

## **Introduction**

The Discipline Plan for Parents workbook is a compilation of ideas and techniques that I have used for years in private practice, as a psychotherapist. I began putting the workbook together after an unsuccessful search for a simple, brief guide for child discipline, to use as a resource for parents. I found excellent parenting materials, but none of them were quite what the parents with whom I worked needed: brief, step-by-step instruction. Most of the parents I had met were busy and overwhelmed, trying to meet the expectations of everyone who relied on them. In order for them to be successful in their efforts to improve their discipline, they needed a resource that was simple and user-friendly. So I began to create a resource by organizing my own information, with forms and worksheets, in a manner that would simplify the task of helping parents be more effective in their discipline.

The workbook project evolved, and I had the privilege of teaching it in an interactive class format for the first time. The group of parents in that first class gave me an even greater understanding of what parents really need, and this revised workbook is the result of that feedback. I am very grateful to those parents who were willing to be open and honest about their discipline struggles, and I admire their commitment to parenting their children well.

Discipline Plan for Parents is relevant for children ages 2–17, providing concepts that are valid for all ages, but require adjustments to the application of those concepts, based on each child's age. For clarity, children ages 2–5 are referred to as a “preschooler”, ages 6–12 a “child” and ages 13–17 a “teen”. Regardless of your children's ages, stay prepared to battle discouragement because discipline isn't easy.

## **Part I Discipline Isn't Easy:**

Do you ever feel disheartened when you try to discipline your children? Does it seem like at times that you're fighting a losing battle? Parenting is one of the most important and challenging tasks that exists, and for many people it is the most rewarding challenge of their life. But many of us become discouraged when it comes to the discipline aspect of parenting, and rightfully so.

Disciplining our children is mentally and emotionally exhausting! We can begin to feel completely inept and find ourselves in "survival mode", just doing what it takes to get by. Unfortunately, staying in "survival mode" causes us to miss out on some of the best moments of being a parent.

To further complicate the matter, how do we learn to discipline children? Most of our knowledge about parenting in general comes from our own childhood, which for some people is great, but for others it's problematic. Although most people are able to become parents, many are not sufficiently equipped for the job. As a result, we have a frightening number of children in our world today who are growing up without the balance of nurture and effective discipline they need, to become healthy adults.

There are several groups of people who are typically ineffective in disciplining their children, and the differences between them are vast. The most obvious group is people whose lives are chaotic and unstable, often characterized by

addictions or illegal activity. The second group is people who are successful in many areas of their life, which demand a great deal of time and attention.

These parents are often distracted from their parenting role because work and material things are such a high priority. The third group consists of people who have very good intentions; however, their life circumstances prevent them from devoting the time and effort needed to give their children their best.

These people may suffer with health problems or employment problems which are beyond their control. A forth group of people who are ineffective in their discipline, is people from all socioeconomic backgrounds who have good intentions of training their children well, but lack the knowledge or tools to do so. These people truly do the best they can, but often make crucial mistakes in the area of discipline.

Discipline is the hardest part of parenting and the least enjoyable. All children need love, but it is equally important that their caregivers are effective disciplinarians who make discipline decisions based on sound logic and morals, instead of emotion. Parents who are not willing to **learn and practice** effective discipline strategies are communicating a very disturbing message; being a good parent is not high on their priority list. When we take on the parenting role by conceiving, adopting or fostering a child, we are accepting the full responsibility for that child's physical, mental, emotional and spiritual wellbeing. Our role as "parent" in our child's life will change as he or she ages,

and will require that we constantly assess what his or her needs are regarding nurture, discipline and basic care.

The goal of this workbook is to provide clear, concise information in a format that will help people improve their success with discipline by **developing a discipline plan for each child**. There are multiple parenting books in existence that are lengthier and more complicated; however, this workbook is intended to be simple and specific to the area of discipline. Other aspects of parenting are briefly mentioned in this workbook and are equally important, but not addressed in detail here. In the Discipline Plan for Parents workbook, we will identify the important aspects of parenting in Parts II and III. Parts IV, V and VI serve as a guide through the process of developing a discipline strategy for each child, based on his or her personality and behavior. Part VII challenges us to take an honest look at ourselves and identify areas in which we want to make changes that will make our discipline more effective. Finally, Part VIII encourages us to persevere, even when it is difficult, because our mission is an incredibly important one.

The process of developing a discipline plan for each child, implementing the plan and consistently practicing the approach described here, is hard. Typically, when we make changes in the way we discipline, our child's behavior will get worse before it gets better; however, the parents who stick with it discover that the end result is well worth the effort. It's okay if you're getting a late start; if your children are already teenagers or things seem to be out-of-

control. Anything you do to improve your discipline effectiveness, even the smallest changes, will benefit your children and your relationship with them.

As you proceed, be sure your expectations are realistic and your commitment is steadfast. You don't have to do the plan perfectly, just do the best you can.

Any positive changes you make will benefit your children, and they are worth it!

You are encouraged to use a highlighter as you read, write your answers in the workbook and make copies of the blank worksheets for use with multiple children. All of the forms mentioned are located in the "**Forms**" section on page 75.

## **Part II Understand Parent Roles and Responsibilities:**

It helps tremendously to grasp the concept that we have several roles to fulfill in parenting. It is much better to understand this **before** we become parents instead of **during** the process of being one. If the latter is true, we are parenting far too much by trial and error. We don't want our parenting approach to be detrimental to our children, just because of our lack of information. Preventive efforts are far more effective than recovery efforts, when it comes to parenting.

These are the common roles which a parent should fulfill in their child's life:

### **1. Caregiver:**

Parents are required by law to provide food, clothing, shelter and basic care until the child is no longer a minor (age 18 in most states). This is a very concrete aspect of the parenting task; however, some parents confuse their children's **wants** with their **needs**. This can lead to over-indulgence, which results in children who misbehave and are labeled as "spoiled". Spoiling your child means you are giving in to their requests at times when saying "no" would be better for them. In essence, **spoiling a child is doing what feels good to you, instead of what your child needs**. The extreme opposite of "spoiling" is neglect, which is failure to provide your child's basic needs. Either extreme is not a healthy approach to fulfilling your role as caregiver.

## **2. Nurturer:**

Our state and federal laws do not require parents to be good nurturers; however, children who don't receive sufficient nurture and affection often become dysfunctional adults. Our efforts to nurture our children will greatly improve our potential for a healthy parent-child relationship.

In order to have a good relationship with our children, we have to choose to invest positively in their lives with unconditional love. A parent can nurture and demonstrate their love for each child daily by remembering the three Ts, **Time, Talk & Touch**:

“**Time**” means spending considerable quantities of time with our child doing a variety of activities, or doing nothing at all.

“**Talk**” means truly communicating with them on their level in such a way that enables us to know our child well, and for them to know us well. Really listening to our child is generally more important than what we say to them.

“**Touch**” means appropriate physical touch on a regular basis. Everyone needs to be touched regularly by another human being. Sometimes touch is simply patting them on the shoulder as you walk by or a hug for no reason.

**Time, Talk, & Touch** help us to emotionally attach with one another so that we're not just a group of individuals sharing living quarters and a

last name. The parent is the adult in a parent-child relationship, and the adult is responsible for the emotional health of the relationship, regardless of how challenging the child is.

### **3. Protector:**

Parents are responsible for protecting their children physically, emotionally and mentally. In many homes it is quite dangerous to be a child. This is evidenced by the massive number of reports to Child Protective Services, and the large number of adults in therapy today who are dealing with abuse they suffered as a child.

Every day children are being sexually and physically abused by their own parents and caregivers. Emotional and mental abuse are more difficult for outsiders to see, but the resulting damage is astounding. Children are also damaged when parents don't adequately protect them from inappropriate material that can be accessed through internet, television, music or movies.

