FAMILY RULES

RAISING RESPONSIBLE CHILDREN WITHOUT YELLING OR NAGGING

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For my parents, Saul and Juanita Kaye;
for my children;
and for Eva Kaye, mother of my first grandchild

Contents

What the king fundamentally insisted upon was that his authority should be respected. He tolerated no disobedience. He was an absolute monarch. But, because he was a very good man, he made his orders reasonable.

"If I ordered a general," he would say, by way of example, "if I ordered a general to change himself into a sea bird, and if the general did not obey me, that would not be the fault of the general. It would be my fault."

"May I sit down?" came now a timid inquiry from the little prince.

"I order you to do so," the king answered him.

—Antoine de Saint-Exupery, *The Little Prince*, 1943

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Children are not a constant joy. They are often a great deal of aggravation and worry. To help them grow into happy, self-respecting adults, we try to be patient, understanding, generous parents. Yet these virtues are not enough. They can produce irresponsible, unhappy children—unless we also show firmness, consistency, and clarity. Children need the security of clearly enforced rules before they can begin to handle freedom.

Clarity begins at home

Al and Betty have two boys, ages eight and eleven, and Betty's fifteen-year-old daughter from a previous marriage. At times, any one of the three children can make Al and Betty feel frustrated and angry; more often, though, the feeling these parents are left with is worry.

"If only we could be sure that they knew how to take care of themselves," Al says. "This is not the world we grew up in. Everything today seems so much more catastrophic, so much less certain."

Betty observes her daughter Cathy's friends: "They aren't realistic. Sometimes they don't seem to believe that they have full lives ahead of them to look forward to."

Because they are sensitive to the confusion and pressure their children experience away from home, Al and Betty have tried to create a relaxed, low-pressure atmosphere at home. They are not interested in punishing the children. Unfortunately, they often wind

up nagging them instead. Look what happens, for example, when the family comes down for breakfast one morning:

"Whose night was it for dishes?" Al nods toward the full sink and the unwashed pots and pans on the counter. He will try not to get upset, though he knows that his patience has limits.

"Mine, I guess" is eleven-year-old Doug's reply. "I'll do them after school."

"He'll have some excuse by then," mutters Betty. "It's always the same: I get home at five, the dishes from the day before are still piled up, whoever was supposed to do them is outside somewhere, and I have to wash them before I can make dinner."

MISTAKE: Al says, "You're supposed to do them after dinner, Doug. Not the next day. Immediately after dinner, you understand?"

"I couldn't, Dad. I had to finish my book report."

This familiar excuse does not satisfy Al. "If you had so much homework, how were you able to watch TV last night?"

Doug has an answer to that, too. Finally, Al lays down the law: "Listen to me. Those dishes better be done before your mother gets home today, or else! Do you understand?"

BETTER: Al and Betty could announce that from now on, anyone whose night it is to do the dishes may not use the telephone or television until the kitchen has passed inspection. Anyone who disobeys this rule will lose TV and phone privileges for twenty-four hours. The "or else" becomes clear, specific, and enforceable.

MISTAKE: As the boys get ready for school, Betty hears Doug calling Brad stupid.

"Doug," she complains, "I've told you a hundred times not to call your brother names. When are you going to stop being such a brat? And I don't like you wearing that faded shirt."

BETTER: Betty should have a standard penalty for name-calling—for example, a ten-cent fine. (Never call your children names yourself; their self-esteem depends on your respect.) As for the faded shirt, Betty should have a rule about what the child can wear to school and enforce it, not merely complain. If she doesn't have a rule, that means the choice is the child's; again, she shouldn't complain about it.

MISTAKE: Al stomps upstairs. "Get up, Cathy. It's seven-thirty. You're going to be late for school."

"I don't feel well."

"You don't feel well because you didn't get to sleep early enough. You should have thought of that last night, while you were driving around with those scuzzy friends of yours. How much beer did you drink?"

"Leave me alone, will you?" Cathy yells.

Al's patience, stretched thin by the daily argument about the dishes, and even thinner because he overheard Betty's impatience with Doug, finally bursts: "You're grounded tonight. I'm sick of you not coming home when you're supposed to." Cathy makes no reply.

