draw me a picture with her non-instinctive hand (she was right handed so I got her to draw with her left hand).

Her picture came out wobbly and skew. As she was drawing I said:

“Oh come on. Drawing with your other hand is easy. Look how I do it.”

As I am ambidextrous, my picture came out well. I carried on ‘encouraging her’.

“Madam, you’re a mature adult. Why is it so difficult now? It should come easily to you. Come on, keep trying.”

Within 30 seconds she gave up. I asked her how she had felt.

She replied:

“Watching you do it so easily made me feel really stupid. And then you said that as an adult, I should be able to do it easily. I have been to school for 13 years, university and had a full life and I still can’t do it. You telling me that it was easy really made me feel stupid as I couldn’t even do something which someone else found easy.”

The penny dropped for her that day. She realised that just because things may be easy for her, it didn’t make it easy for someone else.

And the thing to avoid is saying that something should be easy to another person. If that person can’t do something that should be easy, then why bother trying at all? If she succeeds in doing something ‘easy’ then she may feel that there is little accomplished.

If she fails, then she has failed to do something ‘easy’. It may be better not to create the expectation of what you think it may entail.

Children react the same way.

They do not want you to show them how easy it is. When they ask you to do something for them, it is because they currently believe they can’t do it for themselves and don’t think attempting it is worth the effort. The barrier to them doing it seems too high.

They do not want you to bring the barrier down; they want you to support them in stepping up.

When we show respect for the challenge that they are facing, they feel encouraged and their willingness to persevere increases dramatically. When we acknowledge that at times, certain things can be really difficult, then they don’t feel like they are failing.

And everything can be difficult under different circumstances.

I learnt that holding a simple pencil is difficult when scuba diving with 5mm diving gloves on.

When you see your child struggling to do something, consider **showing respect**, and **giving information** which might support them.

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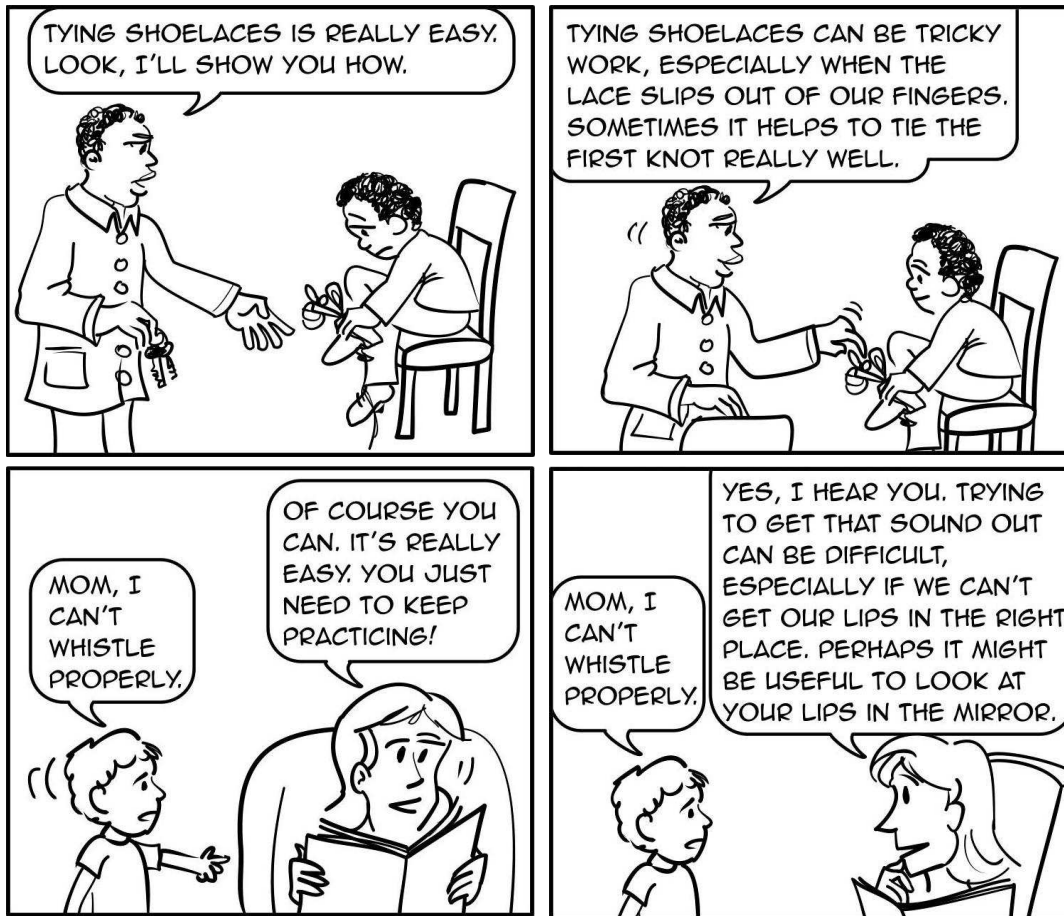
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SHOWING RESPECT FOR A CHILD'S STRUGGLE AND GIVING INFORMATION TO SUPPORT

Instead of making something seem easier....