Being a healthy parent requires that we as adults, make our children's needs a priority during the child-rearing years. Dealing with our own self-centeredness, and being willing to make sacrifices in order to protect our children, is a difficult but temporary task. If we don't protect our children, who will?

#### **4. Teacher:**

By the time a child is 18 they should have all the basic skills which would enable them to live on their own, even if it isn't necessary for them to live independently at that time. Cooking, cleaning, laundry, money management, decision making, conflict resolution and self-discipline are all necessary skills. Additionally, parents need to foster common sense and impart wisdom to increase the child's chances for success in life.

Spirituality is a major area in which children are dependent on their parents to teach and guide them. No other individual or entity should be more responsible for our child's **spiritual development** than us, the parents. If spirituality is important to us, we must be willing to live out our beliefs and not just talk about them, or rely solely on a church to teach our child.

#### **5. Playmate:**

A key factor in developing a close relationship with your child is being willing to play with them. Quality play time should always be focused on fun and will usually involve a very simple activity. If we can join our children in their world of play, doing the things they love to do, they will feel more connected with and understood by us. This connection enables a parent to truly know their child and increases the child's desire to be obedient.

**If your children always have to be willing to do the things YOU want to do, in order to spend time with you, they will not feel that you truly want to spend time with them.**

## **6. Fan:**

As parents, we should be our child's greatest fan, regardless of their academic, athletic, social or behavioral level of success. Every child should know without a doubt that their parents are for them, not against them, and love them unconditionally. That doesn't mean we condone problem behavior! Healthy parents appropriately address problem behavior **without withholding love and affection**, and encourage their children on a daily basis. If being an encourager doesn't come naturally for us, we need to do it anyway because every child needs it.

## **7. Role Model:**

Our children are more likely to do what they see us doing, than what they hear us saying. We are their moral compass as we raise them and help them to develop their own set of values. One of the most important traits we should attempt to instill in our children is **honesty**. In order to do that, we have to be honest ourselves. **As parents, we must live out the standard for behavior we expect from our children.** We can't expect our children to exhibit appropriate behavior if the adults in their lives do not.

## **8. Trainer:**

Parenting is very frustrating at times. We can decrease our frustration level by choosing to look at discipline as a **training process**, and consider that the subjects of our training do not think and perceive things with an adult mind. Parents have the benefit of contemplating life with a perspective based on years of experience, and we seem to forget that our kid's point of view will usually be very different from ours.

Training children is generally not convenient; it's much easier for a parent to complete a task themselves, than go through the process of training a child. However, that training process, more than the completed task, is very important to a child's development. Sometimes the family dog is shown more grace during training than the children; we accept that the dog won't be house-broken immediately and give him multiple opportunities to learn. Why then do we become upset when our child disobeys in an area we've already addressed with him?

Many life lessons will have to be taught repeatedly before our kids demonstrate mastery. Those lessons are learned most efficiently when we practice consistent, well-planned discipline, and view the process as training. Discipline Plan for Parents was written to help busy parents with their role as "trainer", by providing tools and a protocol to follow, in their efforts to safely and effectively discipline their children.

\*Listed below are 8 parent roles. Write your initials beside the ones that you fulfill satisfactorily, and add an \* to the ones you do well:

	Mom:	Dad:
1. Caregiver	-----	-----
2. Nurturer	-----	-----
3. Protector	-----	-----
4. Teacher	-----	-----
5. Playmate	-----	-----
6. Fan	-----	-----
7. Role model	-----	-----
8. Trainer	-----	-----

In which of these areas did you experience neglect as a child?

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## **Part III Know the Basics:**

One very important key to having a successful discipline plan is knowing the basic factors that make a good plan work. Owning the best car on the market does not benefit you if you do not know how to drive. If we are characterized by the following seven traits in our approach to discipline, we will tremendously improve our potential for success:

### **1. Be Prepared:**

Develop a discipline strategy tailored to each child based on the problem behaviors they present, and determine the particular consequences that are effective with that child. I'm sure you've heard it before, "If you fail to plan, you've planned to fail." Good discipline must be preceded by putting a strategy into place. Having a discipline plan for each child enables us to **respond** to their behaviors and attitudes instead of **react**. When a parent disciplines a child by reacting to their behavior, the parent ends up dealing with that child based on their own **emotion** (anger, frustration, hurt, embarrassment) instead of **common sense and logic**. Parent's emotional reactions can be detrimental to the child's training because 1.) the child is confused about whether the consequence is dependent on the emotion of the parent, or the type and severity of the behavior and 2.) the child may see themselves as a bad kid, instead of a kid who had bad behavior or made a bad choice.

## **2. Be Thorough:**

Gather all the facts by listening to your child, **without interrupting**, before you make a discipline decision. It is very important to determine the nature of the child's **motive** behind his or her behavior without using the word "why". "*Tell me what happened*" or "*Tell me about \_\_\_\_\_*" will give us a more accurate version of the incident. Was the behavior on purpose or an accident? Does the child's behavior demonstrate **defiance** or was it a result of **carelessness or ignorance**?

**Defiance:** The child knew their behavior was wrong and chose to do it anyway.

**Carelessness:** The child knew their behavior was wrong, but did it accidentally due to extenuating circumstances or impulsivity.

**Ignorance:** The child didn't know their behavior was wrong.

## **3. Be Calm, Brief & Sincere:**

We are most effective as a parent when we speak to our child in a calm manner using as few words as possible, and **never, ever use sarcasm or profanity** when we discipline. A good example of calm, brief and sincere words is: "*You chose not to obey/follow instructions, so you are choosing to have a consequence.*  
*No TV for 12 hrs.*"

**STAY CALM:** When our emotion level rises and we become visibly upset, or we yell, they win! That's right, we lose and they win because they've

pushed our buttons and now they get to watch the grownup “misbehave”. Our children need us to win so they can know without a doubt that a grownup is in charge, not them. Children have a strong desire to be in control and get a great deal of pleasure out of facilitating our loss of control. If you have a tendency to hold grudges, you will find it very difficult to keep your emotion level in check. Forgive your child and refuse to allow the past to fuel anger or resentment. Unforgiveness on the parent’s part makes parenting much harder than it has to be.

**QUIT TALKING SO MUCH:** When we drone on and on about their infraction, our children quit listening to us and begin to feel a sense of control by tuning us out. Our best effort will be to maintain a calm presence, regardless of how we feel on the inside, and keep our words brief and clear. Short and sweet. Calm and concise. To the point. With teenagers we have a tendency to say things over and over, in a variety of ways, trying to get our point across because we have no evidence of their comprehension, such as *“gee, thanks Mom for enlightening me. You’re right; I will never do that again”*. Think it through, say it, ask if they have any questions and then be done with it. They won’t hear anything else you say anyway so, unless you just want to hear yourself say it repeatedly, end it.

**DON’T USE SARCASM, PROFANITY OR DEMEANING ACTIONS:** It just doesn’t work when we are trying to discipline children or teens. When

our words or our tone is sarcastic, it looks like we are “pulling rank” on our kids because we are speaking to them in a manner in which they are not allowed to speak to us. Example: If a parent says “*wipe that smirk off of your face or I'll do it for you*”, the kid would not be allowed to say “*I'll wipe the smirk off of your face for you too*”. **When we discipline using sarcasm it causes the child to feel angry, and emotion becomes the focus of the interaction, instead of the child's problem behavior.**

When adults use profanity with their children, especially during discipline, it can make the child feel demeaned or put-down. This dynamic will distract from the training process and cause the child to perceive the adult's discipline as an attack or insult, instead of correction. The result is often a loss of respect for the adult and damage to the relationship.

Name-calling, slapping a child's face, popping them on the mouth or thumping them on the head are all actions that will most likely be experienced by the child as belittling or attacking. These actions by a parent are counterproductive in that they will cause the child to feel hurt and angry, and will distract them from the main issue: their own behavior problem.