Betty can foresee the whole scenario that will unfold this evening. Cathy will argue about the time she was supposed to be home last night, what time she actually came in, why she did not call ("I didn't want to wake you up!"), and why it is unfair to ground her. In the end, because Betty and Al have a party to go to—and will be afraid of Cathy sneaking out after they leave, they will let her off with another warning. Al and Betty will probably not fight about this until later at night, when Cathy is once again out past her curfew ("It's not a school night!") and when Al, anticipating Betty's criticism of him, will accuse her of not being firm enough. (She'll wince when he says, "She's your daughter.") Then they will discuss Doug and Brad, and the dishes that Doug will not have washed, and the bicycles, which were left out all night in the rain, and the concerned notes from Brad's teacher, and the boys' constant bickering that drives Betty crazy. ("They don't do it around me," Al will say, "or I just whack 'em both." "When are you ever around?" will be her response, and the battle will escalate.)

This book is designed to teach all parents to stop nagging, stop complaining, stop yelling, stop growing frustrated with their kids and then with each other, and even to stop whacking. The secret is clear communication and sensitivity to children's feelings, combined with firm, consistently enforced rules.

Al and Betty obviously care about their children, but they are simply not clear enough about their expectations. They rely on the meaningless "or else." They don't state specific consequences of misbehavior and follow through with them.

On the other hand, they miss opportunities to be constructive, to be sensitive, to instill confidence. Doug's book report, which his father could have read and praised, is drowned in Al's annoyance about the dishes. In Betty's frustration about Doug's name-calling, she winds up calling him a name. As both parents grow frustrated, tense, and angry, they have little energy or warmth left over for any of the three children.

The label "overly permissive" applies to parents who set few limits on their children's behavior. The children of permissive parents generally make more and more demands on them, and the parents capitulate—until they reach their breaking point. At that point the parents scream and yell, attack the children emotionally and sometimes physically, apologize and revert to permissiveness. Unfortunately, despite all they are "getting away with," these children often do not get the sense of security and acceptance that every child needs. They grow up to be, at best, unpleasant, and, at worst, seriously disturbed.

At the opposite extreme is the "authoritarian" parent, who has strict rules for the sake of having strict rules and who exacts obedience for the sake of having obedient children, even when there is no reason for concern about the potential disobedience. This parent tends to use punishments that are more severe than necessary to get the children to conform. Authoritarian parents rule by fear rather than by love. Some children of authoritarian parents become passive, withdrawn, ineffectual adults; others are hostile and aggressive; many become authoritarian parents themselves.

Being firm

Quite separate from these two extremes—not a half-and-half mixture but a type distinct from either the permissive or the authoritarian parent—is the "authoritative" type. Authoritative parents are firm and clear about issues that are important for the child's safety, development, and respect for the rights of others. But they are not interested in unnecessarily strict controls. Based on studies by Professor Diana Baumrind, a University of California psychologist, we know that authori*tative* parents raise more responsible, independent, and competent children than either permissive or authori*tarian* parents. (In this book, I shall call

authoritative parents *clear* parents, because the word *authoritative* looks too much like *authoritarian*.)

I think the biggest difference among these types of parents is in how certain they are that they are right. *Authoritarian* parents are quite certain (or at least act certain) that they are always right. Their word should be law. *Overly permissive* parents feel helpless: Resigned to not knowing what is best for their children, they cave in to the pressure of the moment. *Clear* parents don't feel helpless, but they don't feel infallible either. They can be convinced by their children about many issues, through reasonable discussions. On certain issues, however, the parents are prepared to set limits. They will change the rules as their children's needs change. They are more interested in being rational than in always being right.

Many permissive parents are inspired by all the best intentions. They are bending over backward to avoid being authoritarian. They are trying to show respect for the child's independent judgment. They want to generate an atmosphere of equality and democratic decision-making. Those are worthwhile goals, but only for certain kinds of family decisions (what restaurant to go to, for example, or what book to read at bedtime). When more important concerns are involved (health, safety, education, responsibility to others), a family cannot work as a democracy. It has to be organized as a hierarchy, with the more competent members—the parents—at the top. At the same time, the structure has to be flexible enough to acknowledge the child's growth and increasing competence. It has to permit open, supportive communication between parent and child. It has to emphasize the fundamental task of parents: not to control children's lives but to enhance the development of young people who will soon control their own lives.

A built-in paradox. Chances are, this is not the first book you have read on being a good parent. If it is not, then you have already encountered many of the ideas in Part II, about building self-confidence and competence. Part I, about restrictions and discipline, may be new to you. But the two parts of the job go together. Parents who nag, complain, and fail to make clear, enforceable rules inevitably undermine their children's self-esteem.

This book is about both aspects of parenthood: the restrictive part and the constructive part. It is especially about how to weave together both roles, without sacrificing either part of the job for the sake of the other.

