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Enjoy!

Course Name: Teaching Parents About Family Rules—

The difference between a house and a home

Course Number: B6C4

CEU: 6.0

Instructor: Philip Copitch, Ph.D.

Course material based on:

Basic Parenting 101:

THE MANUAL YOUR CHILD
SHOULD HAVE BEEN BORN WITH

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How-2 Parenting Series

This book is available to therapists from CEUforTherapists.com at wholesale pricing.

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COURSE OBJECTIVES

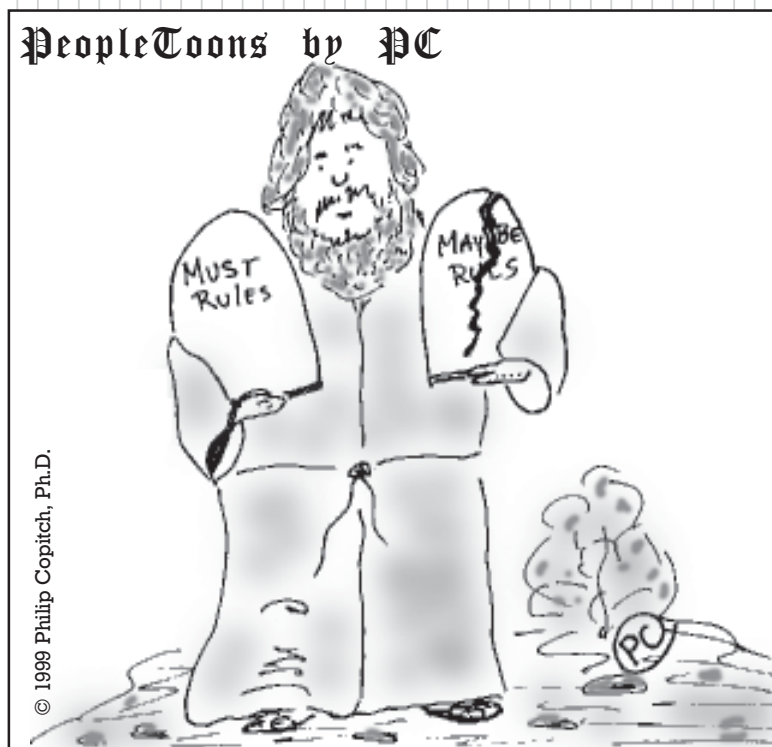
1. You will study a process to teach parents how to set limits and develop loving and disciplined children.
2. You will read real life examples of how parents positively influence their children.
3. You will study ways to teach a complicated subject to parents who are coming to you for help with their children.
4. You will experience the power of story as a cognitive-behavioral therapeutic tool.
5. You will see ways to demystify psychotherapy for your patients.

Tell me, I forget.

Show me, I remember.

Involve me, I understand.

Teaching Parents About Family Rules



SUGGESTED PREREQUISITE COURSES

I am assuming that the student has a solid understanding of learning theory and cognitive behavioral techniques. This course is based on and refers back to:

- B6C1 Teaching Parents About How Their Children Learn
- B6C2 Teaching Parents How To Build Their Child's Self Esteem
- B6C3 Teaching Parents About How To Use Time Out Effectively

In this course we will look at how a therapist can teach parents how to deal with a complex family problem. The above course materials are available, free of charge, from CEUforTherapists.com.

The sections in red are for your information. The sections in black are how I explain the process to the parent. Please note that I use a cognitive behavioral approach.

INTRODUCTION

Let's look at how to talk to parents about how they can positively influence their children by adding healthy structure to their family.

When I work with parents I often find that the most well meaning of them are missing basic parenting and coping skills. In this course we are going to look at how to teach basic learning theory in a way so that a loving parent can pick it up and use it. And I do mean use it. I find that the parents I work with are eager to try new ways of dealing with old problems; as long as I don't try to stuff the new stuff down their throats. A major part of my therapy is teaching, but not in the high school or college way. I teach through stories. I tell vivid stories about solving problems. I let my patients walk out of each session with new eyes. With new skills embedded in a story form. In a safe story form. I want them to be able to get their minds around the new concept without feeling like they are wading through science or psycho-babble. I teach in the way we humans have probably passed down important information since the beginning of the extended family.

So, if it is OK with you, let's start.

It is curious that physical courage should be so common in the world and moral courage so rare.

Mark Twain

The real test of a parent is to possess power without abusing it.



Quick Reference Guide

Noun (n) A word that is used to name a person, place, thing, quality, or action.

Verb (v) The part of speech that expresses existence, action, or occurrence in most languages.

Punish (v) 1. To subject to a penalty for an offense, a sin, or a fault. 2. To inflict a penalty for (an offense). 3. To handle roughly; hurt

Discipline (n) 1. Training expected to produce a specific character or pattern of behavior, especially training that produces moral or mental improvement. 2. Controlled behavior resulting from disciplinary training; self-control.

American Heritage Dictionary

Home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in.

Robert Frost

TEACHING PARENTS ABOUT FAMILY RULES— THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A HOUSE AND A HOME

I must admit that as a family therapist I have a pet peeve. It is a large purple funky life-form that makes me initially feel upset and then feel pity. My pet peeve is when a parent says, "I do it for the kids" or "I do it for the family." For example, the Michaels family is in disarray. Their seventeen year old son spends most of his day avoiding the family. Their fifteen year old son is failing every class and was arrested while breaking into neighborhood homes to use their phones and computers. Their daughter, eleven, is in an emotional daze, numb due to the constant bickering between her siblings and the hateful words between her parents. Mr. and Mrs. Michaels have been married for almost twenty years. Mrs. Michaels explains, "In the last twenty years we have learned how to look like a happy family. On the outside we show well. But, inside the walls of our house, we hate each other. We argue constantly, if we talk at all. Most days I wish I could just run away from home."

When I first met Mr. and Mrs. Michaels they were scared and angry. Their fifteen year old son had been accused of \$60,000 worth of destruction to a neighbor's home.

Mr. Michaels: I don't know what to do ... our son must hate us. He says he 'just lost it' and destroyed the inside of a neighbor's home. He tore the sheet rock off the wall and poured paint all over the carpets and furniture.

Mrs. Michaels: I just can't believe he would do this sort of thing. It was just evil. He must just hate me ...

Mr. Michaels: No! He doesn't hate you, he is crazy! It must be that he is just mad, there was no reason to destroy the neighbor's home.

Dr. Phil: Where were you folks when it happened?

Mr. Michaels: We were at work. We usually get home around six-thirty or seven. It seems that he has been breaking into neighbors' homes for months ... after school and on weekends. The police say they have phone evidence that he has been using other neighbors' phones too.

Dr. Phil: Your children are unsupervised from after school until around six?

Mr. Michaels: Sure, it has never been a problem until now. We both work long hours ... we try to get as much overtime as possible. We are a little behind on our bills. WE DO IT FOR THE KIDS! And they treat us like !@#\$.%

There's my pet peeve, "WE DO IT FOR THE KIDS!" Mom and dad Michaels love the concept of being in love with their children, but they had to say that their children were hard to love. The behaviors in the family were so abrasive that no one could chance showing love or affection because of the fear of being hurt by other family members. If you parked your car on the curb in front of the Michaels' home you would see a beautiful, four bedroom, freshly painted, house. The lawn is well kept. The windows are covered with warm curtains. The rooms are well appointed with newer furniture. Three cars fill the driveway. A boat is in the garage. A motor home is along side.

My problem is with the misguided belief, "WE DO IT FOR THE KIDS!" I have found that many parents use these words to justify their chosen behaviors. They use these words to justify not making time to properly parent.

The word **parent** is a noun. But the act of parenting, to parent is a verb. Parenting is an action word. A doing word. The primary role of a parent is *to parent*, to participate and direct the upbringing of their children. Don't get me wrong, I know that money makes the world go round, but I am adamant that paying the bills is not enough. It is a part of the adult world, but it is not the primary role of a parent in the life of their children.

Parenting is a full-time (plus) job. It has no pay and only non-tangible rewards. And, let me be very clear ... most of the time it is time consuming!!! Yep, it takes time to parent. Lots of it. Period. It is your responsibility to care for and protect your children from the real world and sometimes even from themselves.

THE ART OF DISCIPLINE

This next concept is difficult for parents to implement. You will find that you will reiterate this many times over many sessions.

I would like to take a moment to further investigate the relationship between two words: punishment versus discipline. As we initially discussed in the first chapter, punishment is something that decreases the likelihood of a behavior. In Chapter 3 we explored both punishment and discipline.

Punishment is the presentation of an adverse

I'm going to define a new word as a dictionary might define it: *to parent*— "to use, with tender loving care, all the information science has accumulated about child psychology in order to raise happy and intelligent human beings."

Fritz Hugh Dobson, Ph.D.

*stimulus, following an undesired response, that decreases the likelihood of that undesired response. **Discipline** is learned choices, self control. With punishment we force our demands on our child, but when we teach our children to be disciplined we teach them how to make choices and let them build character.*

Now we look at the essence of our choice to use punishment verses develop discipline within our children. Both punishment and discipline have their place in child rearing. What I would like to look at is the art of parenting that allows us to know when we should punish and when we should develop discipline.

In Chapter 1 we looked at the negative side effects of punishment:

Punishment is a powerful teaching tool. However, it has two major drawbacks to its efficiency. First, for punishment to be effective it must be severe. If not, its efficiency is only temporary. Second, punishment brings to the relationship powerful feelings such as anger and revenge, which can destroy a positive learning situation.

These side effects can severely undermine the parent/child relationship. Thus, I advocate that we use punishment sparingly.

The definition for discipline is often misunderstood. Many people think of it as authoritarian, such as the way a Marine drill sergeant treats a new recruit. This is a very narrow view of the word. Discipline comes from the Latin word *discipulus* for “learner.” It is related to disciple, doctor, and document. In Anglo-Saxon times the Latin root and Old French merged to become *deciple*, meaning instruction or knowledge. Over the centuries the meaning developed into “*maintenance of order.*”

For me, I perceive discipline as “self control.” The act of my child learning to accept personal responsibility for his behavior. The act of taking individual responsibility for emotional and behavioral self regulation. It is my goal as a parent to systematically relinquish my external control over my child, while my child systematically takes over his own self control.

This systematic release and acceptance of control is the art of parenting that most of us find so difficult. We want to protect our children from harm or even discomfort. Unfortunately, this virtuous goal tends to allow us to be overly protective and, in the long run, we inadvertently hinder our own children.

When I was an undergraduate student, I watched a rat experiment that some graduate students were conducting. The experiment consisted of teaching two groups of rats how to find food at

Correction does much, but encouragement does more. Encouragement after censure is as the sun after a shower.