Show respect for their struggle



By acknowledging the challenges our children face, we give them the support needed to persevere.

SKILL

1. Showing respect for a child's struggle and giving information/advice that supports
2. Showing respect for their struggle and coaching them.
3. Showing respect for their struggle and asking permission to give advice.

There are two things to remember when showing respect.

The words '**sometimes**' conveys that sometimes it's easy, and sometimes it's not. It shows that what may be easy to me today may be difficult tomorrow. It is less threatening for a child to hear.

When giving advice, also use those conditional tense words such as '**perhaps**', '**could**' and '**maybe**'. This allows the child to choose whether to take your advice or not. When we offer information that might work, they are more willing to take our advice than if we tell them what they have to do.

"It **looks like** that door is really sticking today. **Sometimes** it helps if you turn the knob all the way first."

"Cutting carefully around those shapes is **not always easy**. **Sometimes** it is easier if you hold the scissors like this."

"**Sometimes** clay is hard and difficult to work with. **Perhaps** the clay will be softer if we put some water with it."

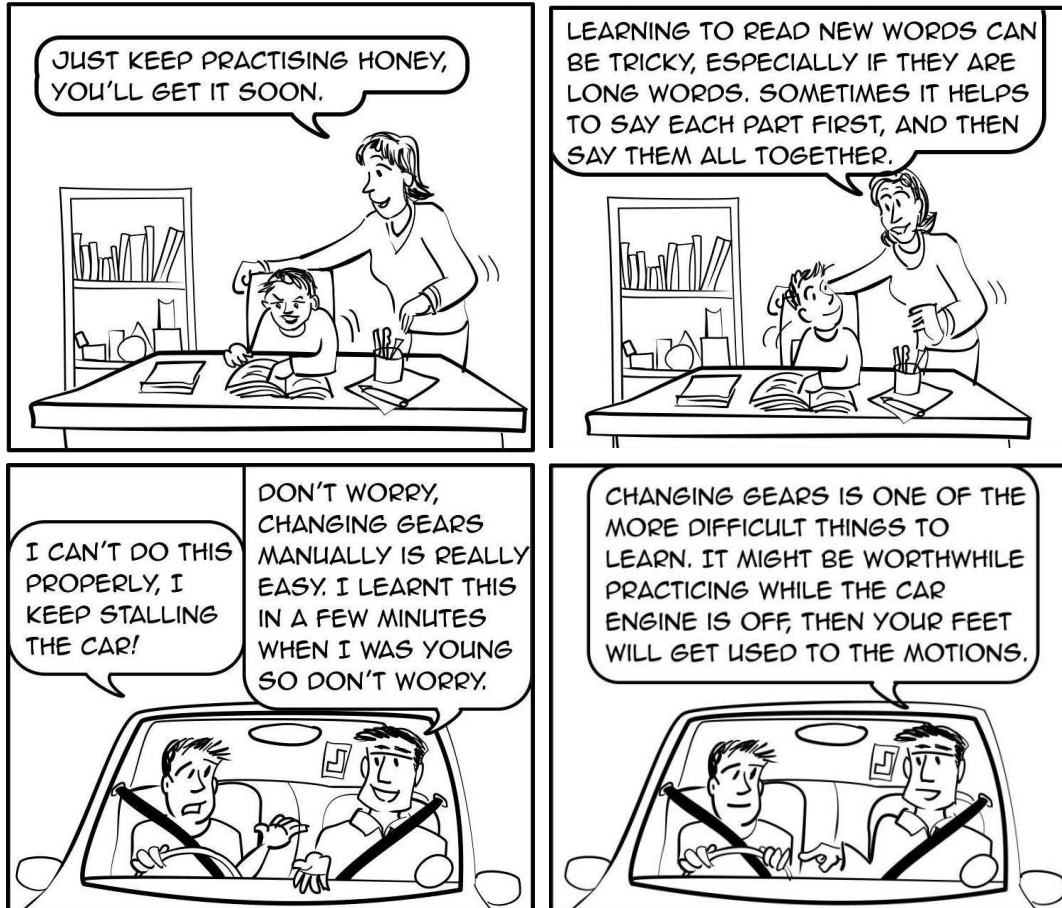
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SHOWING RESPECT AND GIVING ADVICE

When giving advice or suggestions, use words like 'sometimes', 'perhaps', 'it might be helpful if' etc.