At the root of parents' concern is a built-in paradox, for in all children, three psychological needs conflict with one another.

1. They need *attention* from their parents. They need to be stimulated and they need to be responded to. They need affection, praise, and adult models with whom they can identify. They need to know that their parents care about them, and they need someone wiser than themselves to monitor their growth and changing needs. But all this attention conflicts with the next need:

2. They need *autonomy*: This requires more and more independence as they grow older. Children must gradually acquire a feeling of being responsible for themselves, along with the feeling that their parents want them to be so. The process of achieving autonomy begins in infancy. It cannot be suddenly thrust upon the child at age eighteen or later. Unfortunately, the need for autonomy conflicts directly with the next equally essential need:

3. Children need *limits*. They need the security of knowing that someone more competent than themselves is in charge. They lack the knowledge or experience to make certain decisions. They also need to know that someone cares. Parents who don't set limits, who act as though their children's behavior does not matter, imply that the children themselves don't matter to them. Another reason children need limits-perhaps the most important reason-is that they need a structure in which to "be good," that is, to be able to behave in such a way that they can feel good about themselves.

The conflict among these three needs can only be resolved if we realize that restricting children goes hand in hand with building strengths within them.

Being constructive

The first part of this book is about the job of being restrictive; the second part is about being constructive. Since both parts are absolutely essential to being a parent, I wish it were possible for you to read both parts of the book at once. Building up children's skills and self-confidence, the subject of Part II, is really the rationale for the system of rules and discipline described in Part I. This section briefly summarizes that rationale.

Building in self-esteem. Most of the parents I know would list among their deepest hopes for their children:

Motivation: That their children strive to achieve the best they are capable of, in school, in outside activities, and later in their chosen walks of life.

Decency: That they grow up to be "good people," earning respect for their humanity and trustworthiness, not just their achievements.

Self-preservation: That they manage to traverse the obstacle course of adolescence and young adulthood without succumbing to drugs, delinquency, unsavory friendships, depression, and other self-destructive detours.

Self-esteem: That they feel good about themselves.

The way to help children toward *all four* of these goals is to concentrate on the last one. This is because the first three can only be built into your children indirectly. The motivation for achievement--in school, work, sports, the arts, or community affairs has to be built into a person. Positive human values, and the resources with which to care for others, also have to be built in. So does the instinct for self-preservation.

The first three goals come fairly naturally to a child or young person who is high in self-esteem. A person with good self-esteem feels: "I am competent—if I work hard, I can succeed" (motivation); "I am a good person" (decency); "My loved ones value me and see me as someone special, so I should take care of myself" (self-preservation).

With low self-esteem—with doubts about one's competence, worth, or importance to loved ones—it is difficult to be motivated, decent, and self-preserving. Many people low in self-esteem do poorly in school and in later work. Others become high achievers but have personality problems that annoy and alienate the people who work or live with them. Still others with low self-esteem are well liked and appreciated, yet they turn against themselves through alcoholism, drug abuse, eating disorders, or other psychological problems.

Since you are certain to have an enormous effect upon your child's self-esteem, it is your best ally in helping to enhance the

child's achievements, personal qualities, and ability for self-preservation.

Imagine that your child is in his or her* early teens and is offered a ride home from a party by an acquaintance who has had too much to drink. Will he get in the car? Or imagine that someone offers him a little pill and assures him that it will provide a terrific high with no side effects. Will he try it? If he believes that his life is worthwhile and that he has a bright future, and if he knows how important he is to you, he is likely to say, "No, thanks."

It is the young people with little self-esteem who are willing to risk their lives and the lives of others for a moment's pleasure, or to bring an unwanted life into the world, or to throw away their educational prospects. Parents who devote too much energy to worrying about those dire possibilities-for example, trying to crack down on drugs while doing nothing to help their children feel good about themselves--generally do more harm than good.

This book is based on the premise that our children's success and happiness will depend, ultimately, upon what we *build into them*—in the form of motivation, intelligence, and moral character—rather than what we *lay on them* in the form of specific demands. Yet we do have to demand that they behave in certain ways, and not in other ways, when they are young; and the clarity of those rules plays an essential part in helping them grow up to be self-controlled, self-motivated, self-respecting.

How can you build children's self-esteem? It depends upon their age and the kinds of activities they engage in, but two principles stand out as most important. One is to use praise, as sincerely, as specifically, and as often as possible. Negative criticism undermines self-esteem. The ideas in Part II should help you convey your values and motivate your children while *increasing* their self-esteem.