Goethe

the end of a maze. The large maze was constructed out of wood in the basement of the psychology building. The experiment was interesting as well as hilarious to watch. The graduate students had two groups of rats. Both groups were treated the same in all aspects, except one.

Group 1 members were placed at the starting point of the maze and then observed. Each rat nosed around the maze eventually finding the “reward” food at the end of the maze. Each member of Group 1 experienced the process of finding food twenty times. Each time the rats got faster at finding their way through the maze. Basic rat learning in progress. Then the funny stuff happened. Group 2 also got 20 trips through the maze. The graduate students had concocted a little “rat wagon” that the rats got to ride in. Twenty times each member of Group 2 was pulled along through the maze and was rewarded with food at the end. (The rat, not the student.)

The graduate students were investigating passive versus active learning. They wanted to see which group could run the maze the fastest, which group learned the maze the best. The next day, (so the rats would be hungry and motivated to play maze with the graduate students) each of the rats were timed as they ran the maze. The rats in Group 1 were very fast. They dashed through the maze and gobbled up their reward. The rats in Group 2 just sat there at the starting gate. Most didn’t even explore much. They just sat there, hungry, waiting for a ride. When they finally did start to explore they were very tentative. They were substantially slower than Group 1 rats were their first time through the maze. How interesting, helping the Group 2 rats through the maze subsequently hindered their ability to learn. But it sure was funny to watch.

I assure you that I am not equating our children to rats. But, we can learn a lot from experimental evidence.

Albert was a small framed, angelic looking boy of nine. A few minutes into a therapy session, Albert’s watch fell off. He picked up his watch from the carpet and stated, “Dr. Phil, put this on for me.” When I explained that he was able to put his own watch on he matter of factly marched off to the waiting room and barked his order at his mom. “Mom, put my watch on!” As I got to the waiting room door I got Mrs. Warren’s attention and nodded “no” to her. She understood and politely told Albert, “I think you can put your own watch on,” and handed it back to him. Albert took the watch and threw it on the ground screaming, “I want you to put it on for me! I want you to put it on for me!” I motioned to mom to come with me and we went back to the therapy room and sat down. I reminded mom about last week’s session when we discussed that she should



have more age appropriate expectations of Albert. The week prior we had discussed how she was not truly helping Albert if she did everything for him. We had the following conversation:

Mrs. Warren: (looking worried) If I don't put his watch on he may lose it.

Dr. Phil: That may be so ...

Mrs. Warren: If I don't help, he may think I don't love him.

Dr. Phil: That may be so ...

Mrs. Warren: He will have a temper tantrum. (She put both hands on her head and rocked it in despair.)

Dr. Phil: That may be so ...

Mrs. Warren: Albert loses everything!

Dr. Phil: That may be so ...

At this point Albert found his way to the therapy room. He was calm, collected and just a little red faced from all of his screaming. "You guys left me out there ... I was having a temper tantrum you know!!!"

"That may be so," smiled Mrs. Warren, "but you haven't put your watch on." Albert looked at his feet. "I broke it when I threw it on the ground," he said softly.

Over the next few weeks Albert trotted into session excitedly telling me all the new things he could now do. "I took out the garbage, I made my bed, I walked to the store." He quickly started to act like a nine year old.

At the end of three months the family didn't need therapy any longer. Mrs. Warren wrote me a nice thank you letter. One part caught my attention. "It is nice to see Albert playing with the neighborhood children. I saw him pulling the neighbor's six year old in a wagon this morning. He was so happy. He is getting so big. Thanks for making me stop pulling Albert in the rat wagon." (I always get warm fuzzies when people remember my stories.)

In this section we are going to explore the process of developing a home that encourages individuals to develop discipline and self control. Only when our children have self control, can we stop being police officers, judges, and probation officers and be what we are ... loving parents. Our goal should be to provide a *home* not just a *house*.

If you ask children what they want, they sing out, "Freedom," as it should be. As your children grow they should want to be adults.

Every artist was first an amateur.

Emerson

In giving advice I advise you, be short.

Horance

Through the eyes of minors, adults have it made. We can do whatever we want to. We go to bed when we desire. We eat whatever crosses our fancy. We can say and do whatever we want. Boy, are kids uninformed. They don't know about taxes, bosses, and adult responsibilities. They don't know that we go to bed so we can get up to go to work. That we eat cardboard fiber and low fat, tasteless stuff because of our waist lines and our clogging arteries. In fact, kids have it made. We protect them. But, nonetheless, kids want freedom.

As parents we really want realistic freedom for our children. Our long term goal is for our children to develop self control so we can relinquish our limited control over them. We want our children to have respect for themselves and others. We desire that our children use good judgment to direct their lives. When babies enter the world they are, by design, self centered. They know nothing about the rights and self responsibility of others. As they grow and mature, they build awareness of others and eventually respect for self and others. Within the limits of our society, children learn how to be free.

I like to think of degrees of freedom as the size of the envelope our children live within. By envelope I mean the limitations within which our children can perform safely and effectively. When our children are very young, the envelope is the crib, our arms or the area that has been made safe on the living room floor. As our infants grow into toddlers, the envelope may be the "baby safe" living room and the car-seat. Preschoolers get the run of part of the house or the enclosed playground. The size of the envelope grows with the child. School children expand to the classroom, most of the house, and parts of the neighborhood. The envelope is the limitations we place on our children.

The size of this envelope is very important in helping our children learn what freedom is. As our child teaches us that they can handle more freedom — we enlarge the envelope. If they teach us that the freedom is more responsibility than they can control, we limit the envelope. The art of parenting is "knowing" when to enlarge or reduce the envelope.

I advise that parents help children (especially teens) to see growing up as proving that they can handle increases in freedom. This leads us to four major factors.

1. **Parents need to define, within themselves and their marriage, what they believe the size of the envelope should be.** Parents need to talk openly about what is and is not allowed within each child's envelope of freedom. This process will be mapped out for you in the following pages.
2. **After the parents have defined the size of the envelope for each child, the limitations must be clearly defined for that child.** Children need well defined limitations to feel safe and secure in their lives.
3. **Parents must give more freedom when their child teaches them that they have mastered the present limitations of their envelope.** As your child develops you can only challenge her to grow with further freedoms.
4. **If your child teaches you that the envelope is too large, you must respect your child's need for limitations.** If your child breaks a rule that forces you to implement a consequence, you must respect your child's needs. When your child again teaches you that she is ready for an enlargement of the envelope, you can again give your child more freedom.

I often tell the following story to teens to help them see their involvement in the size of the

envelope of freedom. Unfortunately, this story is sad, but like all the stories in the book, it is true. The lesson it teaches is important.

Mr. and Mrs. Peabody came to my office to talk about the stress their family had recently undergone. The problem centered around their sixteen year old son, Scott. Scott was a wonderful child and a respectful and talented teenager. He was on the high school football team and was interested in studying anthropology in college. As the Peabodys told me about their son I was impressed with his talents and social skills.

Six weeks prior to my first session with Mr. and Mrs. Peabody, a terrible thing happened. Three classmates were angry with Scott. They were jealous of his sport talents and his ease in social situations. So, as a prank (their words), they thought that they would bring Scott down off his high cloud. They wanted to publicly embarrass Scott and get teachers to not like him as much. The three boys conspired to put phencyclidine (PCP) in his drink. Scott drank the spiked drink and had a massive seizure. Scott suffered permanent brain damage. He now had the mind of a three year old. [See Course B6C5-SD, WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT STREET DRUGS? for more information about PCP.]

I tell this story to teens and ask them how Scott's parents should treat him. Should they treat him as a sixteen year old or as a three year old?

Mr. and Mrs. Peabody had to learn how to treat Scott correctly. They had to learn to protect Scott from himself. They had to hold his hand when he was near a street. They had to "child proof" their home. I can honestly say that Mr. and Mrs. Peabody taught me much about compassion and parental love. I am honored to have known them.

We have to respect the needs of our children. The needs of our children define the size of the envelope of freedom we allow them to practice their lives in. The envelope is defined by the needs of the individual child.

If your child teaches you that he should be treated like a twenty-two year old, it would be disrespectful to treat him any other way. If your child teaches you that she should be treated as an eleven year old you must treat her like an eleven year old. Please note that we must treat our children as their behavior teaches us, not based on the chronological date of their birth. It would be unfair to treat Scott as a sixteen year old. It would endanger him to have the freedom of a sixteen year old. Conversely, it would be unfair for a parent to treat their fourteen year old as a ten year old if he is acting sixteen.

Now, let's look at how we can fairly and respectfully treat each other in the family.

MUST, MAYBE AND MINOR RULES

The size of the envelope is defined by the child when the limitations are not clearly defined.

Never assume anything except a 4 1/2 percent mortgage.

Most families have too many rules. Yep, that's what I said, too many rules. So many rules that the members of the family can't even keep track of all the rules. So many rules that parents become law clerks trying to keep track of the family's laws. Kids say it, usually loudly, "I didn't know that," or "You never said that," or "You said this or that." What a mess.

Most families don't really have well defined rules. What they really have are "preferences." Parental expectations based on lots of unmentioned factors. The following conversation is typical of one heard during the first session with an acting out teenager and his mother.

Mom: Johnny just won't behave. He is in trouble at school all the time.

Son: I'm not in trouble all the time ...

Mom: See, he argues about everything ...

Son: Sure I do, you lie about me all the time.

Mom: As an example of his uncooperative behavior, I asked him to come home right after school today because we had this appointment. He never showed. I had to go to school and pick him up.

Son: I would have been home in plenty of time to make it to this stupid appointment.

Mom: I'm here because of you ... Do you know how much this is going to cost?

Son: Just give me the money. I wouldn't get into trouble if I had cash to do stuff with.

Mom: What, to buy drugs? You're never going to go to college with your attitude.

Son: I'm going to college, you just don't believe in me...

Mom: I love you so much (tears start flowing). That is why I'm worrying myself sick over you.

Dr. Phil: Do you believe your mom?

Son: Sure, most of the time.

Dr. Phil: Is it OK if I ask you about how honest your mom is?

Son: Sure man, it's your office.

Dr. Phil: If your mom says 'come home after school' what does she mean?

Son: What? She means come home after school, I guess.

Dr. Phil: Sometimes you come right home after school?

Son: Sure, if my mom means it, I come right home.

- Dr. Phil: What does that mean?
- Son: Look, if she says, "I need you to watch your brother right after school," then I know she needs me to be home right after school.
- Dr. Phil: Other times ...
- Son: Sometimes she says, "Be home after school, I'm bringing pizza home after work." So I know that as long as I'm home by five thirty she won't be too mad.
- Dr. Phil: Too mad?
- Son: Yeah, you know ... She will just growl at me for a minute then we eat pizza.