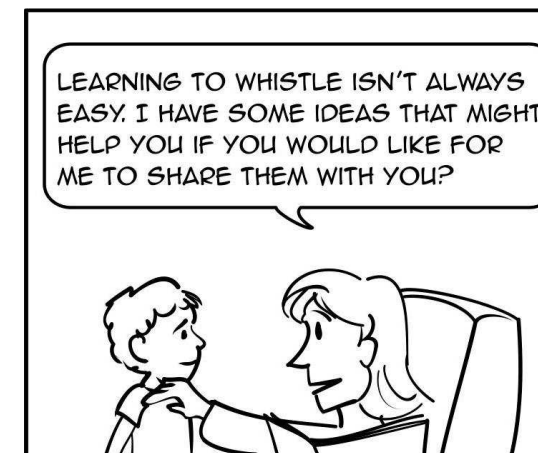


Children don't want us to bring the barrier down, they want us to support them in stepping up to it. By acknowledging and respecting their struggle, they develop skills of perseverance, stamina, follow through and determination. And every time they transform 'I can't' into 'Now I can!', their confidence in their own abilities dramatically increases.

Showing respect for the struggle, then opening up a question for them to think what might work best



Show respect for their struggle and then ask them if they would like to hear your suggestions





Examples across the Ages

1 Showing respect for a child's struggle and giving information/advice that supports.

AGE	THEIR STRUGGLE	SHOW RESPECT AND GIVE INFORMATION
3-7	Doing up buttons	Doing the buttons up is not always easy . The most difficult part can be to push the button through the hole. Sometimes it helps to push your finger through the hole first to make sure the hole is open and big before trying to get the button through.
7-12	Struggling to make the bed	Making beds can be tricky work, especially getting the duvets to look so smooth. Sometimes it helps to do each corner two times instead of just once each.
7-12	Learning for a test	Learning information for a test is sometimes time consuming and tedious. It might help to make sure you have enough time for studying at least a week before test day.

2 Showing respect for their struggle and coaching them.

AGE	THEIR STRUGGLE	SHOW RESPECT AND GIVE INFORMATION
3-7	Getting rooms tidy.	Keeping a room tidy when it's so much easier just to keep playing isn't all that much fun. I wonder what system we could create that would make packing away quick and easy so it didn't take that much of your playing time away?
7-12	Getting up in time for school.	Sometimes it's really difficult getting up in the morning while it's still dark and cold outside. What do you think would need to be in place that would support you in getting up in time without it being a real mission for you?

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12-18	Losing weight on a diet.	Having the self discipline to keep at a diet plan can really be challenging, especially when its birthday and Christmas times. Is there anything you can think of that would make these times work better for your diet plan?
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3 Showing respect for their struggle and asking permission to give advice.

AGE	THEIR STRUGGLE	SHOW RESPECT AND GIVE INFORMATION
3-7	Learning to hold a pencil	Getting used to holding a pencil can sometimes be tiring for your fingers. I have some ideas that might really help you with your colouring in if you wish for me to share them with you?
7-12	Learning to read	Seeing new words for the first time is often the most challenging part in reading new words. Just let me know if you wish for me to share some good ideas that might make this easier for you.
12-18	Saving money	Trying to save money when there are so many nice things to buy sometimes just feels so unfair. It may seem like either way you aren't really getting what you want. I came across some ways that might help you out with this if you wish to hear them. Just let me know and I'll find them for you.

If this doesn't **work?**

Again, don't worry or panic. If communicating with children (or any person), was really easy, then there would be no need for books like these. We would also have little or no conflict in our relationships. We are born with an intense desire to communicate but have to learn the skills to do so effectively.

One of the greatest challenges of learning new skills is being able to identify what part of our communication is not working, such that we can adjust it to get back on track. Many parents have shared **it can be** like learning a foreign language. At first **it can feel** strange, unnatural and contrived. It **may** even feel manipulative.

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For many other parents, they can see how these skills work (and have experienced it shifting paradigms), but feel so trapped by the traditional habitual patterns they have as default. They really wish that they could change the patterns quickly and simply and **often** feel frustrated by the effort and time needed to change their old styles.

Often it really helps to print out the CHAPTER SUMMARIES (from the e-mail skill integration programme) and review the skills often so that they begin to integrate into your natural communication style. It **may** also be useful to share this with your partner/ spouse or friend such that they can also give you feedback when they hear you talk with your child. Having someone else accelerates your learning hugely.

- Children would rather not try new things if they keep experiencing failure.

And even if you now apply the new skills, it may take a while for them to begin to trust themselves again. During this **'recalibration'** time, it is really important not get frustrated that they SHOULD now be giving everything a go.

Self esteem is a complex dynamic. It would really be worth your while to get the whole **Nurturing of Self Esteem Series** so you can ensure that you consciously build their self esteem across all areas of praise, discipline, cooperation, independence and problem solving.

- The more you are able to really pinpoint the challenge your children are struggling with, the more open they will be to receiving your suggestions or advice.

To master this skill, get the workshop sessions on **"Unlocking the power struggle in 3 basic steps"**, or **"Problem Solving: Your ultimate solution."** or **"Acknowledging Emotions (NSE series)"** or **"Conscious Conflict Resolution"**.

All of these workshop sessions deal with this skill but are adapted slightly to the different contexts you may find yourselves in.