The other principle is to listen. Sometimes it takes a special effort to listen compassionately, understandingly, and nonjudgmentally, especially to a family member. (We all know people who are excellent listeners at work or with friends but who

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* Almost everything in this book applies equally to girls as to boys. It is awkward to keep saying "he or she," however, so I will sometimes make use of the generic "he" where the child's gender does not matter.

fail dismally with their own parents, spouses, or children.) However, there is something even more important than understanding your children. On certain points, it is essential to make *them* understand *you*.

The job of restriction

The problem with the restrictive part of our job is that we love our children. We want life to be easy for them. We want to protect them from the ruthless world outside the home. We do not want a ruthless world inside the home. We want to be kind, generous, understanding parents. We want our children to love us. At the same time, we need to ensure our children's compliance with basic rules, and that means establishing a certain degree of authority.

This dilemma faces parents all across America: rich and poor; married, single, divorced, and remarried; black, white, and of every ethnic group. We place a high value on individual freedom. We have a distaste for authoritarian regimes of any kind. Yet, as parents, we do sometimes have to discipline our children.

Unfortunately, many of us feel so ambivalent about the whole idea of discipline that we do it in an unsystematic, even arbitrary, way-and we often find that it only makes our children's behavior worse. This is because we garble the messages that we are trying to send them.

Part of our ambivalence is that while we want our children to obey certain rules, we don't want them to do it because they are coerced. We want them to follow our rules *of their own free will*! We are not satisfied with reluctant compliance: We want *willing* compliance—children who come home on time because *they* think it is important. As the psychoanalyst Bruno Bettetheim expressed the dilemma to *our* parents:

> Life was much easier for my parents: they knew what a child was supposed to do, and he had jolly well better do it. But things are different with us. We want our children to live according to their own lights, to develop their personalities in freedom. This we do because we believe in freedom and know that coercion is bad. At the same time, we want their development to lead to goals we have set for them. Fearful of spoiling their spontaneity and happiness, we refrain from imposing our wishes on them; yet we want to end up with the same results as though we had.*

The dream child would respect our rules, would want to abide by them just because he sees how reasonable they are. We are afraid to force our children to do things they do not really want to do, and we are afraid to prevent them from doing things they do want to do.

A system of rules. In Part I of this book, I am going to show you how to make and enforce a set of rules consistent with your own values. I assume that each set of parents will have their own ideas about what limits they need to place on their children's freedom. This system will work for any family. It deals with *how* to be firm and consistent, *how* to translate your specific concerns into rules. The question of *what* rules to make will be left up to you.

You may be liberal or conservative, modern or old-fashioned, permissive or strict. My task is to teach you to translate your own values into clear and consistent rules: enforceable rules that provide freedom to live together and grow.

I have no opinion as to whether your daughter should be home by 5:00, 9:00, midnight, or whenever she pleases. Your rule must depend on her age, your neighborhood, your lifestyle, and the degree to which you can trust her judgment. I have no opinion as to whether your son should be required to do his homework before he turns on the TV, whether he should be allowed to invite friends over without asking you first or to smoke dope on school nights. Instead, I shall try to help *you decide* what rules to set up for your family.

If you already have a few firm rules, if your children know what the rules are, if you follow through with consistent consequences when the rules are occasionally tested, and if you don't nag or complain about other things, then you are not having trouble with your kids. You may skip to Part II. On the other hand, perhaps the principles make sense to you intellectually but you simply have not been able to put them into practice. Do you find yourself being inconsistent about rules, unable to enforce them, unable to monitor whether the kids are obeying them or not? Or

* Bruno Bettelheim, *Dialogues with Mothers*, New York: Free Press, 1962, p. 11.

perhaps you are getting into power struggles about things that are not really important. Part I is for you.

This system has helped many different kinds of families. Some were families whom I counseled when their kids were only Mildly obnoxious; others were in deep trouble. I cannot claim much originality for the system. Every day, thousands of family counselors help parents to draw up lists of rules for their children. If your family is having a crisis, then you need professional help (see chapters 20 and 21). But I decided to write this book when I realized that for every family in need of professional counseling, there are dozens of other parents who can put a system of rules to work *before* a crisis occurs, with far less emotional and financial cost.

I put the restrictive part first because I think other books on child-rearing don't say enough about it. However, you need to be *both* restrictive and constructive. The principal purpose of this book is to show you how to integrate the constructive part with the restrictive part of your job.