#### **4. Be Consistent:**

Stick with the strategy but always maintain the ability to be flexible.

Keep flexibility as an option to use on a rare to occasional basis.

Inconsistency in discipline will train your child to make behavior decisions based on the odds of him getting in trouble or not. If a child really wants to do something badly, he'll often be willing to take a chance and hope he doesn't get a consequence. The parent's consistency will make it easier for him to accept that he won't always get what he wants. As parents, we can be more motivated to be consistent if we remember that being consistent today makes our job easier in the future.

#### **5. Be Diligent:**

Lazy parenting is ineffective and sets us up to have more difficulty in the future when we discipline our children. It's very tempting to let a child get away with problem behavior, or to give in and not enforce a consequence, when we are tired, frustrated or depressed; however, it is wrong. **It is detrimental to our child when we fail to give them the discipline and training they need, when they need it.**

If we start to give a consequence and let the child talk us out of it, we are doing what feels good to us instead of what our child needs at that moment. Being a good parent often means choosing not to be self-

centered, but following through with the plan we develop, regardless of how it makes us **FEEL** or how inconvenient it is right now.

## **6. Be Genuine:**

We **will** make mistakes. In light of this truth, it's important to be able to admit when we make a mistake and apologize to our children. **A real apology means taking responsibility for our mistake without excuses.**

An apology such as "*yes, I messed up but it was because you...*" does not qualify as a real apology. An example of a genuine apology is: "*I'm very sorry I yelled at you, I was wrong; please forgive me. Now let me try that again; pick up your toys and take your bath.*"

Our children know we aren't perfect, so why act as though we are? **Our genuineness will foster respect.**

## **7. Be Cooperative:**

Training children to have good behavior and make good choices is truly a team effort. When Mom and Dad disagree frequently about how to discipline the children, and are unable to work together in this effort, it has a negative impact on training the children. Our children are very aware of the tension and conflict in the home, even if we think we are concealing it. If you are a single parent, you still have others involved in training your child such as teachers, coaches, family members and childcare workers. It is always best for the children if the parents are

willing to figure out how to work cooperatively with all the other adults involved in their children's lives.

Sometimes one or both parents have a strong need to be in control of the discipline aspect of parenting. Additionally, some parents will undermine or contradict the efforts of their co-parent in the presence of their children. These dynamics make it particularly difficult for everyone, especially the children. Being cooperative means being willing to communicate, compromise and consider that sometimes our co-parent's idea is best.

\*Listed below are the 7 traits that will improve the effectiveness of our discipline. Put your initials beside the traits you possess and exhibit sufficiently, and add an \* to the ones you do well.

	Mom:	Dad:
1. Be Prepared	-----	-----
2. Be Thorough	-----	-----
3. Be Calm, Brief & Sincere	-----	-----
4. Be Consistent	-----	-----
5. Be Diligent	-----	-----
6. Be Genuine	-----	-----
7. Be Cooperative	-----	-----



## **Part IV Develop an Individualized Discipline Plan:**

Now it's time to get specific about discipline. Locate the **PLAN CHECKLIST** (in the **FORMS** section) to reference as you develop your plan by completing each of the 4 steps listed below:

**STEP 1 Describe the child.**

**STEP 2 Evaluate the child's behavior.**

**STEP 3 Choose consequences.**

**STEP 4 Choose rewards.**

If you co-parent with another person, it is important for both of you to develop the plan together as a team. Set aside enough uninterrupted time together to discuss and create an Individualized Discipline Plan (IDP) for each of your children. Start by selecting the first child for which you wish to develop a discipline plan, and have copies of **forms A, B, C & F** ready.

**STEP 1 Describe the child** by writing down the words which best explain who this child is. How would you describe your child? Strong-willed, stubborn, compliant, sneaky, sensitive, manipulative, a leader, a follower, emotional, moody, laid-back or high-strung? No one knows our children better than us, the parents, but when we intentionally study each child and put in writing all we know about their personality and traits, we come to understand them better. There are several websites available which provide information about identifying personality traits in children. A simple search online “children’s

personality traits” or “child personality type” can lead you to those websites that will give you a variety of words to help you describe **who** your child is.

A. Create a Child Description: Answer each question on the **Child Description (form A)** to organize information about the unique make-up of this particular child including age, personality, temperament and historically what type of discipline has worked well.

**STEP 2 Evaluate the child's behavior** (including words and attitudes) to determine his or her main problem behaviors. The primary task involved with this step is deciding which words best describe this child's problem behavior. It's easy to identify a behavior as good or bad, but our discipline will be more effective if we can clearly define each behavior. If we consistently use specific words when we discipline, our child will quickly relate those words to the problem behavior and training is more efficient.

A. On the **Problem Behavior List (form B)** identify and circle the child's problem behaviors. Feel free to write in any relevant behaviors that aren't listed.

B. On the **Individualized Discipline Plan (form C)** list the child's 3-5 most frequent problem behaviors in the “Problem Behavior” section.

\*Note: You can add more behaviors later as you achieve success with the initial ones.

**C. On the Individualized Discipline Plan (form C) directly to the right of each problem behavior, write the desired behavior.**

Example: The desired behavior for “back-talk” would be “speak respectfully”.

\*Note: You may need to write and rewrite these, if they seem repetitious, until the problem behaviors and desired behaviors are simple, concise and clear.

**STEP 3 Choose consequences** for the child based on who they are and what you think will work for that particular child. A consequence is a result or effect of an action or condition. Use of the word “consequence” is recommended because the term “punishment” can encourage the child think of themselves as mistreated or as a victim, when that truly isn’t the case. When children are given consequences for inappropriate behavior, they have the opportunity to see it as something they chose as a result of their behavior. The parent can emphasize this concept by saying “*You chose not to obey/follow instructions, so you are choosing to have a consequence.*”

Not every consequence is appropriate for every child, nor does every parent agree on which consequences are acceptable and which ones aren’t. There is a

great deal of controversy about the use of SWATS (also known as corporal punishment, spanking or whipping), as a consequence in child discipline. Some people even compare SWATS to the act of hitting or beating someone, which is understandable in light of the epidemic of child abuse in our country today. But comparing SWATS, which are administered in a safe and appropriate manner (see **Consequences Description form D,**) to hitting a child, is like comparing surgery to stabbing someone. There are similarities to each action, however, the motive and purpose for each of them are drastically different.

Each parent must make decisions about consequences to use as discipline, within the parameters of our State and Federal laws. As you think about your child and who they are, consider the following:

**Age:**

Preschoolers (ages 2–5) need immediate, short term consequences such as toy time-out for 1 hour or time-out in a chair for 3–5 minutes. Their attention span is short and they aren't strong enough verbally to express themselves well, so dialogue with them should always be brief when it comes to discipline.

Children (ages 6–12) need consequences that make sense and make them think, such as early to bed 30 minutes for not getting up when told, or rewind and say-it-again for speaking in a rude or disrespectful manner.

Teens (ages 13–17) need consequences that talk their language, meaning responses from the parent that impact them, make them think and motivate

them to change problem behavior. Loss of a privilege, such as cell phone use, generally works well.

### **Personality and temperament:**

Training your children is much more efficient if you give consequences based on who they are, instead of who you are. If you feel more comfortable with discipline that consists of reasoning in a sweet, loving voice but your rambunctious 9-year-old boy needs a firm voice and an immediate consequence, then you have a decision to make. You are faced with the choice of doing **what feels good to you or what he needs.**

When we try to discipline each child according to what works best individually, we may be accused of not being fair (something which happens regardless of how we discipline). Trying to treat every child exactly alike would be more unfair because no two children are exactly alike. Equity and fairness are important in families, but being fair doesn't mean everyone receives exactly the same consequences.

### **Historical success:**

When we discipline based on **who our child is, instead of who we are**, we can look at what has worked well in the past to help us determine what he needs. BUT it is important to remember that some discipline attempts in the past may

have failed because we didn't execute them well, or we gave up too soon because we weren't getting the immediate results we were looking for.