- Children who are perfectionists really struggle to accept advice or admit that something isn't working for them. In these situations, you asking their permission to give advice is often the best way to go.

You can also resolve this by asking **'wondering questions'** out loud:

"I wonder what would happen if we did this....? Or I wonder what would change if we did that...?"

The trick here **is not to expect** them to take your advice. Just voice your question and leave it at that. They are always listening even though they don't want to show it.

- Bear in mind that respecting their struggle is not about solving the problem. If your attitude that drives your communication at this moment is to take away their problem (or solve it), then they may be left feeling incompetent and helpless and therefore actually resent you.
- The more resistant they are to your words, the more you will have to make them feel heard and understood. Learn how to do this and they will soften dramatically. (get the session on **"Unlocking the power struggle in 3 basic steps"**)

- You ask permission to share some of your good ideas and they still say they don't want your help.

That's still ok.

One way you can still keep a doorway open for them to get your advice might look like this:

"Ok. What I will do then is just write the ideas down and put them on the fridge. If you wish to read them later then you can just get them from the fridge."

Now your child can still read your ideas, while you are not looking, and still gain from your wisdom.



Advice from other parents on how to learn this skill

The most challenging part of this skill is to decide when is the best time for you to be by your child's side supporting them, or to step in and do it for them. Sometimes it is great to have someone take over what we are struggling to do. But by trying to protect our children from disappointment, we protect them from hoping, striving and sometimes from achieving their dreams.

In this lesson we looked at how we can change a child's attitude and confidence about themselves.

The next lesson takes this a step further. The next skill taps into their deep belief system of how they view themselves. When we change one belief in one area, it impacts the belief systems in a whole range of other areas.

If you could give your child one gift, what would it be?

I give my child a high self esteem and belief in themselves.

Wait for the next chapter on how to do this.



Summary: Show respect for your child's struggle

Show respect for a child's struggle

- Whether you **think you can**, or **think you can't**, either way you are right.
- Children do not necessarily want us to drop the barriers that they are finding challenging, they would like us to support them in stepping up to achieving it.
- Show respect for their struggle by acknowledging the challenge, and then offer information that might be useful.
- Sometimes just acknowledging the challenge gives the child courage to take it further.
- Words that are really useful are 'sometimes'; 'perhaps'; 'maybe'; 'looks like'; 'could'.
- This skill develops the characteristics of **perseverance**, **courage**, **stamina** and **determination** in your child.

1. Showing respect for a child's struggle and giving information/ advice that supports.

"Cleaning your room can *sometimes* be difficult on your own. *Sometimes* it helps to decide which are the important things to pack away first."

2. Showing respect for their struggle and coaching them.

"Making sure that your room is tidy every evening can really require self discipline. Is there anything that you think we could do to make sure that this is as easy as possible for you?"

3. Showing respect for their struggle and asking permission to give advice.

"You have your final exams coming up soon and I am sure that it's not all that easy to make sure you are on top of your studying. I have some ideas that might help you stay on top of your game if you would like me to share them with you?"

What to expect in the next chapter?

- How to praise that will add and build self esteem to your child.
- How to make sure your compliments are meaningful and penetrate your child's defences.
- Understand the pitfalls and risks of value based praise.
- How to praise siblings differently but each child still feels it is fair.
- How to give them the feeling that they are valued and worthy.
- Giving your child a positive self image of themselves.

"If you always do
what you always did
you'll always get
what you always got."

~Unknown



5

Descriptive Praise – building their self image



Welcome to the next chapter on *“The Top skills that every parent should know but was never taught.”*

So in this next skill set on descriptive praise you can expect solutions to some of the following scenarios:

Do you believe that the quality of your interactions with your children impact their personality development?

Research tells that having a happy child is the top wish for most parents.

How much time and effort are you willing to invest in your child's happiness?

Because it is an *investment* more than a once off expense.

But although the research may tell us that building up a child's self image is important, it doesn't really give us the concrete skills on how to do it.

- Making your child feel good about their own achievements without the risk of you appearing condescending.
- Being able to praise authentically on any situation without ever telling a lie or being false.
- How to entrench deep core values of respect, humility, courage, independence and discernment.
- Find out how to see your child smile and feel proud of what they have done.
- To be able to praise even if you are not sure of the value of what you are really praising.
- Being able to praise something that even infants are doing (like doing scribbles).
- Make sure your praise doesn't sound like you are getting ready to manipulate your children.



Let's recap chapter 4

We looked at the skill of showing respect for a child's struggle. It may sound strange that showing respect is also a skill, and not only an attitude.

Showing someone respect certainly originates from an attitude of respect to others. But just having that attitude doesn't mean that you are skilled at showing respect.