Mom, in this type of situation, is always in shock. She sits speechless. Then says something like, "Why can't he just follow the rules!"

My belief is that he is following the "family rules." The rules as he has learned them to be. In this family the rules are actually preferences. If mom needs you to watch your baby brother, then after school is 3:45. If mom is bringing home pizza after work and won't be too upset, then home after school is 5:30. Please note, the size of the envelope is defined by the child when the limitations are not clearly defined.

Please take a few minutes and complete the following exercise. We will use the information later in this chapter. Don't even think about skipping this homework assignment. This assignment is mandatory for you to get the most out of this book. Remember, process counts and the process of doing this assignment will really help you to learn a lot about your parenting skills.

Please fill in the following form (Dr. Phil's Three M's of Rule Types) with the rules of your family. Your family rules as they actually are, not your dream family rules, your actual family rules. There are three categories to be filled in.

1. Must Rules: Rules you make sure are followed 100% of the time. Not 99% or less of the time. For example, you will miss work to make sure this rule is followed. You would stop watching the end of a great movie to make sure this rule is followed. You would put up with public embarrassment to make sure that this rule is followed.

2. Maybe Rules: You really want these rules to be followed but you know that they are not followed 100% of the time. Often your kids follow these rules, especially when you beg, nag, or are angry, but the kids do not follow these rules 100% of the time. (This is a long list usually, use extra paper if need be.)

3. Minor Rules: Rules that are followed by your child (a minor) so well that you don't worry about it anymore. For example, you no longer check your fourteen year old's underwear to see if he needs changing. When he was two you needed to. But you no longer find a need to monitor your "big boy's" bowel movements. At this point your child is 100% responsible and capable of following this rule.

WHERE ARE WE TODAY: HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT #1

Please complete the following form as completely as possible.

Process counts!!!

Thank you for completing the assignment before you continued on. Most families find that the Three M's form is somewhat skewed. They usually find that there are a few Must Rules (if any) and a few more Minor Rules and a whole encyclopedia of Maybe Rules. To tell you the truth, I don't think you would be reading this book if that was not the case.

Words count.

Many parents bring back the list after taking many hours to fill it out. Often I hear, "Our rules are so simple ... how come my kids fight them so much?" or, "I can't believe my family is this out of control. I knew it was uncomfortable but as I wrote up this list I found myself getting angry. Why do my children make our family life so difficult?" One couple proclaimed, "As we worked on our homework assignment, we found ourselves getting angry. The more we talked the more we came to the conclusion that our kids just hate us. We never acted like this with our parents!"

The three M's list tends to point to the symptom of the problem in many homes. It points to one simple but powerful fact: Your children do not believe you. If they did believe you, your Must Rule list

A TYPICAL 3M LIST

The first rough draft of the 3M list tends to be a snap shot of the present family rule structure. As Mr. and Mrs. Smith talked about their family conflicts it quickly became apparent that most of the Must Rules were actually Maybe Rules. This is to be expected at first.

Until there is a clearly defined consequence associated with a family rule it is most likely destined to be on the Maybe pile of want-to-be rules.

| Family: <u>Smith</u> Dr. Phil's Three M's of Rule Types <small>First Draft</small> Date: <u>Jan 1997</u> | | |
|---|---|---|
| Must Must rules are followed through by parents 100% of the time | Maybe Maybe rules are not followed through by parents 100% of the time | Minor Parents are comfortable with minor's ability to follow these rules independently |
| No name calling | Follow all rules of the | Pick out appropriate clothes |
| No hitting/hurting | apartment complex | for school |
| No damaging other's belongings | Do homework before playing | Keep room clean |
| Do not answer the phone | Pick up own clothes & toys | Do your best in school |
| Do not go to other people's houses without permission | Wash hands before eating | every day |
| No playing in the street | Shower every other day | Seat belts |
| | Be considerate and kind | Keep track of homework |
| | Help with laundry | and school books |
| | Bedtime is 9pm | |

would be the long list followed by the minor list. The Maybe list would be empty. That's right, empty. Over the next few pages this should become evident to you.

MAYBE RULES CAUSE CONSTANT CONFLICT

Maybe Rules feel safe to most parents. They feel friendly. It is important that the therapist point out that family conflicts need to be avoided when ever possible. Must Rules avoid conflict!

Your children are people, yep, people ... with all the human nature that people possess. I point this out because over the years I have noticed one consistent thing about people. All people, irrelevant of race, creed, sexual orientation, economic status, or parenting, have one, huge, binding consistency. A same-ness that binds us throughout the generations and history of mankind. One undoubtable fact that proves humanness. We all know it to be true, but hate to believe it:

All things being equal, people do what they want to do!

Humans, including children, possess rational and logical thought, at least from their perspective, from their point of view. People always have clear and plausible reasons for why they did whatever they did. (Later they may believe, "Well, at the time it seemed like a good idea.")

I once read in the paper about a man in his twenties who shot his hand gun from the parking lot in the direction of a small store. When asked why he shot a man as he was walking out of the store, the shooter answered, "I didn't shoot the man, he walked in front of the bullet."

All things being equal, people do what they want to do! So let's get down to brass tacks. Your children, from their point of view, have excellent reasons for getting their needs met. For example, let's look at a real life situation from the child's point of view:

You are a fourteen year old girl who wants to fit in with the "cool" group at school. Would you rather wear the appropriate dress your aunt bought you, or the rad jeans and tank top (or less) that your boyfriend said makes him think only of you? As a kid, which would make more sense to you?

You are sixteen years old and your dad tells you to clean your room. Would you rather comply and build a deep meaningful relationship with your father or blast heavy metal music throughout the neighborhood

Never let your authority blind you to the need for leadership.

John Luther

The rules are defined by the children when the limitations are not clearly defined.

to express your individuality and impress your old man with your lack of concern about his imperial rule? As a kid, which would make more sense to you?

You're a fifteen year old boy and constantly noticing rumblings in your pants. Would you rather split participles and evaluate sentence structure for your English teacher or go over to Bob's house and evaluate "babes" in super slow motion on the VCR? As a kid, which would make more sense to you?

You're twelve years old and starting to hate school. The same, boring stuff again. Your best friend offers to let you try pot for the first time. She tells you it helps her deal with the lame stuff in school. Do you sneak off to the bleachers or go to class? As a kid, which would make more sense to you?

You're a ten year old girl and you believe you can never please your parents. Whatever you do they always nag you to improve on something. Now dad wants you to clean up the kitchen. You could get the job done as quickly as possible or you could take control and work at a snail's pace. You know it will really get his goat, and it feels good to make his life as miserable as your life is. As a kid, which would make more sense to you?

You're a fifteen year old girl and you just had a nuclear blow up with your parents. You run away from home to the arms of your stud muffin. He assures you that you have been seriously wronged and that your parents will never understand your maturing needs and they only think of you as a little girl. Stud muffin holds you safely and agrees that you are an adult. In fact, you are very mature, even womanly. He helps you feel safe and tells you that he loves and respects you. He touches you in a very exciting way and lets you know that he too has mature needs. Do you tell him that you need to go and talk things out with your parents or do you fall into his arms and mask your pain with your fantasies? As a kid, which would make more sense to you?

All things being equal, people do what they want to do! Our job as parents is to influence our child's thoughts so that they include our choices in their behavioral options. This is done by imple-

menting consistent Must Rules into the family. We need our children to internalize our values.

Maybe Rules are a waste. They lead to nagging, anger, and dishonesty. Families tend to have 90 percent of their conflict around the Maybe Rules. This conflict weakens the ties within the family. If you are not going to be consistent with your rules, why should your children?

NORMAL FAMILY INCONSISTENCIES

Please allow me to be a fly on your wall. It is 7:00 PM and your family is just finishing up dinner. "Whose turn is it to do dishes?" you inquire. "I've got dishes tonight" Dana moans (place your child's name here). You explain, "I've got a lot to do, boy am I behind on my stuff." You plead, "So get the dishes done as soon as possible. I still want to make brownies for Tommy's class tonight."

"Sure," Dana moans again.

Now you're off and running. You have a load of laundry to start in the garage and papers to find in your bedroom for the meeting tomorrow. (Plus Tommy's class brownies) "No more procrastination, it all has to get done," you tell yourself.

At 7:05 you are on your way to the garage and you spy the empty kitchen. "Dana," you bellow, "Get to work on your chore."

"OK mom, I'm on my way," she yells back sounding innocent.

At 7:06 you can't believe you have to go out to the car to get the laundry soap. At 7:10 you are rushing back to your room to find those damn papers, "Dana, you never brought in the laundry soap from the car ... Do I have to do everything?" Your voice echoes around the house.

"OK mom, I'll get it right after the dishes are done."

At 7:15 you're up to your elbows in boxes of papers when the phone rings. With teenagers in the house, you long ago learned that the phone is rarely for you.

"Mom, it's Aunt Sara ... she needs to talk with you."

You pick up the extension phone. You tell your sister that the number she needs is on the bulletin board in the kitchen. But you will happily get it for her, implying that she should have copied it down yesterday when she was visiting. You dash to the kitchen. To your surprise you are alone in the kitchen. Your kitchen help is parked on the couch watching TV. "Hold on Sara, Dana!" you yell, "get on the dishes, I still need to make brownies for Tommy's class tonight."

"In just a minute, the show is almost over," Dana replies.

Not wanting a scene, you already have enough to do, you try to be reasonable, "OK honey, right after the show, I'm counting on you." You give your sister the number you tried to give her yester-

day.

7:20 and you're back to the paper chase. The sound of sibling abuse catches your ear. You drop everything to investigate.

"Mom, Tommy is in the way of the TV. You said I could watch the show before I go do the dishes."

Tommy is not happy with anything, "You always let Dana pick the show, how come she always gets to hog the TV?"

"Tommy are you done with your homework?" you ask pointedly. "Almost, mom. But I need help ..." He whines.

"You don't need help Tommy, you go take a look at your homework, and I'll come help you in a few minutes, I have to find a very important paper and still make brownies for your class."

"Mom shhhhh, I'm trying to watch the TV, it's almost over."

"I'm sorry honey, Tommy go to work on your homework. We're bothering Dana ..."

Tommy throws a pillow at Dana.

"Mom!" Dana erupts.

Your voice is harsh towards Tommy, "You go to your room right now before I get angry, I have too much to do to play this silly game tonight." You are muttering as you head for the garage, "I still have to make brownies ..."

The garage is a quiet sanctuary. Moving laundry along seems comforting.