To begin the process of choosing consequences:

- A. Read each of the suggested consequences listed on the **Consequences Description (form D)** and decide which consequences would be most appropriate for this child.
- B. On the **Individualized Discipline Plan (form C)** in the "List of Possible Consequences" section, write down the consequences you are choosing to try with this child.

**STEP 4 Choose rewards** for the child based on what your child enjoys or is interested in the most. Choosing rewards for your child is an opportunity to demonstrate to her that you know her well, pay attention to her and care about the things that are important to her. Children feel very loved when Mom or Dad know them so well that they can choose just the right reward.

The majority of the rewards you give should be acknowledgement, affirmation and praise for demonstrations of good character and good choices. Money and gift rewards should be limited. Your child shouldn't expect to be paid to have good behavior; he should be trained to have

appropriate behavior and learn to gain satisfaction from mastering that ability.

Be careful not to over-emphasize performance to assure that your child knows your love for him is not conditional; you love him because he is yours! Encourage your children to tell you what they would enjoy most for a reward but be sure they are aware that they are not allowed to ask for rewards, and that decisions about rewards are completely up to the parents. Asking for a reward, or complaining about a sibling's reward, is the best way to assure that they **won't** be receiving one.

To begin the process of choosing rewards:

- A. Read the **Rewards List (form E)** and review your **Child Description (form A)** to determine which rewards are the most desirable and motivating for this child. Feel free to write in reward ideas which aren't listed on the form.
  
- B. On the **Individualized Discipline Plan (form C)** in the "List of Possible Rewards" section, write down the rewards you chose to use with this child.

**Repeat STEPS 1–4:**

Your IDP, **Individualized Discipline Plan (form C)**, is now complete for one child. Repeat steps 1–4 for each child and you will have successfully created a discipline strategy for each child that you can reference quickly on a single page.

Make a packet for each of your children that includes:

- Individualized Discipline Plan (form C)**
- Problem Behavior List (form B)**
- Child Description (form A)**
- Evaluate Consequences (form F)**

It will be beneficial to keep all of your children's packets in a 3-ring binder so that both parents can access them easily. Periodically review each packet and note information that might be helpful in addressing future behavior problems or good behavior for a particular child.

By the time you have completed a packet for each child, you will have put a great deal of time and effort into this part of the parenting process. This is time and effort well-spent, and a tremendous investment into the well-being of your children, IF you implement the plan with intentionality and communicate well with your co-parent. The Consequence Log and Weekly Co-Parent Meeting will help you accomplish your goals.

### **Consequence Log:**

Many of the consequences parent's use to train their children are immediate, meaning that the consequence is given and completed just after the problem behavior occurs. However, some consequences have time or task completion deadlines, such as a toy/device time-out or a consequence chore. Most families are busy and parents sometimes find it difficult to remember the specific consequence they gave. As a matter of fact, **children often hope that a parent will forget and not follow through with a consequence.**

The **Consequence Log (form G)** can be placed on the fridge, or in the 3-ring binder containing the children's IDPs, to document when time or task completion consequences are given and if they are successfully completed. Simply record the date, child's name, consequence, and the date and time it is to be completed. When the deadline comes, place a plus sign in the completion box if it was successfully completed and a minus sign if it was not. If the consequence was not successfully completed, the parent would need to investigate and address it.

It is very important to follow-up with every consequence given in order to assure that it was completed successfully, and to be consistent. Failure to do so will have a negative impact on the effectiveness of your discipline.

### **Weekly Co-Parent Meeting:**

Co-parents need to get together on a weekly basis to discuss each child's behavior, the effectiveness of each child's IDP and the parent's efforts to implement the plan. Choose a day and time that will be the most convenient for both parents and plan to spend 10–20 minutes once per week. These discussions will be difficult at times, but using the same traits discussed in Part III Know the Basics will help parents communicate more effectively. **This is an excellent opportunity for co-parents to encourage and acknowledge each other for all their hard work.**

Make an effort to avoid being critical of each other. If we're honest, child discipline can often leave us feeling badly about ourselves. It is very hard to discipline without yelling, using sarcasm or showing emotion, and the intensity of the emotions we experience in raising children can be almost unbearable at times. We can find ourselves consumed with self-doubt and fear to the degree that we feel like giving up; and some parents do. That is why being a team, or having support, is so important.

In an effort to encourage teamwork, it is advisable for co-parents to choreograph a victory dance to celebrate their successes! Of course, the victory dance should never be performed in front of the children ☺.

## **Part V Implement the Individualized Discipline Plan:**

When each child's Individualized Discipline Plan (IDP) is complete, it is helpful to prepare your children for the changes you are making and communicate to them what they can expect. This is your opportunity to **set them up to succeed** by paying careful attention to what you say and how you say it. After the children are aware that the situation has changed, the parents must be committed to following through with what they have said, even when it's difficult.

### **FIRST – Prepare for a Family Meeting:**

At this point, you are ready to prepare for a family meeting to make everyone aware that you are making changes. Make a written agenda with a **List of Important Points** for the meeting, to assure that every point is covered. The meeting should be brief and positive with a goal of explaining the following:

1. You love your child/children very much and want the very best for them. In order to do that, you feel you need to make some changes.
2. You will be helping them to learn what is expected of them regarding their behavior and attitude, by giving them instructions.

3. When they choose not to obey/follow instructions, they are choosing to receive a **consequence**.
4. A **consequence** is something that will happen, selected by you, as a result of their problem behavior such as (but not limited to) time-out, belongings or privileges taken away or SWATS.
5. Go over the list of problem behaviors on the **Problem Behavior List (form B)** to remind them of the behaviors and attitudes in general that are not appropriate.
6. At times you may give them a **WARNING**, to allow them to correct their behavior.
7. If they ignore the **WARNING**, they will be choosing to receive a **consequence**.
8. On occasion you will reward especially good behavior, but they aren't allowed to ask for rewards or complain about a sibling's reward.
9. They are choosing to receive consequences or rewards when they choose to have problem behavior or good behavior.
10. **They are allowed to say what they think and feel, as long as they say it respectfully and follow instructions.**

Set the date and time, and create a written agenda to make sure you don't miss anything. Decide on a simple, fun family activity to have at the end such as a game, going for a walk, tossing a ball, timing how long you can

keep a balloon in the air or building a tower with large cardboard blocks.

The activity chosen would depend on the age of your children.

### **Family Meeting Agenda:**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_ Place: \_\_\_\_\_

Activity: \_\_\_\_\_

### **List of Important Points:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_
8. \_\_\_\_\_
9. \_\_\_\_\_
10. \_\_\_\_\_

### **Questions:**

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## **SECOND – Have a Family Meeting:**

- \_\_\_ Give everyone notice about the family meeting and make sure they can be present at the time scheduled.
- \_\_\_ Begin the meeting and ask your children to hold their questions until you finish your **List of Important Points**.
- \_\_\_ Try to keep the atmosphere positive and upbeat.
- \_\_\_ Go through your **List of Important Points**, explaining each one as clearly and briefly as possible.
- \_\_\_ Ask if anyone has any questions or comments, and listen carefully **without interrupting**. If you don't know the answer to a question, tell them you will have to think about it and get back to them. Be sure to write the question down, determine the answer later and follow-up with the child. If you demonstrate that you are interested in what your children have to say, they will be more motivated to cooperate with the plan.
- \_\_\_ **Do not reveal the children's IDPs to them.** That is strictly for the parents to reference.
- \_\_\_ End the family meeting with the activity you have planned.

The Family Meeting will be more successful if the parents can remain calm, brief and sincere, regardless of their children's attitudes.

### **THIRD – Implement the Plan:**

Respond appropriately and effectively to your child's behavior.