- Whether you think **you can**, or think **you can't**, either way **you're right**.
- Children do not necessarily want us to drop the barriers that they are finding challenging, they would like us to support them in stepping up to achieving it.
- Show respect for their struggle by acknowledging the challenge, and then offer information that might be useful.
- Sometimes just acknowledging the challenge gives the child the courage to take it further.
- Words that are really useful are 'sometimes', 'perhaps', 'maybe', 'looks like', 'could'.
- This skill develops the characteristics of **perseverance**, **courage**, **stamina** and **determination** for your child

Building their self image

The foundation of the skill in chapter 4 is based on our belief that our children '**can do it**.' Our attitude towards the situation therefore flows from that belief, and the words reflect that attitude.

When our children experience the successes of overcoming their challenges, so their self image and confidence grows. The skill we will learn in this lesson accelerates that process. By giving our children the gift of a high self esteem, we give them a gift of hope, of possibility, of happiness and of love.

It is well documented that praise and positive reinforcement is a building block of a high self esteem. But that is not enough. Just saying to someone that you should praise your child is like saying to a person, eat healthily and you will live a long life.

What does eating healthily look like? What foods are healthy, when should we eat these foods, and how often? We may know that eating healthily makes sense, but we don't know the specifics of **HOW** to do so.

To demonstrate this, let's take the common examples of how people praise.

"Well done! You're such a good swimmer."

"That's a lovely drawing. You're a true artist."

The above examples are what we call **value judgement praise**. The adjectives of '**good**', and '**lovely**' are relative words and mean different things for different people.

"Relative words" are adjectives that describe something in relation to something else.

THE TOP 5 SKILLS

that every parent should know but was never taught



“Good” only has meaning in relation to the criteria you set for that situation.

My grandmother once gave me a Christmas present of a ‘birthday calendar’. For each month there was a painted picture at the top of the page. The pictures were well painted but of fairly common things such as birds, the sea shore and farms.

I was wondering what I was going to do with this as it was not really my kind of art. I happened to look closely at the bottom corner of each picture, and to my utter amazement, saw that these pictures were painted by the painter using either their mouth or their foot.

What was a fairly normal picture before I saw this was now an amazing feat of wonder and inspiration. If it was ‘pretty’ before, it was outstanding now. What was good for a normal painter, was outstanding from a physically challenged painter.

How can we use **‘good’** to describe both painters?

And that is the challenge of value based praise. When we use value based praise, we use words that are relative, that have no value within themselves and that leads to much misunderstanding and misinterpretation.

After one of my workshops where we had a lively discussion on parenting, a parent came up to me afterward and said:

“Thanks for a really great workshop. I feel so much better now.”

I nodded my head, reliving that conversation and how that conversation had positively impacted other parent’s lives. I asked him what the highlight for him was.

“That cake you brought for break time was a real life saver. I hadn’t eaten before I came here this evening and after having some of that cake, I felt so much better. Thanks.”

He walked away, and I realised that unless you actually share what it is you are praising, then people will probably misinterpret or misunderstand your words.

A few other points to think about in giving traditional praise.

- Praise is nothing about what is said or given. It is directly dependant on whether the person you are praising is open to receiving it from you. You can praise till you are blue in the face but if the receiver doesn’t agree with you, your praise means nothing.

(the only time this will not be the case is when the receiver really respects the giver, and therefore is willing to consider the other person’s belief as also true)

- When you say: *“I really like the car you have drawn”* and the object isn’t actually a car but a house, you clearly convey that the person is a shocking drawer and the praise backfires. It doesn’t matter how good your intentions are to praise, it can always backfire.
- If you don’t really like what you see (or experience), then many people clamp their mouths shut because they don’t want to be dishonest. This means you are very limited in *when* you can give praise.
- If you say: *“I’m so proud of you for doing that,”* it reinforces that the purpose of doing that action is now to make you feel good and proud at what that person has done. **Praise should be given to the other person and not reflected back at ourselves.**

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The simplest and most effective way of giving praise, is to use :

Descriptive Praise

Descriptive praise never lies, nor is fake as it is what you see/hear/experience.

When you describe, you convey to the other person that you have noticed what they have done. The fact of noticing something is far more powerful than just saying:

“Oh what a lovely drawing”.

For me to describe your drawing, I will have to have looked at it, and thought about what I see.

SKILL

1. Describe what you see or hear or experience.
2. Describe the process as well as the content.
3. Describe your favourite part.
4. Sum up with a word

DESCRIPTIVE PRAISE NEVER LIES NOR IS FAKE

Instead of value based words.....



Describe what you see-in detail



Instead of generic simple phrases.....