It is 7:35 and back through the house you go. You're astonished. "Dana, what are you doing?"

"I'm looking in the TV paper, why?"

"You can't watch TV. You have the dishes to do." You're feeling your blood pressure rise behind your eyes.

"I know, I'm not stupid you know!"

"How come the dishes aren't done, I still have brownies to make tonight!"

"I don't care about any stupid brownies, I'll get the dishes done," Dana snarls.

"When?!!!" You scream.

"I'm going right now, why are you so upset. You are always doing stuff for Tommy, why yell at me?"

At this point you head for your boxes of papers. You are so angry you could bust. Dana is in the kitchen slamming pots around making sure you know she is mad at you. Tommy is in his room yelling over and over, "Don't get this, I need help!"

Wow! Just writing this down tired me out. I have told this type of story to thousands of families over the years. Regularly I hear, "Were you at my house?"

This story is an example of how many people live their family life— conflict to conflict. Only when mom gets angry *enough* does Dana go and do her chore. What a mess. There is no discipline.

Dana knows that she can push her mom only so far then she may (or will) get punished. *Dana does not believe her mother until her mother is angry. This is a major point, Dana does not believe her mother until her mother is angry.*

After pushing the limits of the envelope for thirty-five minutes, Dana feels like a victim. "I'm going right now, why are you so upset. You are always doing stuff for Tommy, why yell at me?"

We will return to Dana in a few moments, but first let's learn that only parents can break rules.

ONLY PARENTS CAN BREAK A MUST RULE

This section is truly empowering for most parents. Over two or three weekly sessions, parents start to feel that they are starting to live in a family instead of being a warden in a family jail.

When I bring this up in a family therapy session the kids love this and the parents look concerned while they reevaluate my clinical skills. But, I am positive ... only parents can break a rule.

What is a rule? It is an equation that looks like:

One Rule = Child's Behavior + Parent's Behavior

A rule is an If/Then statement. If you do [Child's Behavior] then this will happen [Parent's Behavior].

Almost every family has this (maybe) rule: "No running in the house."

One Rule = *No running in the house* [Child's Behavior] + Parent's Behavior

If your child runs in the house what happens? One mother was very frustrated during an early family therapy session. "Look Dr. Phil, I just don't understand why it is all that hard. I should be able to say, "Don't run in the house," and the kids should just do as they are told!"

I understand the sentiment, but the reality is that, *All things being equal, people do what they want to do!* So, if your child wants to run in the house and only sometimes they earn a negative consequence, why wouldn't they continue getting their needs met? (running in the house) Our job is to influence the *all things being equal* part of the statement. We need to impart information that makes our rules become their rules.

Most parents try this through logical nagging. "Don't run in the house or you will fall and hurt yourself!" or "Don't run in the house or you will knock something over!" For those of us who have inter-

nalized the rule, this makes lots of sense. But, to a child who uses their own envelope of understanding, "If I want to get there quicker, run!" Our nagging makes little sense to them.

With, "No running in the house," you really have only half a rule, the child's part. We all know that a child will interpret this to their advantage.

"But mom, I was in a hurry."

"Dad, you don't understand, I had to answer the phone."

"You never yell at Tommy for anything, why me!"

"Mom told me to go right to my room and do my homework."

(This kid is good!)

For the rule to be effective it must have the child's part and the parent's part. In long hand it looks like this: If I catch you running in the house, you are breaking a Must Rule. I as a loving parent follow Must Rules 100% of the time. So, if you run in the house I must send you to your room for ten minutes. Even though I would like to explain my well founded parental decision, I will keep it to myself, for now, and give you what you have earned.

Boy, what a mouthful! In equation form it is much easier to see:

No Running in the house = **If** you run in the house, **Then** you earn ten minutes of sitting on your bed.

One Rule = Child's Behavior + Parent's Behavior

One Rule = **If** (child action) + **Then** (parent action)

This makes it very simple to understand. If you run in the house you earn time sitting on your bed. Who is responsible? Who initiated the rule breaking? The child is responsible. Did the parent have a choice about the consequence? Not one bit. The parent honors the child by being honest. The parent honors themselves by being honest.

If you throw a rock straight up into the air and it comes straight down on top of your skull, are you mad at the rock? Maybe at first, but it is a very easy leap of thought to get from, "I threw the rock up in the air and it came down on my head" to "I hit myself on the head with a rock." In the same way, it is very easy for your child to learn that, "My mom tells me that if I run in the house, she will send me to my room for ten minutes," to "I earned ten minutes of restrictions because of my behavior." The child gains nothing by being mad at the rock or the mom. However, the child gains something very important from the If/Then. It is important that she learns that her mother is an honest person. This is no small point. If your child knows that you are an honest person then she knows that she can count on you and your wisdom.

Must Rules are followed through 100% of the time. So, we need to be very careful about what the Must Rules are.

No Running in the house = **If** you run in the house, **Then** you earn ten minutes of sitting on your bed.

One Rule = Child's Behavior + Parent's Behavior

One Rule = **If** (child action) + **Then** (parent action)

At this point in a family session, a bright child usually smirks out, "But what if the house is on fire, do I have to go to my room and DIE?" At this point we have to teach children to weigh the If/Then statement. "Are you willing to earn ten minutes of room restrictions in exchange for running out of a burning house?" This is not as silly as it initially sounds. We have to make this type of decision on a regular basis. If I speed in my car I can get a speeding ticket. Am I willing to get a speeding ticket in order to get to work five minutes earlier? Am I willing to get a speeding ticket to get my beloved to the hospital to deliver a baby?

If I go over the speed limit, do I expect myself to look down at the speedometer and say, "oh golly whizz, I'm going four miles over the speed limit, I better skedaddle to the police station and pay my fine." (I doubt if the police even have a form to fill out in the event that someone turns themselves in for a speeding ticket.) The real question is, do I monitor my own behavior and place limits on myself? If I find myself going over the speed limit, do I take responsibility for my behavior and reduce my speed? Have I internalized the rule? Is it a rule that I have agreed, within myself, to follow? Many adults have not truly internalized the rules. An example is the driver who is angry with the traffic cop who issued the ticket. Assuming the cop didn't lie and just gave out a bogus ticket, why are adults angry with the cop? He was being honest about the rules:

45 Miles per hour = **If** you are caught driving over 45 miles per hour, **Then** you earn a speeding ticket.

One Rule = Driver's Behavior + Traffic Cop's Behavior

Who is being honest and who is not? I point this out because over the years I have seen many adults that blame the rock for falling on their head. They have not learned their own responsibilities. The following statement came from adults during initial sessions:

I hit her (wife) because she didn't listen.

My boss is always telling me what to do!

I didn't mean to wreck the car, I just had too much to drink.

I didn't call my mother on Mother's Day because she always nags at me for not calling.

It is imperative that we teach our children that they are responsible for their behaviors. By doing so we give them life tools that will make the rest of their lives easier and more creative.

DANA AND THE DISHES

Of all the stories that I have written, this one has by far generated the most mail. I have even had parents accuse me of peeking through their window and watching the argument they had *last night*.

A few moments ago we were flies on the wall of Dana's house. Her mom had lots to do. Find some lost paperwork, move laundry along, and make brownies for Tommy's class. But what a mess occurred from 7:00 to 7:35 PM. The time line went as follows:

- | | |
|---------|---|
| 7:00 PM | The family dinner finished with this conversation. "Whose turn is it to do dishes?" "I've got dishes tonight." Dana moaned. You explained, "I've got a lot to do." You pleaded, "So, get the dishes done as soon as possible. I still want to make brownies for Tommy's class tonight." "Sure," Dana moaned again. |
| 7:05 PM | "Dana," You bellowed, "Get to work on your chore." "OK mom, I'm on my way," she yelled back sounding innocent. |
| 7:06 PM | You're at the car bringing in the laundry soap. |
| 7:10 PM | "Dana, you never brought in the laundry soap from the car ... Do I have to do everything?" Your voice echoed . "OK mom, I'll get it right after the dishes are done." Dana stated. |
| 7:15 PM | Sister called. "Hold on Sara, Dana," you yelled, "Get on the dishes, I still need to make brownies for Tommy's class tonight." "In just a minute, the show is almost over," Dana replied. Not wanting a scene, you tried to be reasonable, "OK honey, right after the show, I'm counting on you." You gave your sister the number she should have gotten herself yesterday. |

7:20 PM The sound of sibling abuse caught your ear. You dropped everything to investigate.

7:35 PM “Dana what are you doing?”

 “I’m looking in the TV paper, why?”

 “You can’t watch TV. You have dishes to do.” You felt your blood pressure rise behind your eyes.

 “I know, I’m not stupid you know.”

 “How come the dishes aren’t done, I still have brownies to make tonight!”

 “I don’t care about any stupid brownies, I’ll get the dishes done.”

 “When?!!!”

 “I’m going right now, why are you so upset? You always are doing stuff for Tommy, why yell at me?”

Let’s look at this scenario from the stand point of a Maybe Rule. In a Maybe Rule, the child knows that their parent’s mood has a lot to do with the letter of the law. If mom is in a good mood, then the letter of the rule is, “it is OK to push the envelope.” If mom is in a bad mood, you better straighten up and fly right. The child also knows that they probably have very little to do with mom’s moods. Work, spouse, and the rest of the family influence mom much more than any one kid. So, if mom is in a bad mood and making you fly straight, it isn’t because she cares or loves you as much as it is because she is pissed! In the mind of the child, they have no responsibilities, they are just the victim of mom’s (or dad’s) sour mood. The child sees Maybe Rules as:

One Maybe Rule = Child’s Behavior + Parent’s Mood

In the above story, Dana got her needs met, watching TV. All things being equal, would a child rather watch TV or wash the dishes? Then, when mom’s mood went sour, Dana felt unjustly persecuted but went and did the dishes before her mother did something rash and unreasonable like, give her dishes for a week or remove her TV privileges. Dana saw herself as the victim. If her mother took away her TV privileges she would be upset and say something like, “What, am I your dish slave? All I ever do around here is work!!!”

Mom would also be upset. All she wanted to do was get the

long list of stuff done that she was responsible for. She doesn't like fighting with her daughter. And, on top of everything else, now her daughter was going to make everyone miserable for a day or two because she felt so misused.

So, where did it all go wrong? At 7:10, 7:20, or 7:30? Actually it went into the giant family dumpster of inconsistency right from the beginning. Right at the beginning? When mom *lied* and allowed her daughter to *lie*.