In a nutshell

This book is not radical or avant-garde. It is not based on new discoveries. It is based on fundamental, well-established principles of psychology, child development, and family relations. Its three most important principles can be stated quite simply:

1. Children, like adults, will make responsible decisions, protect themselves from harm, and work to achieve their potential only if they have a strong sense of self-esteem.
2. Children, like adults, respond poorly to criticism of their personalities. They respond much better to suggestions on how they can change specific behavior to get specific results.
3. Children, like adults, choose to act in ways that lead to pleasant consequences and not to unpleasant consequences.

I don't know any psychologists who would disagree with those principles. For that reason, I will not be citing many other authors to support the statements in this book. At the end of Part I and each subsequent chapter, however, you will find a list of suggested books

for further reading. (In making these suggestions, I have limited myself to full-length books, currently in print, which contain additional material on topics I may have treated too briefly. Each book is listed only once, though most could have been listed in connection with several chapters. Unless otherwise indicated, the recommended books are addressed primarily to parents, rather than to psychologists or educators.)

Is this book different from the dozens of other self-help books for parents? It is different in two major ways. In one way, it is more specific. It avoids generalities, which make sense while one is reading a book but Are not so easy to translate into practical measures. As much as possible, I shall present *methods* for making and enforcing rules, for making children feel good about themselves, for listening to them and getting them to listen to you.

In another way, this book is *less* specific than any other book I know, because the methods offered have nothing to do with the content of your rules, punishments, or values. The system helps *you* decide on *your* rules, helps you enforce them, helps you talk with your children about those rules and about your preferences and concerns. You can use this system whether you are conservative, liberal, religious, agnostic, or "none of the above."

Later in the book, to be sure, many of my own attitudes will be obvious. It would not be possible to hide them, nor would you want me to hide them. They are derived partly from professional experience and partly from my own successes and mistakes as a parent. But what my wife and I think is right for our kids may not be right for yours. What you need is a system for making and enforcing your own family rules, based on your own values.

PART I.

A System of Clear, Firm Family Rules

Part I deals with the restrictive aspect of parenting. Not all children require written rules with specific consequences, but if one of your children does, then you need to write a set of rules for each child in the family. Although two parents can have different opinions about most things without creating any problems for their children, they have to come to a definite agreement about rules, because rules are the things parents insist upon.

You should start with as few rules as possible, with consequences that are relatively small. Then you can add rules as needed, and you can escalate the consequences until they are sufficiently persuasive. After an overview of the system in chapter 2, chapters 3 through 10 deal with making rules, enforcing them, and changing them over time.

Throughout this part of the book, I deal with the dilemma of how parents can be clear without being authoritarian: how to be firm about certain things and open about others, how to rule by love and respect rather than by antagonism and fear.

CHAPTER TWO

Restrict to Make Free

This chapter presents the main ideas of Part I. The most important idea is that children need restrictions in order to be able to handle freedom.

A developing child's proper goal is to acquire the liberty that adults enjoy. Adults in a free society have a great deal of freedom, as long as we obey the law and respect the rights of others. Infants begin with no respect for the law or for other people's rights—and with no freedom. They learn how to be free, within the law and in cooperation with other people. Their parents' long-term goal, therefore, is not to control the child. It is to *relinquish control* to him, gradually, sensibly, and sensitively.

Defining children's and parent's goals that way—in terms of freedom—leads us to three principles:

1. At every age, make the limits on your children's freedom clear to them. Too much freedom is scary. They are afraid of hurting themselves or others. A few well-defined restrictions are reassuring. Children often are uncomfortable when they do not know what the rules are. It makes them unsure where they stand with other people. Do others, particularly their parents, care what they do? Will others, particularly their parents, think them good or bad? It is just as important for parents to be restrictive enough as not to be overly restrictive.

2. Allow more freedom only when your children demonstrate that they can handle the freedom they already have. Greater autonomy is the child's reward for respecting the rules.

3. When you have to punish a child in order to make it clear that your rules are to be taken seriously, the best kinds of punishment to use are those involving extra restrictions. Children's disobedience usually indicates that they are not mature enough to handle the freedom they have and that they need a little more restriction to feel secure.

Ways of restricting freedom are different at different ages: A seven-year-old might be sent to his room, a twelve-year-old grounded, a seventeen-year-old denied the use of the car. Having an allowance, being allowed to have a friend sleep over, watching television, and talking on the telephone are all forms of freedom that children cherish.