#### **Problem Behavior Protocol:**

When your child exhibits problem behavior or an inappropriate attitude, it is time for action. Respond using the following protocol as a guide:

- A. Identify the problem behavior.**
- B. Gather the facts.**
- C. Determine the motive.**
- D. Choose a consequence.**
- E. Deliver the consequence.**
- F. Show love.**

**A. Identify the Problem Behavior:** Tell the child that the behavior or attitude you just observed (or learned about) is not appropriate.

**B. Gather the Facts:** Briefly and calmly say to the child “*tell me what happened.*” **DO NOT ASK THE CHILD IF THEY DID IT OR WHY; INSTRUCT THEM TO TELL YOU ABOUT IT.** Be willing to listen to your child explain their perspective **without interrupting them.** Then summarize **BRIEFLY** what the child said, followed by “*did I hear you correctly?*” Briefly clear up any miscommunication until you are sure you understand your child’s point of view (**whether you agree with it or not**).

**C. Determine the Motive:** At this point it is necessary to take the time you need (it might be best to send the child to their room) to lower your emotion level, think about the behavior presented, weigh all the facts and determine the nature of the child's motive. What was the intention of your child's heart when he chose to have the problem behavior? Defiance, carelessness or ignorance:

**Defiance:** The child knew their behavior was wrong and chose to do it anyway.

**Carelessness:** The child knew their behavior was wrong, but did it accidentally due to extenuating circumstances or impulsivity. It seems as though the child didn't think things through.

**Ignorance:** The child didn't know their behavior was wrong.

**D. Choose a Consequence:** Based on motive, choose an effective, appropriate consequence from your child's IDP.

**E. Deliver the consequence:** Tell the child briefly what their consequence will be as a result of their behavior, using little emotion and absolutely **no sarcasm, profanity or demeaning behavior**. Deliver the consequence and be sure to address any inappropriate reaction on the child's part.

**F. Show love:** Briefly communicate love and affection to the child.

## **EXAMPLES for Implement the Plan – Problem Behavior:**

### **Preschooler:**

#### **A. Identify the problem behavior.**

*"It's not nice to hit others".*

#### **B. Gather the facts.**

*"Tell me what just happened."*

When the child is a toddler, you might need to state what you believe was happening, instead of asking.

*"You felt angry when you saw your friend with your toy".*

#### **C. Determine the motive.**

*Most likely defiance since the behavior has previously been addressed on several occasions.*

#### **D. Choose a consequence.**

*Toy time-out for 1 hour.*

#### **E. Deliver the consequence.**

*"You chose to hit John, so your toy will go into time-out until the timer rings". Put the toy in the designated "time-out" location, out of the child's reach, and set the timer.*

#### **D. Show love.**

*Hug.*

Give an example of a Preschooler (ages 2–5) Problem Behavior:

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Write the words you would use to Identify the Problem Behavior:

“ \_\_\_\_\_ ”

**Child:**

**A. Identify the problem behavior.**

*"Your sister said you borrowed her basketball and never returned it. It's not okay to damage or lose other peoples' belongings".*

**B. Gather the facts.**

*"Tell me what happened".*

**C. Determine the motive.**

*Carelessness – he knew the behavior was wrong but there is no evidence that losing the ball was his intention.*

**D. Choose a consequence.**

*Replace the lost property & apologize.*

**E. Deliver the consequence.**

*"You chose not to be responsible with your sister's ball so you are choosing to have a consequence. You need to apologize and buy her another ball with your allowance money. I'll take you to the store Friday to take care of that".*

*Have him prepare and give his apology, and take him to purchase the ball on Friday.*

**F. Show love.**

*"I'm very proud of you for having such a good attitude. I love you"!*

Give an example of a Child (ages 6-12) Problem Behavior:

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Write the words you would use to Identify the Problem Behavior:

“ \_\_\_\_\_ ”

**Teen:**

- A. Identify the problem behavior.

*"It's 12:30am, you're just now getting home and your curfew is 11:00pm on weekends".*

- B. Gather the facts.

*"What would you like to tell me about your coming home late"?*

- C. Determine the motive.

*Defiance-there wasn't a legitimate reason to be late and the issue has been addressed previously on multiple occasions.*

- D. Choose a consequence.

*Grounded to the house until next Friday.*

- E. Deliver the consequence.

*You chose not to be home on time, so you are choosing to have a consequence. You will not have the privilege of leaving home except for school and any other place deemed necessary by us until Friday". Enforce the consequence.*

- F. Show love.

*I love you". Plan ways to spend time with your teen at home during the week and make an effort to point out the things he does right.*

Give an example of a Teen (ages 13–17) Problem Behavior:

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Write the words you would use to Identify the Problem Behavior:

“ \_\_\_\_\_ ”

### **The “POWERFUL PAUSE”:**

The POWERFUL PAUSE is a period of calm silence accompanied by eye contact, with absolutely no emotion and no facial expression from the parent. The parent remains in this state until the child corrects her behavior, usually 5 seconds to 2 minutes. This tool can effectively communicate to the child that she has a brief opportunity to change, and may eliminate the need for further action on the part of the parent.

If the child does not correct her behavior, the parent would continue with the discipline plan.

### **EXAMPLES for the “POWERFUL PAUSE”:**

#### **1. Parent gives instructions:**

*“Pick up your blocks and come take a bath.”*

The child continues playing with his blocks.

*Parent re-enters the room 5 minutes later and exhibits the POWERFUL PAUSE.*

The child chooses to follow instructions or not.

#### **2. Parent gives instructions:**

*“Turn your music down to a 6 or use your headphones”*

Teen’s music remains above a 6 and is still too loud.

*Parent re-enters the room after 5 minutes and exhibits the POWERFUL PAUSE.*

The child chooses to follow instructions or not.

### **The “WARNING”:**

The WARNING is a training technique to use when your child is learning a particular boundary or rule. When the parent becomes aware of a problem behavior, they communicate this to the child and give her an opportunity to correct her behavior. This is the process of creating space between the child’s learning that a particular behavior is not appropriate, and the child’s response to what she has learned. The WARNING begins with “if you choose ...” compared to immediately giving a consequence which begins with “you chose ...”. When parents begin using the discipline plan, they may find it helpful to use the WARNING frequently to help their children get used to the plan.

Your WARNING should communicate the following message:

*“If you choose not to obey (follow instructions), you are choosing to have a consequence”,* followed by repeating your instructions to the child. As you practice your WARNING, you can adjust it and make it your own. Choose words that are comfortable for you and get the message across to your child, but keep it brief. Remember, after the WARNING is given there should be a consequence if the problem behavior continues.

**Parents who give the same instructions multiple times before they give a consequence, are training their children to misbehave.**

## **EXAMPLES for the “WARNING”:**

1. Parent gives instructions:

*“Clean up your room before we leave to take you to the basketball game.”*

It’s time to leave and the child has not cleaned their room.

*“If you choose not to clean your room, you are choosing not to go to the basketball game. Clean your room now.”*

The child still does not clean his room, so he does not go to the game.

2. Parent gives instructions:

*“Stop pestering your sister.”*

Child continues to pester his sister.

*“If you choose to continue pestering your sister, you are choosing to have a consequence. Stop now.”*

Child stops.

3. Parent has addressed the problem behavior previously (skip instructions):

*“Nagging is disrespectful. If you choose to keep nagging, you are choosing to have a consequence.”*

Child continues to nag the parent.

*“You chose not to follow instructions, so you are choosing to have a consequence. You will not get to have a friend over tonight.”*

The child is required to call their friend to tell them they cannot come over.

### **Avoid Consequence Stacking:**

Often when parents are in the process of giving a consequence, the child exhibits another problem behavior or attitude. The natural response is to give an additional consequence each time the child presents another problem behavior. The parent could end up giving multiple consequences, or **consequence stacking**, and find himself emotionally escalating, struggling to remember what he told the child. When this occurs, follow-through is very unlikely and the child wins, now that the interaction has become a control battle.