Let's review the first moments of the problem:

It is 7:00 PM and your family is just finishing up dinner. "Whose turn is it to do dishes?" "I've got dishes tonight." Dana moans. You explain, "I've got a lot to do, boy am I behind on my stuff." You plead, "So get the dishes done as soon as possible. I still want to make brownies for Tommy's class tonight." "Sure," Dana moans again.

Now you're off and running. You have a load of laundry to start in the garage and papers to find in your bedroom for the meeting tomorrow. (Plus Tommy's class brownies) "No more procrastination, it all has to get done."

At 7:05 you are on your way to the garage and you spy the empty kitchen. "Dana", you bellow, "Get to work on your chore."

"OK mom, I'm on my way," she yells back sounding innocent.

This five minute period is a tissue of Maybe Rules. Unclear rules lead to conflict. You read the rule your way while your children read it their way. You are trying to be easy going and reasonable, while your children see you as weak minded and naggy. The problem is that mom is not saying what she really wants to say. Mom's words are open to interpretation by the child.

If this family had a Must Rule that read something like (child's behavior defined), "Chores are done before anything else is done," or "After dinner, the kitchen chore must be done within 20 minutes." This takes the interpretation out of the picture. Of importance here is that a Must Rule defines acceptable behavior, decreasing family conflict. When mom states, "I've got a lot to do ... so, get the dishes done as soon as possible. I still want to make brownies for Tommy's class tonight." This is nagging. It tells the child that you do not believe that they are up to the task at hand. It is a subtle attack on their character. This statement lowers the expectations your child has for herself.

Your life is much less complicated if your children believe you

when you talk to them. Unfortunately, many parents actually teach their children to “read between the lines” when they talk. In a grocery store I observed a mom say the following statements in a five minute period.

“I know you want a candy bar but you can’t have one today, OK?”

“Stop running, OK?”

“You will have to hold my hand ... Are you listening to me when I speak to you?”

Her two children paid very little attention to her. They did not believe their mother’s words. By using the word “OK” she was asking permission, from her children, for the rule to exist. What kid would give such permission? The statement, “You will have to ...” is a threat. If the mother meant the rule it would have been an action. “Please hold my hand, your behavior is not acceptable.” Ordering, even politely, by using the word “please,” is an action that restricts the child’s behavioral envelope. Parents who use threats lose their children’s respect. If the family’s basic trust is constantly undermined, members of the family will feel unsafe.

MUST RULES BUILD A FAMILY

Must Rules define for our children the limitations that we expect them to adhere to. These limitations, the envelope, help our children feel safe. One young lady of fourteen summed it up clearly:

I told my boyfriend that I wouldn’t have sex with him. He was very upset with me. He told me that he loved me and that he thought that I loved him. I do love him, you know? At first I told him that I couldn’t sleep with him because my folks have a Must Rule about sex. The rule is *No sex until marriage*. I think it is a dumb rule, but I figure that I live with them so I have to follow the rules. I told them that I would. Well, my boyfriend broke up with me. He said it wasn’t about the sex, just that he had to date other people. Then, one night I was thinking, he didn’t really love me, if he did he would want me to be safe. My parents are kind of old fashioned but I know they love me. They want me to be safe.

Must Rules empower children. The Must Rules set the limits for the child to feel safe within. Over the years I have worked with

Home is home, though it is homely.

English proverb

Home is where the heart is.

Pliny the Elder

lots of gang kids. One thing about gangs that has always impressed me is their steadfast rules. Most of the kids I have met in gangs are lonely lost souls. The restrictiveness of the gang makes the kids feel safe. And the rules of the gangs are amazingly restrictive.

Rebecca was fifteen years old when I met her. She was a referral from the emergency room of the local hospital. She was admitted to the emergency room with a broken sternum and three broken ribs. Her left lung had collapsed. Rebecca never told anyone who beat her. The police were pretty sure it was the fellow members of the gang she hung out with. Following weeks of care in the hospital she was released to the custody of her parents.

During our third session:

Dr. Phil: Your parents seem very worried about ...

Rebecca: Not really, it's just an act. They have to worry about me.

Dr. Phil: Are you in any danger?

Rebecca: No, I don't think so ... why?

Dr. Phil: I read the hospital report, you were in pretty bad shape.

Rebecca: Yeah, I thought I was going to die ... The doctors put me back together. I'm OK now.

Dr. Phil: How come you got so beat up ... Aren't you protected?

Rebecca: Sure I am. I'm full in ... But I really @#\$\$-up!

Dr. Phil: What does that mean?

Rebecca: You know, I'm not ratting on anyone.

Dr. Phil: I'm not asking for evidence, I'm just trying to understand your world.

Rebecca: I slept around and the sergeants found out. I was so stupid. With AIDS and all, I know better. I can't believe I @#\$\$-up!

As it turned out, Rebecca's gang had a "Must Rule." *You can only sleep with fellow gang members.* If you break the rule you are punished with a line beating. In a line beating you pick six gang members to punch you or kick you in the chest. If you wish to show the gang that you are really remorseful you stand with your back to a wall so the beating is intensified. Rebecca was so concerned that

A consequence is an **If-Then statement.** **If** you are a member of the family **Then** you get the positive effects, consequences of being a member of the family

the gang would disown her for her transgression she stood against a brick wall after picking the biggest kids to punch her in the chest.

When I asked Rebecca's mother about her daughter's problem with the family, she said, "Rebecca is just out of control. She hates to follow even the simplest of rules." Over six months of family therapy Rebecca "bought" herself out of the gang and returned to her home and school. Rebecca and her mom did wonderfully with consistent Must Rules at home.

With discipline we restrict behaviors to teach true freedom to our children.

POSITIVE CONSEQUENCES OF BEING A MEMBER OF YOUR FAMILY: HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT #2

Parents tend to have a hard time picturing any positive gifts to their families. Many parents totally discount what they offer their family.

For every behavior there are consequences. Some of these consequences are positive and some are negative. But, there are always consequences. Some small, some gigantic. But, there are always consequences. This fact is usually difficult for children to comprehend. Often kids will tell me, "My parents have to love me," or "Mom has to let me play basketball." Most children see the world as very black and white, with them right in the center of everything. But, when I ask them about how other kids live they are able to pull from their memories sad stories of unfair parental misconduct.

Kent was fourteen years old when I met him. His parents were concerned about his attitude concerning school and job completion. Overall he was doing relatively well. When I asked him about his world he said, "My parents are boarish. All they want to talk about is me getting into college." When I asked him about the worst family life he had direct knowledge of he became soft spoken, "I know this girl, her parents drink every night. She told me that she has to put her dad to bed all the time because he passes out on the couch."

Children as young as three notice what they have. One little tyke squealed with joy as he told me about his bedroom. "I got a bed with superman sheets. My dresser is white and I'm not allowed to color on it. The floor is soft. When I fall out of bed I don't break my head much."

What do your children get for just being a member of the family? What are the positive consequences for being lucky enough to be a member of your family? Please rack your brain, then list the positive consequences below:



Quick Reference Guide

Consequence: Something that logically or naturally follows from an action or condition.

If-then statement: A statement of cause and effect.

Second marriage is the triumph of hope over experience.

Samuel Johnson

In my office I have a large blackboard. Early on in family therapy I ask the family to brainstorm on this question of positive consequences. At first the families are hesitant, "You mean like special stuff, like a trip to Disneyland?" But I explain that I am talking about the stuff that makes membership in the family comfortable and safe. The "what you get from the family, just for being a part of the family." Most families easily fill the large blackboard with positive consequences.

The Knapp family consisted of mom and dad and their two children, a girl fourteen and a boy nine. They brainstormed the fol-

lowing positive consequence list:

Food, love, help with homework, mom's spaghetti, rides to soccer, a bed, living room furniture, a bathroom, toilet paper, electricity, a refrigerator, a nice home, friendship, movie night with popcorn, soda pop - sometimes, clothes, medical insurance, hopefully a car when I'm sixteen, hugs, grandparents, a pet rabbit, two cats and a dog, soccer cleats, birthday parties, birthday presents, Christmas, special food, back rubs, laughs.

This is a pretty typical list. All the good stuff that makes being a member of the family worthwhile. A consequence (positive or negative) is an **If/Then statement**. **If** you are a member of the family **Then** you get the consequences of being a member of the family. Most parents are surprised at how many positive consequences there are for simply being a member of the family.

MUST RULES SHOULD BE WRITTEN DOWN

All things being equal, children do what they want to do. To help them survive this fact we need to make the limitations on our children's behavioral choices clear cut. We need to make these limitations so clear cut that there are no loop holes for our children to strangle us, or themselves, in.

If a rule is so important to your family that you are going to insist that it is followed 100% of the time, write the rule down. All Must Rules should be written down. The act of writing the rule down causes two major things to happen.

1. Parents force themselves to think clearly about their objectives while planning the rule.
2. All family members have a ready reference to the rules.

The Armondo family consisted of a mother and her eleven year old daughter, Allison. Mrs. Armondo was adamant that she did not want to keep a written list. "I work for the state," Mrs. Armondo explained, "All day long I have half-wits quoting regulations to me, I don't want my daughter exposed to that." Three weeks later Mrs. Armondo's opinion had changed.

Over the weekend Allison and I had an awful argument. Last session I made it very clear that she could not watch TV if her homework was not done. Well, Saturday afternoon she was watching some stu-

There are those who understand everything till one puts it into words.

Francis Bradley

pid television program when I asked her about her homework. To make a long story short, we both got very angry with each other. She said that she could watch TV if it was a weekend, and I became furious. She was manipulating my intentions. Believe it or not, this argument went on until Monday night!

It was Allison's contention that homework was a school day limitation. Mrs. Armondo saw homework as very important, no matter what the day. She expected homework to be completed before any entertainment. Mrs. Armondo found that if the rule was not written down and clearly understood, Allison remembered the discussion to her advantage. All things being equal, children do what they want to do.

Mr. Depue was insistent that writing the rules down was a waste of effort. His four teenage sons thought it would be a good idea. Following a long family discussion it was clear to all, that the sons were concerned that their father arbitrarily manipulated family rules to get his way. All things being equal, parents do what they want to do.

Initially, writing the rules down, usually in a family meeting or over a relaxed meal, lets it be known what the family expectations are for each member of the family. The Must Rule list is a living document. A rule that may be very important when Bobby is three, is irrelevant when he is eight, and down right silly when he is thirteen.

I advise that parents post family rules in a centralized location. Most use the refrigerator or the family message board. Some families feel that the family rules are a private matter and "post" them inside a cupboard or in a binder. One very artistic family made a papier-mache mock up of two biblical tablets and mounted it by the kitchen table. The family had a running joke, "God gave us ten commandments and mom and dad added eight more." One family used the family rules as a screen background on the computer. It was labeled, "Rules to Live By." Their son changed it one day to, "Rules that Byte." Find a place that works for you. Life will become easier the moment you post your family rules.