Describe what you see

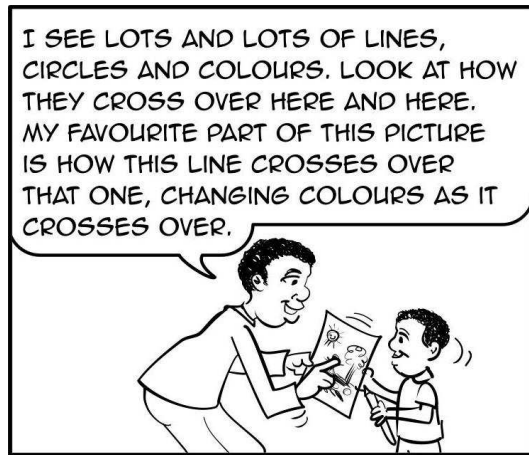


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DESCRIBING YOUR FAVOURITE PART

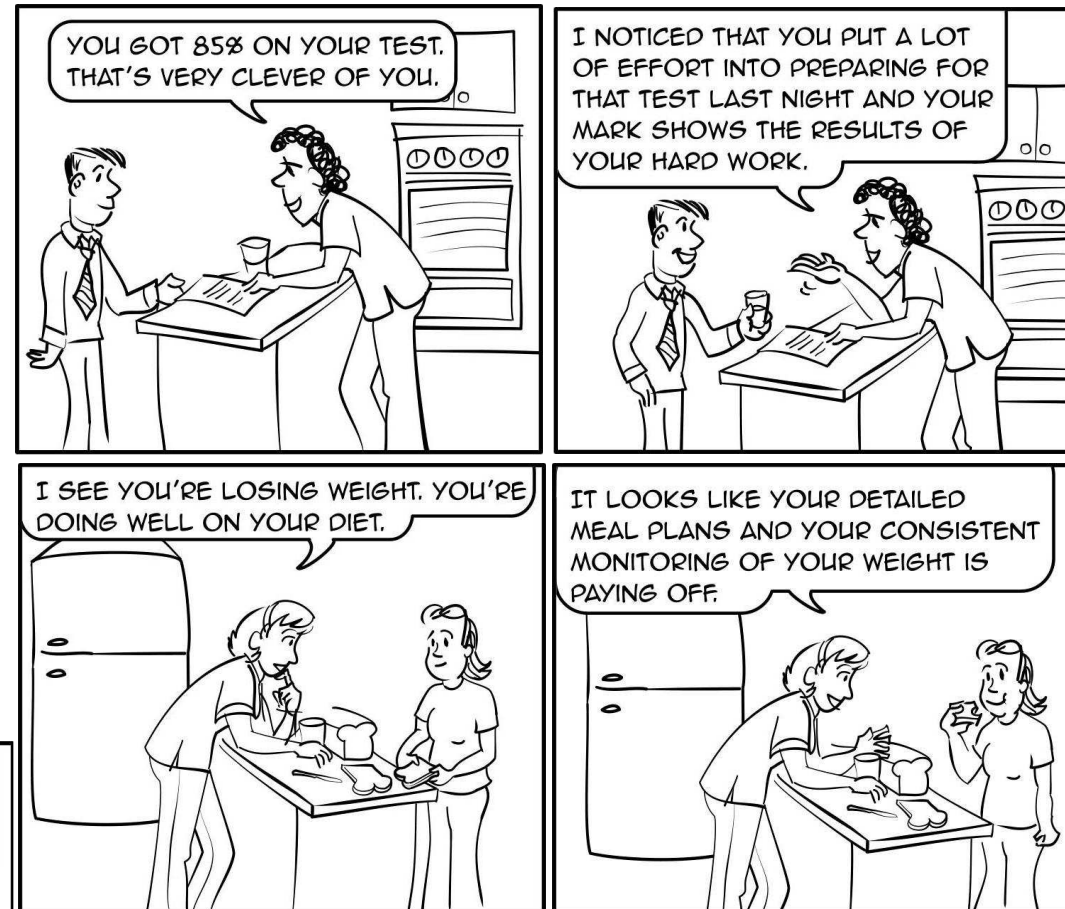


No matter how much you may dislike what you see, you will always have a favourite part. And you can always share what your favourite part is without lying.

YOU CAN ALSO DESCRIBE THE PROCESS OF WHAT HAPPENED



By describing the process you add value on effort opposed to just results.



"Nobody can go back and start a new beginning,
but anyone can start today and make a new ending"

~MariaRobinson

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This skill involves **describing** your experience.

In doing so, often the child hears this, and then transfers that praise onto themselves, by themselves. Think about that again.

When we describe what we see or value, the child hears this and then transfers the praise back onto themselves, by themselves. It is as though they are patting themselves on the back,:

“Yes, I can draw well.”

This positive self image is what lays the foundation for a child with high self esteem.

If you implemented that skill alone, you will achieve huge results in building a positive self image.

SUM UP THE PRAISE-WORTHY BEHAVIOUR IN A WORD

“You arrived home at the exact time you said you would. That is called being **punctual**.”

“Even though you didn’t have to, you also gave your friend a turn on the bike. That is being **considerate** and **kind**.”

“You looked after your new toy carefully today. That is being **responsible**.”

Summing up with a word gives children a label through which they will see themselves. When a child sees himself as **considerate** and **kind** in this one situation, he begins to see that in himself in all other situations.