In order to avoid consequence stacking, the parent should give a WARNING or an additional consequence to the child following the 2<sup>nd</sup> problem behavior. If the child continues to exhibit a problem behavior or attitude after receiving the WARNING or 2<sup>nd</sup> consequence, the parent needs to interrupt the cycle by sending the child to her room to await further instructions. Once the cycle is stopped, the parent has the opportunity to calm down and think through their decision to determine the best consequence for this particular incident.

If the cycle is allowed to continue, the child will begin to focus on winning, instead of their own problem behavior. Our children need us, the parents, to win so they have a sense of security knowing that an adult

is in charge. We can **avoid consequence stacking by interrupting the cycle after the 2<sup>nd</sup> consequence is given.**

### **EXAMPLES for Avoid Consequence Stacking:**

Parent gives consequence:

*"You chose not to take your bath when you were told, so you are choosing to have a consequence. You will go to bed at 9:00 instead of 9:30 tonight. Go take your bath now."*

Child exhibits problem behavior:

*"That's not fair; none of my friends have to go to bed that early. Let me stay up till 9:30."*

Parent gives 2<sup>nd</sup> consequence:

*"You chose to argue with me and that is disrespectful, so you're choosing to have another consequence. You will go to bed at 8:30 now."*

Child continues to argue and plead with parent to let them stay up.

Parent stops the cycle:

*"Go to your room and wait for me."*

Parent walks away, reviews the child's IDP or confers with co-parent, calms down and chooses how to respond:

*"Your consequence is 1 SWAT and your bedtime is now 8:30. In 1 week you may ask for it to be changed. Dad and I will consider changing it at that time, based on your behavior."*

Child takes a bath and goes to bed.

Give an example of a time when you have found yourself **consequence stacking:**

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## **Special situations:**

### **1. Problem behavior in blended families:**

Typically, in blended families it is best for each parent to deal with the problem behaviors of their child until a strong, healthy relationship between step-parent and step-child has developed. It is essential that the parents spend time planning their discipline for all of their children to eliminate as many foreseeable issues as possible. Blended families are complicated because the emotional bond between step-parents and step-children is so different than the bond parents have with their own children.

### **2. Problem behavior in single parent homes:**

It is imperative for single parents to identify and use potential resources. Asking a good friend, pastor or someone whom they trust to go over the IDP for their child and give them feedback, can be extremely helpful. A single parent can ask those same people for encouragement and support when they face particularly difficult discipline challenges.

If you are a single parent, remember that **you are far more effective with discipline than many people who have a spouse, when you have researched and made a discipline plan!**

### **3. Problem behavior in foster homes:**

Foster parents have some of the most challenging experiences with discipline because foster children, and the problem behaviors they present, are very complex. It is difficult to truly get to know a child you've never met before, in a short period of time. Consequently, foster parents are addressing problem behavior when they don't really know the child and there hasn't been enough time for sufficient trust to develop between them. Their discipline options are limited and their actions are scrutinized by the placing agency. It is very helpful for foster parents to have a discipline plan in place, which does not violate the restrictions of the placing agency. The plan will enable them to be consistent and focus on the factors (Part III Know the Basics) that will make their discipline efforts more effective.

The most powerful thing a foster parent can do for a foster child is exhibit a good balance of nurture and discipline, regardless of that child's problem behavior. In order to do that, foster parents must be emotionally healthy and have a strong network of support from family, friends and professionals. Choosing to serve as a foster parent is a very admirable decision which requires a great deal of sacrifice, without much appreciation or acknowledgement.

#### **4. Problem behavior during visitation:**

When your child doesn't live with you most of the time, it is very tempting to avoid addressing problem behavior because of the way discipline makes you feel. If you can focus on making your discipline decisions based on logic instead of emotion, it will benefit your relationship with your child. Children can adapt to the reality that the rules are different in different households, and will feel more secure in each of them if both parents will consistently require them to follow the rules. Choosing not to discipline your child when they need it is making your own comfort more important than what your child needs.

#### **5. Problem behavior in public:**

Our children are very aware when we are hesitant to discipline in public, and often use this to their advantage. Many times their problem behaviors are not addressed effectively because we don't want to humiliate our child and we don't want our parenting to be judged by strangers.

When your child presents problem behavior in public, escort your child to a private area and use your discipline plan to address the behavior. If no private area is available, place your hand on your child's arm, give your child the **WARNING** using a calm voice, eye

contact and brief, clear wording. Follow-up with the **POWERFUL PAUSE**. If your child doesn't respond to the **WARNING**, calmly leave and address the behavior at home with an additional consequence for not heeding the **WARNING**. This approach will most likely be inconvenient for the parent; however, it will more quickly resolve the issue of problem behavior in public.

#### **6. Problem behavior in a vehicle:**

Another situation in which children often misbehave is in a vehicle. They seem to feel empowered when everyone is strapped in with a seatbelt and the vehicle is moving, especially if the family is late to an event. When this happens, give your child a brief description of their problem behavior:

*"Your arguing and yelling is disrespectful and distracting;"*

Followed by instructions:

*"speak respectfully and quietly in the car."*

And the **WARNING**

*"if you choose not to follow instructions, you are choosing to have a consequence".*

If your child does not follow instructions, give a consequence such as the **Talking Time-Out**, or pull over as soon as you can to a safe area and use your discipline plan. If you cannot pull over, address the problem behavior at home with an additional consequence for not heeding the **WARNING**.

## **7. Problem behavior with extenuating circumstances:**

When your child is sick, emotionally upset, tired or has experienced anything that would impact their ability to regulate their behavior, it is time to show grace. That doesn't mean the parents don't respond to the problem behavior, it merely means the parents need to consider the special circumstances and adjust the response accordingly. It is very important to communicate to our children that **we are all responsible for our own behavior, despite what we are going through or feeling.** It is equally important that we model that concept for our children when we are experiencing negative emotion or dealing with a particularly difficult circumstance.

Deviating from the usual routine on occasion can help parents learn to be flexible and balanced in their discipline approach. Holidays, vacations or visiting relatives for extended periods of time can be challenging, but are excellent opportunities to help children learn to self-regulate. One primary consideration in determining your expectations of your child, is your child's age.

Give an example of a **special situation** in which you have experienced increased difficulty with the discipline process:

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### **Good Behavior Protocol:**

When your child exhibits very good behavior, a great attitude (despite the circumstances) or exceptional moral character, address it using the protocol as a guide:

- A. Identify the good behavior.**
- B. Gather the facts.**
- C. Determine the motive.**
- D. Choose a reward.**
- E. Deliver the reward.**
- F. Show love.**

Tell your child the specific behavior, attitude or character trait you observed, or learned about, and **consider** giving an appropriate reward from that child's IDP "**List of Possible Rewards**" (form E). Obviously, dealing with good behavior is much easier, and more enjoyable, than dealing with problem behavior.

As parents, we are making a positive investment in our child's self-esteem every time we affirm or acknowledge them for making good decisions or doing the right thing, even if it is something small.

**Put as much time and effort as you can into catching your child doing something good, then let them know about it!**

## **EXAMPLES for Implement the Plan - Good Behavior:**

### **Preschooler:**

- A. Identify the good behavior.

*"Your teacher told me you were sharing toys with the new boy today".*

- B. Gather the facts.

*"Tell me about it."*

- C. Determine the motive.

*Based on what the child says, it sounds like he was genuinely trying to be nice.*

- D. Choose a reward.

*Verbal affirmation.*

- E. Deliver the reward.

*"I'm so proud of you for sharing. I know you like it when other kids share toys with you.*

*Good job!"*

- F. Show love.

*Hug.*

Give examples of Preschooler (ages 2-5) Good Behavior:

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**Child:**

- A. Identify the good behavior.