WHO WRITES THE MUST RULES?

Parents write the family rules. Most families find that if the process includes the children, family harmony is heightened. But, parents write family rules. Parents run the family.

Let's take a moment to define what I mean by parents. It is not as simple as you might think. With divorces and step families, live-in lovers and roommates, it can be a little tricky to decide who is the writer of the family rules. The rule of thumb is, "Involve all adults

The very bond of love.
Shakespeare

who take on the responsibility of caregiving for the minors of the family.” It is important that all parental types agree to work together to enforce the family rules. Without this agreement, the children are in an emotionally unsafe environment. I am very adamant about this. If your co-parent is not participating in the process of developing and implementing family rules, then they are undermining the process.

HOW DO YOU WRITE A MUST RULE?

Therapists must caution parents to write one Must Rule at a time, at least a first. Many parents want to get it all accomplished between sessions. This can be a disaster. I tend to ask parents to write a rule or two for homework ... but not to implement it until we have gone over it. It is harder to correct a poorly written Must Rule than a Maybe or no rule at all.

This is not a simple process. I have never seen a mother and a father just sit down and write out a list of rules. Family rules define who we are as a unit. Who we are is constantly growing and changing. The family rules list is a snapshot of where we are at this moment in time. Most families find that the family rules list is relatively consistent over the years, once it is developed.

To start writing a family Must Rules list you have to ask yourself when does your family need a rule? As you recall, most families have millions of preferences (Maybe Rules) that work most of the time. Not everything needs to be, or should be spelled out to the final period. That would be too confining for the family. It would crunch individuality and creativity.

When do you need a Must Rule? The simple answer is when you have a problem that is not being remedied by a preference. For example: If your son leaves his towel on the bathroom floor, a simple reminder is probably sufficient. But, if after numerous simple reminders the towel on the bathroom floor has become a problem that is building into conflict, you need a Must Rule.

You need to write a Must Rule to keep yourself from getting into the situation of nagging, yelling, sulking or vengefully punishing your beloved child. You write Must Rules to build family harmony, security and safety. You start by looking inward and openly talking with your co-parent(s). What do you worry most about for your children? What limitations do your children need placed upon them at this time to protect them from themselves or others? These worries are the seed of your Must Rules. There are two basic reasons for a Must Rule:

1. A problem has developed that is causing unnecessary conflicts within the family.

Examples: Rules about sibling arguments, personal property rights, and sharing common areas of the house.

·Usually developed following a problem.

2. To prevent endangerment to health and safety of family members.

Examples: Rules about drugs, sex, and swimming pools.

·Usually developed prior to a problem raising its ugly head.

Once you need a rule, the rule must be written down clearly. Remember, all things being equal, children do what they want to do, so Must Rules must be written clearly. Rules must be written at the level of understanding of each member of the family.

Must Rules are written about behaviors. Parents cannot control thought, they are only able to influence behaviors. Must Rules must be enforceable. You and your co-parent must agree to enforce the Must Rule. If you do not, you do not have a Must Rule.

A Must Rule has two parts, the kid part and the parent part. The kid part is a concern you have for the health and safety of your child. The parent part is the negative consequence that will be earned if the kid commits a rule breaking behavior. As you recall from earlier, One Rule = Child's Behavior + Parent's Behavior. We start writing the Must Rule from the concern, the Child's Behavior side, the problem. In a few pages we will look at an actual parental concern from my home. I will go through the actual process of how my wife and I developed a usable Must Rule.

Let's look over the shoulders of two families. One with young children, one with teenage children. The behavior problems are very similar. The Must Rules will have to be worded differently, but the central parental concerns are the same. At the core, each family is developing similar family values. However, with toddlers, the Peachtree family is worried about potty training, while the Swartz family is worried about pot smoking.

Mr. and Mrs. Peachtree have been married for seven years. Both work in sales and have a difficult time juggling their work schedules with their home life responsibilities. Mr. and Mrs. Peachtree have two active and healthy boys, Chuck, age 3 1/2 and Barry, age 5. Their biggest complaint about their home life is the never ending need to juggle their lives to meet the needs of everyone else in their world.

Peachtree Family Main Parenting Worries:

Barry bites Chuck when he is angry.

Chuck kicks Barry as retaliation or just because he wants to.

Both boys are rough on the family cat, Kat.

Both boys fight naps.

Both boys fight going to bed.

Chuck still needs a diaper when he sleeps.

Barry is a very picky eater.

Chuck cries when he is dropped off at the preschool.

Mr. and Mrs. Swartz have been married for seventeen years. Both work in sales and have a difficult time juggling their work schedules with their home life responsibilities. Mr. and Mrs. Swartz have two active and healthy boys, Gary, age 13 1/2 and Larry age 15. Their biggest complaint about their home life is the never ending need to juggle their lives to meet the needs of everyone else in their world.

Swartz Family Main Parenting Worries:

Larry punches Gary when he is angry.

Gary kicks Larry or breaks Larry's belongings as retaliation.

Both boys are rough on the family cat, Silvester the Lame Hearted. (Named by the boys three years ago. The cat has still not adjusted to his name.)

Both boys fight homework.

Both boys fight bedtime.

Gary still needs reminders about hygiene.

Larry is a very picky eater.

Both boys complain a lot about school.

Both boys have a bad attitude about household responsibilities.

When asked to complete the 3M's list both families had no Must Rules and over sixty Maybe Rules. The Swartz family had two

Minor Rules, one for hygiene, another for piano practice.

Next, the two families went over their worry lists to formulate the Must Rules “first draft.” The concept of writing a must list was new to both families. So, the first draft was a learning experience for the parents to start defining what they believed their families should ideally look like.

Peachtree family Must Rules: First draft (Child Behavior):

No hitting

No biting

No kicking

Must take a nap

Must eat all your food

Must go to bed

Must do what you are told the first time you are told

Swartz family Must Rules: First draft (Child Behavior):

No hitting

No kicking

No pot in the house

Must do what you are told the first time you are told

Must go to school without complaining

You must do your chore everyday

No complaining about your food

Must go to bed when told to

In my office I find the number one concern parents have is about the “attitude” their children exhibit.

My kids fight all the time!

All violence, all that is dreary and repels, is not power, but the absence of power.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

The kids are in constant competition for our (parental) attention.

My child's attitude just irks me, he acts as if he was put on this earth to be catered to!

Whatever I say ... it's always an argument!

I assume these statements hit a cord with you too.

What is the seed of these parental concerns? Most parents start with words like "attitude," or "grumpiness." But if you dig a little deeper, we get to *choice*. Our children *choose* to act "grumpy," "angry," and/or "mean." This fact of choice is very important. If my son screams, "Josh is driving me crazy!" I can advocate for him and softly question, "What did you choose to do?"

Hopefully he says something like, "I walked away so his immaturity did not negatively influence my behavioral choices."

On the day he states such a wonderful thing I will know that I am a *good* dad, but unfortunately, that day has not yet come, so I am left in the caring teaching mode of dad.

Ethan usually states something like, "I told him he was an idiot and went back to my room!"

This allows me to parent with expansive questions such as, "You chose to call him names?" or "Did that help you get your needs met?" (Remember, parenting is a long process made up of many little steps.)

What we are talking about is how our child *chooses* to interact with his world. Must Rules should be written from the concern, the parental worry.

Poorly worded (Child's Behavior) rule:

(pointing out what not to do)

- No Yelling at your brother
- No acting mean
- No rolling your eyes
- No being mad at your brother

This focuses on what not to do. Your child already knows what not to do, but finds that it is kind of working to solve their present situation. Our goal should be to expand their behavioral choices, giving them more options to try in similar situations in the future.

Well worded (Child's Behavior) rule:

(pointing out choices)

For younger children:

If you hit ...
If you bite ...
If you kick ...

For older children:

If you choose to hit ...
If you choose to act disrespectfully ...
If you choose to not care about another's feelings...

This form of rule wording leads your child to look at options. As discussed earlier, your child needs to ask himself, *What can I do differently?* This is empowering your child to channel his creative thoughts towards solving a problem. This is a character building, self esteem developing, emotional growth process. (See, *ADVOCATING FOR GOOD CHOICES* in Chapter 3 for further discussion.)

See [B6C3 Teaching Parents About How To Use Time Out Effectively](#).

**You are or you will become
what you think about the most.**

I wish for our children to think the most about personal choices, and self control. Our children can only build this skill by practicing it over many years with the aide of our parenting.

WHAT REALLY COUNTS FOR YOU: HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT #3

Often I meet families that are in crisis over stupid stuff. I am not being flippant, it is a fact. Many families fight over stupid stuff. The Sewell family were at each other's throats about curfew. Mrs. Sewell believed that her children needed to be home at 8 PM on school nights and 10 PM on non school nights. The three Sewell children ganged up together and were adamant that 8 and 10 were just arbitrary times. "It makes no sense to be home at 8 o' clock. It's just a number. Why should mom care if I come home safe, even if it's 8:15?"

By the time I met the family the feud had grown into a civil war. Mrs. Sewell resigned from office saying in anger one night, "I give up, you kids just come and go as you please, see if I care!" During the first session I explained about perspective, what really counts. This family was only looking at the clock on the wall, not the big picture of what mom wanted for her family.

Mrs. Sewell started the meeting stating, "I said 8 o' clock, it should be a simple rule to follow, 8 o'clock." By the half hour mark mom was talking about individual responsibilities. "It is important

that my children are honest. If they need to be home at 8 o'clock, I expect them to be home at 8 o'clock. It is a trust factor." When Mrs. Sewell moved the focus away from the time to the "meaning" of the family value, her children saw her love and concern. Prior to that point the teens only saw parental domination.

Must Rules need to be written with your family values in mind. Our goal is to write rules that develop internal values within our children, not just blind obedience to parental power. Our goal is to develop individuals with discipline.

Homework assignment number three is for you to write a list of the values you want to "instill" in your children. For example, Mrs. Sewell was having difficulty getting her teens out of bed on Sunday. It was important to her that her children go to church every Sunday. While struggling to write a Must Rule for church attendance, the Sewell family wrote the following Must Rule variations over a six week period.

Week 1: You must go to church on Sunday.

Outcome: Yelling and bad feelings, little compliance.

Week 2: You will go to church. If you do not, then you do not get your allowance.

Outcome: Yelling and bad feelings. The kids chose no allowance.

Week 3: Mom wants you to go to church every Sunday. If you do not, you have to do chores around the house from 8 AM to noon on Sunday.