He begins to label himself as **‘kind and considerate’** or **‘responsible’** or **‘punctual’**. This is the quickest way for your child to ‘redefine and recreate himself’.



When you hold up a mirror for a child to see themselves through your eyes, they begin to see themselves through those same characteristics



Examples across the Ages

1 Descriptive Praise: Describing what you see or hear.

AGE	WHAT THEY DID	DESCRIBING WHAT YOU SAW OR HEARD
3-7	Thank you for tidying your room.	I noticed that you have put your clothes away in the cupboard, the toys are all packed away in their boxes and the pencils are in the drawers. Thanks.
7-12	House hold chores done independently.	I can see that you have completed all the different chores you needed to do without anyone reminding you or helping you out. Well done!
7-12	Helping out with the younger sibling.	I really appreciated that you helped your younger brother get dressed quickly so we would not be late for lunch this afternoon. Getting him dressed and ready is not an easy task and yet you completed it quickly and without any upsets.

2 Describing the process of what happened.

AGE	WHAT THEY DID	DESCRIBING THE PROCESS OF WHAT THEY DID
3-7	An unfinished shoe tying session.	It looks like you really gave it a go in tying your shoe laces this morning. I saw you really concentrating on tying that first knot tight, and I can also see that although you haven't finished, you really feel you are on the right track.
7-12	A beautiful painting	This painting really shows that you took your time in drawing all the little details. It is clear that you thought very carefully about each thing so that when it all came together it creates a striking image.
12-18	Having friends over to play.	I noticed that although you had your best friends over to play this afternoon, it was not always easy. It sounded like although there was

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		still some fighting and some shouting, you were really making an effort to be a great host to them.
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3 Describing your favourite part, therefore never being inauthentic.

AGE	WHAT THEY DID	DESCRIBING WHAT YOU NOTICED OR ENJOYED THE MOST
3-7	Messy eating	I noticed that you really tried eating with your knife and fork tonight. I really valued you trying to even eat your peas with your fork which is always the most difficult thing to do.
7-12	Cleaned their room	I see some clothes packed away here and it looks like some stuff has been packed away from your desk. What I appreciate most is that the floor is clean and has nothing else on it.
12-18	Being polite on the phone	I noticed that when you answered the phone today, you were really polite. I really liked the tone of your voice when you said, "Hi, this is Anton speaking". Very friendly.

4 Using summative praise to build core identity.

AGE	WHAT THEY DID	DESCRIBING WHAT YOU NOTICED OR ENJOYED THE MOST
3-7	Shared their toys with their friends	I noticed that when your friends came over to play you also let them have a turn to play with your toys. When we share like that it shows real caring and kindness.
7-12	Did homework on their own	You finished all your homework well before dinner time. That's being well organised and diligent.
12-18	Saving money	You saved your money until you had enough to buy a new computer. That's requires real self discipline and control. Well done!



If this doesn't work?

This skill has the least curveballs but the most rewards. Get this one right as it really builds self esteem, confidence and the willingness to take on new challenges. You are shifting your child's perspective of themselves from **"I can't to I can."**

- Getting this skill right is so rewarding as you will immediately see the nodding of their heads and their big smiles. The more you are able to tap into exactly what they had intended to do, the more they will be nodding their heads.

If there is little or no response from them, then check to see if you really understood what they had wanted to achieve in the first place.

- At times your child may not understand the descriptive words you have used. They may ask you outright as to their meaning:

"Dad, what does 'responsible' mean?"

If your children are quite young (8 and younger) then it is useful to also give other describing words than the one you used:

"Honey, starting to clean your room on your own is really being pro-active. Being proactive is like when you start doing things without being asked to do them. You are not waiting for anything but starting straight away."

- There is nothing wrong by still using value based praise:

"Lindy, that's an amazing drawing."

But always back it up with the detail of why you feel it is amazing:

"You really captured the colours of the morning light and the movement of the bird flying by."

- You cannot give too much praise. The world perspective is so focused on the negative that you will not run the risk of the negative impacts of too much authentic praise. Authentic praise is different to value based praise or praise which is exaggerated.

With descriptive praise you avoid all of those issues.

- If your child still feels that your praise is a manipulative tool, then keep it shorter than you would think. Say it in as few words as possible and leave it there, otherwise they will feel you are really trying to make them feel better (which comes across as condescending)
- The more you practise and become skilled at this type of praise, the more the words will flow straight from the heart. Your children will then experience your praise at a core level.

If you praise with too much enthusiasm, you may **over-function** which makes your child down play their own feelings:

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“Oh honey what a super duper picture. You are so amazing and so clever”.

Response:

“Oh mom, it wasn't that big a deal”

Keep it real and authentic.

Advice from other parents on how to learn this skill

Make a list of at least 30 things that you find positive about your child. If you struggle to find 30, then keep going as this will keep you open to finding opportunities to positively reinforce your child. Once you have your list of 30 things, next to them write down what characteristic or value it is that underpins that action. Next to this, write down the statement that you could use where you will be **describing the action/ situation that you see your child doing**, and the **word** that you will use to **sum it up**.