*"I noticed you did some of your brother's chores after you were finished with your own".*

- B. Gather the facts.

*"What was going on there?"*

- C. Determine the motive.

*The child's behavior was motivated by her desire to get to the swimming pool sooner, since the family wouldn't be leaving until chores were done. A nice gesture, nonetheless.*

- D. Choose a reward.

*Verbal affirmation in front of the other children.*

- E. Deliver the reward.

*To everyone in the car "you might want to thank your sister for helping Jacob with his chores, since she is the reason we arrived at the pool so early!"*

- F. Show love.

*To your daughter "I'm very proud of you for being a helper!"*

Give examples of Child (ages 6–12) Good Behavior:

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**Teen:**

- A. Identify the good behavior.

*"It's 10:00pm, you're already home and your curfew is 11:00pm on weekends".*

- B. Gather the facts.

*"Tell me about your coming home so early"?*

- C. Determine the motive.

*The teen saw that his friends were going somewhere he wasn't allowed to go, and chose to obey his parents.*

- D. Choose a reward.

*Parents decide to buy the teen's next tank of gas.*

- E. Deliver the reward.

*"That was a very good decision, son! We'll buy your next tank of gas!"*

- F. Show love.

*"We're so proud of the young man you are becoming."*

Give examples of Teen (ages 13–17) Good Behavior:

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## **Part VI Evaluate:**

Use the **Evaluate Consequences List (form F)**, located in each child's packet, to document your responses and determine their effectiveness. Remember the following facts as you evaluate (highlight the ones that you feel are the most significant to you):

1. When you change your discipline approach, your child's behavior will most likely worsen before it improves.
2. Often the **right** consequence needs to be used multiple times before you see the desired results.
3. The severity of consequences, such as length of time imposed, should begin at a low level giving room to increase severity as needed.
4. Sometimes the "**POWERFUL PAUSE**", a period of calm silence, is the most effective response a parent can have when dealing with problem behavior.

5. Long, drawn-out conversations, lectures and attempts to reason (especially with a toddler) are generally ineffective.
  
6. Do not rely on the child's attitude about a consequence to determine its effectiveness. Often children and teens will refrain from letting you know how deeply they are impacted by a consequence, in order to maintain a **sense of control**.
  
7. Don't be too hard on yourself if you don't follow the plan perfectly. You'll become more comfortable with it the more you do it. Just do the best you can!
  
8. Each time you respond to your child's behavior with an appropriate consequence, you will learn more about what to do the next time she presents a problem behavior.
  
9. **Effective discipline is time-consuming and often inconvenient.** Accepting this as a temporary reality can help us to be more patient with the process and more successful in our efforts.
  
10. Staying on topic, and requiring your child to stay on topic, when you interact about problem behavior, will eliminate a lot of discipline problems.

## **Part VII Parent Self-Evaluation:**

There is no such thing as a perfect parent. Since we have so much love for our children, it is easy to feel guilty about our perceived short-comings and beat ourselves up for our mistakes. It takes courage to look at ourselves honestly, identify the areas which might be detrimental to our discipline effectiveness and take steps to improve. Parents who are willing to do so deserve a great deal of respect, and are the most effective parents.

Everyone struggles with parenting to some degree, even the parents who appear to have the optimal situation in which to parent their children. Why?

**Parenting is a complex, unpredictable job for which most people are not well-prepared to begin with.** There seems to be a common belief that when our children come along we should already know how to parent well, as if parenting by instinct and personal experience is sufficient. For many people, their personal experience merely teaches them what not to do, and relying on instinct results in responding to their children based on **how they feel** at the time.

Additionally, our world is constantly changing, requiring that parents adjust their discipline strategy to address those changes and be able to deal with issues that didn't previously exist. For example, the internet wasn't a part of everyone's life when they were children, but nowadays it is hard to find anyone

who doesn't use or have involvement with the internet in some way. That means most parents don't have an example to follow, good or bad, of how to deal with problem behavior regarding internet use.

This section of Discipline Plan for Parents is not intended to criticize anyone, but to provide parents with a means of evaluating themselves to facilitate change. This effort will enable parents to give their children their very best, when it comes to discipline. For most of us, knowing where to start is the biggest roadblock to improvement. So please proceed with an open heart, and allow the insight you gain to provide clarity that will help you to set goals for personal change.

1. **Why are you a parent?** Some people become parents because of an unexpected pregnancy. Other people want children because they think parenthood will make them feel whole, entertain them, give them purpose, improve their marriage or provide them with someone who loves them. These people are usually disappointed and miss the whole point of parenthood.

We should become parents because we want to enjoy having a **relationship** with our children. In order have a healthy **relationship** with our children, we must be able to discipline them effectively. All children desperately need appropriate, consistent discipline. We already have the authority to discipline them based on our parental status; however, our efforts at discipline are much more effective when the relationship is healthy. In a child's mind that healthy relationship gives the parent the right to address the child's problem behavior.

What was/is your motivation for becoming a parent?

Dad:

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Mom:

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2. **How well do you manage negative emotion?** If you frequently lose control, yell or exhibit behavior you'll regret later, it will be very difficult to be a healthy parent. If you aren't satisfactorily managing depression, anxiety or any other mental or emotional issue, you will struggle to provide a healthy emotional environment for a child. Children are one of the greatest blessings on planet Earth but they can also be one of the greatest sources of frustration. If you struggle with managing negative emotion, it is imperative that you seek help before you embark on the parenting journey. Emotional self-regulation is a skill that can be learned.

What are the negative emotions you experience the most (anger, embarrassment, frustration, disappointment, resentment, discouragement, etc.)? Describe how you typically handle negative emotion:

Dad:

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Mom:

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3. **Can you pass the maturity test?** Are you able to choose to do the things you **NEED** to do before, or in some cases instead of, the things you **WANT** to do? Immature people are often late, procrastinators, lacking in self-control and have a strong need for immediate gratification. They might drink excessively, spend money when they can't afford it, spend copious amounts of time on entertainment and/or frequently make poor decisions. Individuals characterized by immaturity find it difficult to take responsibility for their mistakes and usually resort to blaming someone else when things don't go well. Being able to **delay gratification** and take responsibility for your actions is a learned skill and one of the most important signs of maturity.

During the past 12 months, have you been able to do what you **NEED** to do before, or instead of, what you **WANT** to do, most of the time? Have you been able to admit when you made a mistake? Give examples of both:

Dad:

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Mom:

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4. **Do you live a wholesome lifestyle?** Do you have good morals and values? Do you work hard? Do you follow the laws? Children need stability and predictability in their home environment in order to feel safe and secure. Adults who are characterized by lying, cheating, breaking the law, drinking excessively, infidelity, speaking disrespectfully to others or hurting others make poor parents because a large part of the parenting task is being a role model for our children. We cannot expect our children to exhibit positive behavior when they do not see that behavior in us on a consistent basis. Conversely, we cannot expect our children to avoid imitating the negative behaviors or attitudes that they frequently see in us.

Describe your lifestyle. What aspects of it do you consider to be positive and what aspects are negative?

Dad:

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Mom:

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5. **What is your level of commitment to parenting?** Is being a good parent a **priority** at this point in your life? Is it more important than your hobbies, friends, entertainment, work, achievements and personal appearance? Good parenting can be very labor-intensive at various times during the course of a child's life, but good parenting from the beginning makes the years that follow much easier. Eventually the child becomes an adult and leaves to establish a life of their own (that's the plan!).

Do you have goals for **yourself** as a parent? If so, do you aspire to be the best parent you can be and do what is best for your child, or are you satisfied with less than the best? It isn't possible to be a great parent if you succumb to your own selfishness. Let's be honest, **we are all self-centered to some degree by the mere fact that the body we inhabit consistently places demands on us.** Are we willing to learn to put aside our wants in order to meet the needs of our children? Remember, it is a task that is constantly changing.