Outcome: Yelling and bad feelings, chores throughout the week became a family sore point. Teens who went to church acted angry.

Week 4: Mom wants you to go to church every Sunday. If you do not, you have to do chores around the house from 8 AM to 3 PM on Sunday.

Outcome: All teens went to church. Time at church was uncooperative and behavior sullen.

There is no better test of a person's character than their behavior when they are wrong.



Quick Reference Guide

Arbitrary

1. Determined by chance, whim, or impulse, and not by necessity, reason, or principle.

2. Based on or subject to individual judgment or preference.

Logical

1. Of, relating to, in accordance with, or of the nature of logic.

2. Based on earlier or otherwise known statements, events, or conditions; reasonable.

Consequence

1. Something that logically or naturally follows from an action or condition.

2. The relation of a result to its cause.

3. A logical conclusion or inference.

Week 5: You only have to attend church if you want to.

Outcome: Mom spent her time at church concerned that she was not helping her children's souls.

Week 6: Sunday night is family dinner. Each member of the family brings God to the table in the form of a story, picture, or through a poem.

Outcome: Mom went to church alone. Sunday evening was warm family time.

Over the next month, one at a time, the children asked their mother if they could attend church with her. Sunday dinner became an event. Skits were performed, songs were sung.

By the sixth month point, Mrs. Sewell told me, "I used to get so angry. The more I pushed church, the more my children protested. I have good children. When I let them make the choice, in their own way, they each made a good choice. We now talk about church as a family activity. I think I was getting my kids to resent God by forcing church on them. My girls are talking about working at the summer church camp.

If we share our values, our true beliefs, without forcing our thoughts down our children's throats, our children will examine our beliefs. This examination is the starting point of self discipline.

In Chapter 2 we first saw the following list:

See B6C2 Teaching Parents How To Build Their Child's Self Esteem.

-to be happy

-to be safe

-to be smart

-to go to college

-to grow up and have a great life

-to be whatever he wants to be

-to have a better life than my parents could give to me

-to do well in school

-to be self confident

-to be thoughtful and kind

-to give to people less fortunate than herself

-to know and love God

-not to get into major trouble

-to have integrity

to your children. This list will help you to focus on the “big picture” of what you want for your family.

CHILDREN LEARN BY CONSEQUENCES

Two year old Cody is playing in the sand box. He throws the toy truck into the air and, without warning, he is taught one of life’s lessons. We all had to learn it. No, it is not that gravity sucks; It is that for many behaviors there are natural consequences. Little Cody learns, to his amazement, that the natural consequence of throwing a toy truck straight up into the air is that you will be hit on the head by that same truck. The cause and effect along with their punishment (discomfort) teaches Cody not to hit himself in the head with toy trucks. This is usually learned quickly. It takes much longer for a child to learn that hitting her playmate in the head is inappropriate.

A child psychiatrist named Dr. Rudolph Dreikurs pointed out the importance of consequences in child rearing. Dr. Dreikurs wrote widely on how parents can use consequences to help their children develop healthily. He defined consequences as being either Logical or Arbitrary.

Logical consequences are the outcome of a particular behavior. Throwing a toy truck straight up causes a pain on the top of your head. There are two forms of logical consequence, **natural** and **parent made**. A logical consequence that naturally occurs is by far the easiest for a child to understand. It makes sense even to young children, that if you leave your bike in the front yard, a “bad guy” may steal it. A parent made logical consequence is one devised by the parent to teach a lesson in a cause and effect fashion. This cause and effect is not as easy for a child to comprehend.

If nine year old Samantha leaves her bike in the driveway and someone steals it, that would be a natural logical consequence. The problem with it is its severity when it does occur. Samantha may leave her bike in the yard for years, rain or shine. She may get a smaller natural logical consequence way before the bike is stolen, rust. Natural is wonderful, but not always practical. Her parents may implement a Must Rule that reads: *If Samantha leaves her bike anywhere other than in the garage or school bike area, then her bike will be grounded for one week.* This is a parent made logical consequence. Her parents believe that Samantha will learn the value of her bike if they simulate her bike being stolen for one week.

An **arbitrary consequence** is imposed by an outside force (i.e. parent). It is not a logical consequence for a particular behavior. In this example an arbitrary consequence would be if Samantha earned an extra chore for leaving her bike in the front yard. Arbitrary consequences are not logically based. It is often very difficult

for children to comprehend the cause and effect of an arbitrary consequence.

With an arbitrary consequence it tends to be much harder to elicit cooperation from children, and it is usually down right impossible to get cooperation out of teenagers. For example, Allen was very upset that he had to pay part of his allowance for bickering with his sister. This caused the family great turmoil. Allen felt so wronged by the arbitrary consequence that his overall behavior deteriorated. Because Allen felt that the arbitrary consequence was “unfair” he felt persecuted by his parents. Allen’s mother and father accidentally opened a hornet’s nest. When the rule was reevaluated, Allen’s mother and father saw that their arbitrary consequence felt extremely harsh because he was trying to save money for computer camp. The “no bickering” consequence was changed to, “**If** you use words as a weapon **Then** you owe the family a chore to make the world fairer.” This change in the consequence encouraged family harmony and it worked well for this family. When Allen “bought into” the arbitrary consequence, the consequence worked.

Because arbitrary consequences lack logic, they should be the last choice when developing consequences. Family harmony and cooperation is greatly increased with natural consequences. The goal of imposing a consequence is to teach cause and effect. This is made more likely when your children feel that they are being treated “fairly.”

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Over the last thirty or so pages we have covered the process of making a *home* out of a house. At this point most parents find the information interesting but less than practical. How do we go from the theory to the reality of daily living? In this section we will put it all together.

First, a quick overview. If any of the following statements are not clear to you, flip back and reread that section. Our job now will be to take this mass of data and form it into a usable tool.

- Parenting is a full time job.
- The primary role of a parent is *to parent*.
- Punishment has limited value in parenting.
- Discipline builds character.
- Children learn better through active learning.

From a Christmas card:

Dr. Phil,

Hope all is well with you and your family. Things are good for us. Sally is still testing the waters of adulthood. I had to pick her up from school the other day because she had thrown up all over her 2nd period class. Come to find out the alcohol she had for breakfast didn’t sit well with her.

Thank God for Must Rules!

Thank you for all you have taught us!

- As parents, we want realistic freedom for our children.
- Limitations, the envelope, is very important in helping children learn what freedom is.
- Must Rules are followed 100% of the time.
- Maybe Rules are parental preferences.
- Minor Rules are under the control of your child.
- Maybe Rules cause most of the conflict in daily family life.
- All things being equal, children (people) do what they want to do!
- Parental inconsistencies are viewed by you, the parent, as times when you are trying to be reasonable and understanding.
- Parental inconsistencies are viewed by your children as a parental mood disorder that can often be manipulated by them.
- Children who live with Maybe Rules tend not to believe you really mean what you say until you are approaching feelings of anger.
- Only parents can break a Must Rule.
- One Must Rule = Child's Behavior + Parent's Behavior.
- One Must Rule = If (child's action) + Then (parent's action).
- Must Rules build a family. These limitations, the envelope, help our children feel safe.
- The positive consequences of living in your family and following the rules are one-heck-of-a-good deal.
- A consequence (positive or negative) is an If-Then statement.
- Must Rules should be written down.
- Parents write the Must Rules. Having your children involved in the writing is a wonderful way to teach your children about the thought process that went into developing them and your reasons behind the rules.

- Writing a Must Rule list is difficult. It is a living document that grows and changes as the family grows and changes.
- Must Rules are written with the parental concern as the focal point.
- Must Rules reflect your family values.
- Logical consequences are the outcome of a particular behavior.
- There are two forms of logical consequences, natural and parent made.
- An arbitrary consequence is imposed by an outside force (i.e., parent).
- Arbitrary consequences are not logically based. Because arbitrary consequences lack logic, they should be the last choice when developing consequences.

Chapter 5 looks at specific problem areas and how to deal with each of them. In Chapter 5 we will “solve” many specific problems, some that will seem very close to your own personal situation. For now, I want to tell you a story about my boys.

See CEU courses that start B6C5 to “solve” many specific problems.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A MUST RULE

I am blessed with two happy and healthy boys, Ethan is nine and Joshua is six. About five weeks ago school started. Ethan was looking forward to fourth grade because he would finally get letter grades. He saw the switch to letter grades as an elementary school rite of passage. No longer would he be a little kid getting checks and pluses, he would now be a big kid, earning real grades. Joshua was looking forward to first grade with great expectations. He liked the idea of having a full day of school. He liked the idea of two recess periods and a lunch period. He didn't talk much about academics, focusing mainly on recess and lunch.

During the last week of summer, my beloved, Geri, brought up in passing, “School's almost here. Summer went by quickly, I really dislike school mornings.” When I didn't hear the importance of her statement, she stated, “Phil, have I ever told you how hard Ethan is to get up on school days?” She had despair in her voice. She sounded resigned to her belief that Ethan was hard to wake up on

school mornings.

I slipped into my Dr. Phil role and asked, "What is the Must Rule on getting up?" She thought for a moment and explained, "I wake him up at seven o'clock. He is very hard to wake up. At 7:05 I try shaking him, I tickle him, I beg him to get up. Some mornings he is just so tired he can't wake up. Other mornings he pretends to be sleeping. I can't always tell. (She started to get angry) I find myself harping on him to get up, then he moves slowly ... I find myself getting frustrated and angry most mornings. School mornings are a real battle, I hate them!"

"Ger, it sounds like you have a real problem." I noted.

"I sure do." She pointed out, "Ethan is so hard to wake up on school mornings. And when it gets cold, he is even harder. He gets all rolled up in his blankets and pretends he doesn't really hear me! It makes me so angry when he pretends that he doesn't hear me!!!"

In my mind I was thinking:

Define the problem

Whose problem is it?

What are the rewards and/or punishments for the person involved with the problem?

Is it a real problem? And if so, do we have a Must Rule to cover it?

"Geri, I can't deal with it right now, let's deal with it on Friday (family night dinner)." The real world has demands on Geri's time and mine. So, the only thing that could be done was to "appoint" the problem. For now, "the problem" was resting on my back. I would carry it until Friday night's dinner. It is important to note that not every problem needs to be attacked at the moment you become aware of it. At the same extent, you can't let problems linger with open ended statements like, "Let's deal with it later," or "Not now, I'm busy." By making an appointment to start to deal with the problem, I kept the importance of the problem alive, but postponed the needed diagnosis and treatment. It was now my responsibility to initiate dealing with the school morning problem. My wife knows that I am an honest person and I would follow through with dealing with the problem on Friday. This allowed her to put the problem on hold and to feel my love and respect for her.