He packs away his toys	Responsible	I can see that all the toys are packed away in their right places and the books neatly stacked over there. Well done! That's what I call being responsible.
He's a great problem solver	Creative thinker	I noticed that when that meeting was cancelled the other day that you very quickly came up with a plan on how to still achieve what you needed. That's what I call being a creative thinker.
She eats healthily	Self discipline	Even though it is your birthday party, I saw that you still ate only the healthy foods. That really requires a lot of self discipline.

Now just writing these down is not enough. Look to see which of these you can actually make time to share with your children. Perhaps at the end of each day when you tuck them into bed at night, look back at the day and see which things you can positively acknowledge them for.

Or perhaps write something down for them and place it in their lunch box so when they open it the next day they will read your note. Some parents even record such messages so when they are travelling and away from home, their children can still hear these positive messages that build their self image.



Summary: Descriptive Praise

Descriptive Praise

- Value based praise doesn't mean much and is open to **misunderstanding** and **misinterpretation**.
- **Descriptive praise is the act of describing what you see/ hear or experience and therefore allows you to be authentic and honest.**
- The results of praise are not dependant on what you say, but on whether the other person is willing to accept it. Therefore we need skills that will allow our words to penetrate the receiver's own belief system.
- You can describe **process** as well as **content**.
- Summing up their praiseworthy behaviour with a **word** allows for the child to transfer that value in that situation across all other areas of their lives.

1. *Describe what you see/ hear / experience:*

"I see 3 pages of careful writing here."

2. *You can describe the process as well as the content:*

"It looks like you put a lot of effort into these pages. I can see that the handwriting also stayed neat throughout all 3 pages. Not easy to do when a story is that long."

3. *Describe your favourite part, thereby never being in authentic.*

"My favourite part of this picture is the way these colours over here have mixed and created new ones."

4. *Sum up their praiseworthy behaviour with a word:*

"This means being very diligent."



Postscript

I remember when I was a young boy of 6 years, I loved going fishing with my father on an old sea jetty in Swakopmund, Namibia. We walked out on the jetty in the early morning, greeting the other fishermen. On this particular day there were more people than usual but no-one seemed to be catching anything.

We set up our rods, baited our hooks and threw our lines into the water which was about 4 meters below us. Pretty soon there was a big tug on my line and I started reeling it in. There was something on the other end and it was moving. Everything went smoothly until I started lifting it out of the water to pull it up those 4 meters to where we were standing.

I could not see the end of my line as the wooden jetty was in the way. My rod had a massive u-bend in it and I was straining to reel the fish in further.

“Dad, help me! I’ve got a big one and I can’t get it up!”

The people surrounding us started looking. Some people came over to have a look.

“Dad, come on! I’ve got a big one.” I shouted again, causing more people to come on over.

His reply was:

“Slowly now. Wow, your rod is really bending. Sometimes it helps most to keep aoina slowlv.”

It seemed like forever but at last something caught my eye as my line came to its end. It was a fish, but a very small one and it seemed to be straining as much as I was in trying to get free. I had thought that the fish was going to be much bigger and when I saw it I was embarrassed by the shouting and excitement I had caused.

Some people around us chuckled and went back to watching their own lines but I remember that moment well. My calling to my dad was not a plea for help but a plea for recognition and encouragement.

I needed him to recognize that I could do it **alone**.

As an adult focusing on supporting and empowering children, I have come to realise how easily my words can close a child down from trying further, or give them courage to persevere.

I observed a mother trying to get her son to tie his own shoelaces.

“Come on James, you’re a big boy now. You can learn to tie your own shoelaces.”

He looked at her uncertainly and then bent down and gave it a go. He couldn’t do it and soon was in tears and when asked what was wrong he replied:

“Now I can’t be a big boy.”

The mother’s intention to motivate and encourage him to try learn, resulted in him evaluating himself according to her words.

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If you can tie your own shoe laces, you are a big boy. If you can't, then you aren't.

Some parents find it almost unbearable to stand there and watch a child struggle without offering more than just empathy. But rather than take over, describe what you see, showing respect for the person or child's struggle.

We want our children to feel our support. We want to create a space for them to try new things and not to feel bad or give up if at first they do not succeed. We want them to breakthrough the barriers when they think they can't do something.

On the day my dad and I were fishing on the Jetty in Namibia, his support was shown to me in being there by my side, acknowledging me as I struggled to pull this fish in (although I was deeply humbled by the experience). Over the years he continuously offered encouragement and information that resulted in me persevering and developing a sense of trust in myself.

On that day in Namibia, both the fish and myself had something on common; we were both set free.

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Thank You

Robin

" How many people are trapped in their every day habits:

part numb, part frightened, part indifferent?

To have a better life

we must keep choosing how we are living."

~Albert Einstein





Disclaimer

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