Describe how you feel about parenting as a priority in your life now:

Dad:

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Mom:

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6. **How did your parents parent you? What do you want to emulate and what do you want to avoid?** Many people have been raised by parents who were lousy disciplinarians, lousy nurturers, or lousy on both counts. There are parents who are abusive and those who use their children to gratify their own needs. It's very important to take a look at what your parents did in regards to discipline and nurturing because our natural instinct will be to do what our parents did, or the extreme opposite.

Growing up in an unsafe or unhealthy environment doesn't mean you cannot be a good parent. It merely means you will need to work very hard to learn what good parenting looks like. There are parenting books, DVDs, courses and classes that provide education and guidance. Additionally, professional counseling can enable you to evaluate your own emotional health and relational skills, and address any issues that would be detrimental to your parenting.

What did your parents do that you want to imitate as you parent your children, and what do you want to avoid doing?

Dad:

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Mom:

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7. **How healthy is your relationship with your co-parent?** You may be co-parenting with your spouse or another adult, such as your child's grandparent, who helps you with a significant portion of the parenting responsibility. Your parenting partner may be the child's father, mother, step-parent, or no relation at all. Regardless of who they are, it is important to discuss the plan, come to a compromise on areas of disagreement and work together to implement the discipline strategy for each child. Teamwork is a necessity for good parenting, but nearly an impossibility when one parent is overly controlling. If you are in an unhealthy relationship with someone who is responsible for co-parenting your child, good parenting will be very difficult.

When more than one person is responsible for parenting a child, it is important that they are **mostly** in agreement on how to carry out that responsibility.

We agree about:

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We disagree about:

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8. **How well do you communicate?** Communication is likely the most common problem in all relationships. The concept is simple but actually doing it well is quite difficult. Many factors affect our ability to communicate effectively as parents including the communication skills of the adults who raised us, our thought processes, our current emotional state and our level of motivation (to communicate effectively).

Basically, good communication means being willing and able to say what we think and feel in a manner in which others are likely to understand, and to listen to what others are saying with the sole motive of hearing and understanding them. Good communication can take a great deal of effort and is often impeded by negative emotion, defensiveness, selfishness and differences in communication style and skill level.

How often do you notice difficulty in your communication with others?

What are the areas of communication YOU would like to work on?

Dad:

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Mom:

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9. **How well do you manage finances and time?** Are you financially stable?

Do you have debt and if so, what kind? Do you have a financial plan for supporting your family and eliminating debt? Are you able to manage your time and make sure **priorities** are taken care of **first?**

Obviously, being able to manage your life well is a good indication of whether you have the skills to manage parenting. Financial stress in a marriage is a major contributor to marital conflict and divorce.

Additionally, an inability to manage one's time has a negative impact on work performance and relationships at home.

Describe what you do to manage money and time:

Dad:

Money \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Time \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Mom:

Money \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Time \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

10. **What are your fears or concerns about parenting?** Will I do a good job? Will I screw up my kids? Will I hurt my kids? Will my kids disappoint me? Will I regret becoming a parent? Will my spouse be a good parent? We have no guarantees in parenting. Some parents seem to do “all the right things” and raise a child who ends up in jail or involved with drugs, but **most of the time good parenting yields a good outcome.** Some parents have emotional or mental issues that cause them to question their ability to parent such as anger control issues, depression or an addiction. Regardless of your condition or situation, you will be a better parent if you are willing to invest the time and effort to learn, and put that knowledge into action. Learning what to do and practicing perseverance in doing it, will give us the greatest potential for good results.

What are your fears and concerns?

Dad:

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Mom:

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**11. What are your outcome goals in parenting?** Many people say they want to raise a healthy, happy, well-adjusted child, but often other, less noble goals emerge. Sometimes you can see this before your very eyes at a child's sporting event. It appears that many adults are trying to get their self-esteem needs met through their child's accomplishments and they take it very personally if their child doesn't succeed. Healthy parenting goals are related to what is **best for the child**, not what the child can do for the parents or how the child can make the parents feel.

So, what is the anticipated outcome of all your parenting efforts?

**Becoming a parent means committing huge amounts of time, money and physical and emotional energy.** That is quite an investment! What do you hope to accomplish?

What are your top 3 goals related to parenting?

Dad:

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Mom:

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**Evaluate your strengths and weaknesses.** Indicate the areas you feel are your **strengths** using a + sign and your **weaknesses** using a - sign:

1. My motivation for becoming a parent:                      Dad \_\_\_              Mom \_\_\_
2. Managing my negative emotion:                      Dad \_\_\_              Mom \_\_\_
3. My maturity level:                                      Dad \_\_\_              Mom \_\_\_
4. My lifestyle:    Dad \_\_\_              Mom \_\_\_
5. My commitment to parenting:                      Dad \_\_\_              Mom \_\_\_
6. How my parents raised me:                      Dad \_\_\_              Mom \_\_\_
7. My relationship with my partner:                      Dad \_\_\_              Mom \_\_\_
8. My ability to communicate:                      Dad \_\_\_              Mom \_\_\_
9. Managing finances and time:                      Dad \_\_\_              Mom \_\_\_
10. My feelings about parenting in general:              Dad \_\_\_              Mom \_\_\_
11. My parenting goals:                                      Dad \_\_\_              Mom \_\_\_

Out of the 11 areas listed above, which one would you like to address first and what would be your first step?

Dad: \_\_\_\_\_ 1<sup>st</sup> step: \_\_\_\_\_

Mom: \_\_\_\_\_ 1<sup>st</sup> step: \_\_\_\_\_

**We cannot change the past, but we always have a choice about what we will do in the present. That's good news, because the present will have an enormous impact on our future and our children's future.**

## **Part VIII A Final Thought**

Now that you have evaluated your children's behavior, developed an Individualized Discipline Plan (IDP) for each child, communicated with your children what is expected and begun using the plan, it is important to consistently follow through with your part of the plan. Expect the following:

- You may feel discouraged at times because it seems like the plan isn't working. Set realistic expectations and do the best you can. Don't give up!
- You will need to evaluate and change each child's IDP as your child grows and changes. Don't give up!
- You and your co-parent won't always agree or have the same level of motivation to follow the plan. Don't give up!
- You may experience guilt and a sense of hopelessness sometimes as you try to make personal changes and fail. Remember that our failures are evidence that we are trying to change. Guilt and hopelessness are more appropriate for those who do not try at all. Don't give up!

Parenting your children well is an incredibly important job! Your willingness to invest your time and effort in the Discipline Plan for Parents approach is a good indicator that you are an exceptional parent, and your children are blessed to have you. Your efforts to effectively discipline your children will be a tremendous benefit to them and to their children, but remember, discipline is

only one of our roles in parenting (see Part II Understand Parent Roles and Responsibilities). **It would be pointless for someone to be an excellent disciplinarian, but inept in all the other areas of parenting.** A discipline plan, coupled with a lot of effort and commitment, will give you more time, energy and desire to pay attention to all the other important roles of being a parent.

Also, being the very best parent you can be equips you to be a part of a movement to improve the lives of all children. Whether it's one-on-one or in a group, when we can help encourage and equip other parents to be the best they can be, we've made a difference. That is a worthwhile cause!

Lastly, is it possible that ineffective parenting can be linked in some way to every social problem in our Nation today? Write down your thoughts:

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# **FORMS**

**PLAN CHECKLIST**

**FORM A CHILD DESCRIPTION**

**FORM B PROBLEM BEHAVIOR LIST**

**FORM C INDIVIDUALIZED DISCIPLINE PLAN (IDP)**

**FORM D CONSEQUENCES DESCRIPTION (4 pages)**

**FORM E REWARDS**

**FORM F EVALUATE CONSEQUENCES**

**FORM G CONSEQUENCE LOG**

**PARENT AGREEMENT REGARDING USE OF SWATS**