Friday dinner arrived and the family sat together for a little bit longer to make it more of a special meal. It is a family norm that we linger on Fridays, enjoying good food and good fellowship. Often we have a guest or two. It is not unusual for Friday night dinner to be two or more hours long with dinner being a small portion of the time.

For me, the best family dinners end with books piled on the dining room table, scraps of paper strewn around. I like it when

dinner becomes a search for information. When one family member disagrees with another, and a search for knowledge ensues. Then out come the reference books and the fun begins. “How much does a rhinoceros’ horn grow in a year? What is the largest building in the country? What is meant by largest building? Are you talking tallest, usable floor space, or cubic feet of a building? All these and many more have been postulated and “proven” around our dinner table.

It is common for a family member to say on Wednesday, I have a great trivia question for Friday night ... I’ll stump everyone!” This looking forward to the warmth of the family is very important. It allows warm family feelings to go with us all throughout the week, even on the most hectic school mornings.

This Friday night I announced that I had a few questions to bring up. As the plates began to empty I postulated, “What do you get for being a member of the Copitch family?” This is the “positive consequence list” we discussed earlier.

I had pencil in hand and a scrap piece of paper. After a few moments the answers started to fall like snow flakes. Each family member reminded others of the positives of our family. Each of us looked at the question from our own perspective. This was the list we wrote:

School, a house, our dog, food, allowance, live on a mountain, my rat, great cooks, bedroom, warmth, bikes, enough money, TV, refrigerator, tree house, band aids, telephones, medical insurance, help with homework, silverware, a kitchen, Grandma, vacations, camping equipment, pictures, camera, books, computer, watches, I don’t have a watch, telescope, loved by mom and dad, talk with mom and dad, presents, soccer, Jujitsu.

I continued: “We get all this great stuff,” holding up the list, “When we are on target and living fairly as a family. Mom and I have a concern. Next week we start school and we are worried about how the school mornings should go. We can remember that some school mornings were less than fun last year. I don’t want to have anything other than wonderful mornings for us this year.”

Then came the barrage of “it’s other people that cause me a problem.”

Ethan: Mom gets me up too early.

Josh: Ethan is a meanie in the morning.

Ethan: It’s mom’s fault, she gets me up too early.

I was planning to post the new Must Rules on the refrigerator. But, there was so much art taped on the doors, along with soccer snack lists, and honey do lists I thought the index card I rewrote the new rule on would not get noticed.

I also knew that I was scheduled to write this section in a few weeks, so out of curiosity, I made copies of the new rules and gave a copy to each child.

I was curious to see what the boys would do with their copy.

It’s been five weeks and both boys still have the rules posted. Josh placed his in a position of honor, by his bed, “So I can see it when I need it,” he explained.

Ethan’s list seems to migrate around the house. When I asked him why he keeps moving it, he explained, “I don’t want Josh to forget it.” I don’t quite understand this statement, seeing Josh is so happy and easy going in the morning. I guess it’s a big brother thing.

In late January, Ethan had a writing assignment from his fourth grade teacher. He was charged with writing a paragraph about, something he considered stupid.

Stupid

The stupid rules are having 25 minutes. I have 20 minutes to eat and 5 minutes to get in the car. If I am not down the steps by 7:25 I get early bed. If I'm not in the car by 7:45 I get 1 chore a minute. I think they are stupid because I like to sleep late and I am not a morning person.

Ethan's teacher gave him 10/10 for his homework assignment. His mom commented that his penmanship still needs improvement and I noticed that he took responsibility for his behavior.

Mom: I don't get to decide when school starts.

Josh: Let's not go to school, OK?

Ethan: School is fun! I just can't get up in the morning.

Josh: School is funner for me. I get two recess and a lunch!

Interrupting I proceeded, "That may be so, but ... it is not fun for Mom when she has to get you two up and on target every school morning. Last year mom and I made a mistake, we shouldn't have let mom be in charge of your behavior."

Ethan seeing where this was leading, rolled his eyes and slumped into his chair. "But, mom gets me up too early!"

"That may be so, but who is responsible for getting you up and downstairs for breakfast?" I questioned.

"Mom is." Ethan whined back.

"How can mom get you to do something you don't want to do?"

Ethan's face got stern, "I knew it. I have to get myself up in the morning."

"Makes sense to me, you're going into fourth grade," I encouraged.

"I think I should still wake you up," mom stated. "Between me and your alarm clock you should be able to know it is time to get up, but I can't stand over you and *nag you awake*. You must hate that as much as I do."

Ethan looked surprised, "No ... I didn't mind you waking me up a hundred times a morning. I really hated you pulling my covers off when it was cold." Then he smiled and said, "What time do I have to get up by? What's the last second?"

At this point we were taking the problem off mom's shoulders and we were looking for appropriate shoulders to place the responsibility on.

I explained:

We all have to figure out how we get ourselves downstairs to breakfast our own way. I find that my morning shower is very helpful in finding the "on" switch to my brain. Some people, like Josh, just seem happy to wake up in the morning. I wish I could wake up as easily as you do Josh.

We all have to do it our way. But, we have to do it. Let's work backwards from when school starts and let's see the time line that we have to follow.

The family calculated the following school morning facts. (Note, the kids really got into this. At age six and nine, organizing and

estimating skills are growing. Flexing their newly developing skills was fun for the boys):

School starts at 8:20 AM.

Car needs to leave house at 7:45 AM to get us to school on time.

It takes at least 20 minutes to comfortably eat breakfast, clean up your place setting, and put shoes on.

Boys need to be downstairs by 7:25 AM.

It takes at least 25 minutes to get up, get dressed, comb hair, and wash up.

Mom needs to wake up boys at 7:00 AM.

Growing boys need about 10 hours of sleep to grow healthy and learn lots at school.

Bedtime should be no later than 9:00 PM.

It takes an hour to get ready for bed, get story time, and hugs and snuggles.

We head upstairs at 8:00 PM.

This led to the If/Then discussion. We focused on the behavior. Who needs to do what and when. The new Must Rule that we started the first day of school was:

School Mornings

[School night Bedtime: 9:00 PM]

Mom wakes boys at: 7:00 AM

Boys must be downstairs,
dressed and hair combed: 7:25 AM

All in car, seat belt on: 7:45 AM

Goal is to get to school by 8:10 AM.

School Starts at: 8:20 AM

[Note: The above is a list of parental preferences. It only looks at the child's side of the "rule," so technically there is no rule as of yet.]

Two new Must Rules:

[Written by mom and dad but openly discussed with all involved.]

If not downstairs with hair combed and dressed by 7:25 **Then** 1/2 hour early bed next school night.

[A logical consequence (parent made) for being too tired in the morning. If you are tired in the morning, you need to get more sleep.]

If not in car, seat belt on by 7:45 AM **Then** for every minute you're late you earn 1 chore.

[A logical consequence (parent made) for forcing a parent to take responsibility for getting a child into the car. It seems fair that a parent should get "repaid" with a little help for having to "work" to get a child on target.]

Over the first two weeks of the school year a few notable things occurred. The night before school started, Geri confessed to mixed feelings about our new, untested Must Rules. She sheepishly said, "I know this (Must Rules, advocating) works at your office, but Ethan is so tired on school mornings ... What if he can't wake up?"

"He seems to be pretty smart, I think he will figure out a way to get his needs met," I advocated.

Over the first few days, Geri was very happy with how the morning routine was going. Still she questioned, "I like that the mornings are going so well, but ... what happens when the boys aren't as excited about getting up?"

"They seem to be pretty smart, I think they will figure out a way to get their needs met," I advocated.

By the second week both kids had earned an extra chore for being late getting their seat belts on. Geri raved about how well the boys handled their consequences.

Tuesday of the third week, "it" hit the fan. Ethan was late getting down to breakfast. Later on that day, Geri called me at the office. "Ethan is furious with you, well us. He was 23 seconds late for breakfast. He says he is going to talk with you.

"Really," I tried to joke scared.

"Yeah, he said you never said that 23 seconds counted. He is really upset, he is sure that I am not following the Rule. I told him that 23 seconds is late."

Later that day, Josh called me at the office. (With mom's permission.) "Dad, Ethan is really mad at you. He said that you wrote a stupid rule. He is very mad. He said that you forced this dumb rule on him. Dad, he is really mad at you."

"Josh," I questioned, "are you having a problem with the new Must Rule?"

"No."

"Great," I reassured, "I'll see you later ... Bye."

When Ethan and Josh got into the car following JuJitsu class the

next day, they talked nonstop about their day. (Josh mostly talked about recess and lunch.) After fifteen minutes I asked Ethan, "I hear you missed part of soccer practice."

- Ethan: Yeah, I had to leave early, I had early bed.
- Dad: How did it go?
- Ethan: Mom said that I had a choice, I could skip soccer practice or go until 7:00.
- Josh: Did I tell you about the hot dogs at school? They are small, like half hot dogs, but you get two.
- Dad: Two? Wow ... Ethy, I hear that you're mad at me.
- Ethan: Yeah ... but I know what you're going to say.
- Dad: What am I going to say?
- Josh: Ethan said "stupid" a lot ...
- Ethan: Josh, I'm talking to dad now ... I know you're going to tell me that 23 seconds past 7:25 is 23 seconds late, even if it is just a little late.
- Dad: How do you know me so well?
- Ethan: Mom told me.
- Dad: Mom seems to be pretty smart. (I advocated.)

What Ethan didn't know was that Geri and I talked about early bed and soccer practice. We talked about how at this soccer practice the kids were going to scrimmage another team, and that it would be fun for Ethan. We discussed that 23 seconds was only 23 seconds. We discussed that if Ethan earned early bed on a Jujitsu night, he would have to miss his Jujitsu class. We talked about how all of this was important. We also talked about the fact that Must Rules are not preferences. That 100% of the time is very clear. If school mornings were not a problem we would not have written a Must Rule to deal with them. We discussed our choice to be honest people and our desire for our children to know that our word is important to us. We talked about how our children need to be responsible for their own behavior. What a wonderfully loving time we spent talking about our "big picture" for our family.

I cannot emphasize it enough, write as few Must Rules as you

can and follow each Must Rule 100% of the time.

MINOR RULES BUILD CARING ADULTS

A Minor Rule is a Must Rule that the child is solely responsible for. It is the enlargement of the behavioral envelope that allows your child to take care of themselves. Hopefully, by the time your child is 18 he will have incorporated most of the family's Must Rules into their own behavior repertoire.

POSTTEST

When you're ready, take the posttest to obtain your CEU certificate. Your test consists of 5 multiple choice or true/false questions per Continuing Education Unit (3 CEU = 15 questions).



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