Some frequently used methods of punishment that are not restrictions of freedom include spankings, humiliation, and deprivation of basic needs, especially food. I don't advocate any of those methods. Such methods cheat parents out of the opportunity to get across that important message about freedom. Furthermore, they aren't effective. And they often create worse problems than the ones the parents are trying to solve.

With these principles in mind, you can become a perfectly clear parent with a minimum of effort and aggravation, freeing yourself to concentrate on the more constructive aspect of the job, which is to build competence and self-confidence.

How to be a clear parent: Eight steps

It may sound like an ambitious task, proposing to teach you how to change your whole manner of dealing with problem behavior in your children. We can break the system down into eight steps:

1. Read this entire book, and discuss it with your spouse or partner. (If you're a single parent, discuss it with a friend.) If you're not having any problems with your children right now, then you don't need written rules; concentrate on the ideas in Part II, and save what you learn from Part I until it is needed.

2. If you are concerned about certain behavior problems, make a list of rules for each child, based on those current problems. Start with as few rules as possible; you can add more later as needed. (It is only the "standing" rules that need to be written down. Those are the ones I shall emphasize in this book, because once you learn how to make enforceable written rules, the one-time spoken rules, such as "We're not going to the beach until the family room has been cleaned up," will come naturally to you.)

3. For each rule, think of an appropriate consequence to impose if the rule is violated. ("If Sandra doesn't wash her dishes before going off to call her friends, she loses phone privileges for twenty-four hours.") A consequence is a specific punishment that the child knows about in advance. Start with the smallest consequence that you think might be sufficient to enforce the rule.

4. Formally present the list of rules to your children. Some rules will apply differently to each child, depending on their ages and individual needs.

5. Don't panic if the children test your rules. You can expect them to. Show them that you are serious by following through with the consequences you promised.

6. Amend the rules as necessary.

7. Escalate the consequences as necessary. Start with the smallest increase that you think might get the message across.

8. When your children catch you nagging them or complaining about actions that you have not dealt with in your written rules, admit your error. Apologize, and either leave them alone or establish a new rule that will apply in the future.

Each of those steps will be discussed and illustrated in the following chapters. The first thing to make clear is the distinction between *rules* and *preferences*.

Rules versus preferences

Rules are the things you insist upon. Each rule states what a child must do (or must not do) and what sort of consequence will follow if he ignores that rule. *Every rule involves consequences.*

Preferences, on the other hand, are essentially suggestions; although you may try hard to convince a child to follow those preferences, they are ultimately matters of the child's own discretion.

Now you can see how the restrictive part of this system and the constructive part (Part II) are each indispensable to the other. In making your rules clear, you provide firmness and security. At the same time, you make it equally clear which of your statements are merely preferences, not rules. That builds the children's sense of having choices and having to take responsibility for their own decisions. By drawing up a set of written rules, stated clearly and enforced consistently, you get a double benefit: Your children follow the rules, and in the areas where you are not making rules, they learn to handle freedom.

These two areas of your children's lives will be treated quite differently from each other in this book. Part II deals mainly with the area outside your rules, where you have preferences but allow your children to make their own decisions. That is the area in which you give them most of their moral education, social skills, positive feelings about themselves and others. Rules and discipline, our concern in Part I, have little to do directly with right and wrong or with whether the child is good or bad in any moral sense. Their purpose is merely to provide a structure. They are for safety, convenience, family harmony, peace of mind. They guarantee the child some experience at meeting the parents' expectations, while becoming less necessary as the child grows up.

You may think that you already have rules, but I'll bet you don't. You don't have rules unless every rule and its consequence are written down and clearly understood, and unless you always follow through.

MISTAKE: Joe and Patty claim to have three rules for their eleven- and thirteen-year-old boys. The boys "must" do their homework before they are allowed to watch TV in the evening. (Actually, all that happens when the children decide to put off their homework and turn on the TV is that sometimes they get away with it and sometimes they get yelled at.) They "must" practice the piano half an hour every day. (If they miss a day, they had better have a good excuse; if they miss a lot of days, they get yelled at.) They "must" cut the grass every week. (Their father keeps nagging at them until they do it; when he gets tired of nagging, they get yelled at.) This is not a system of rules; it is a system of nagging and yelling.

BETTER: Joe and Patty decide that they can be more explicit about a homework rule: The boys are not allowed in front of the TV until they have shown their homework to one of the parents. If either of the boys tries to watch TV before showing his homework, he must go to bed.

They can also eliminate the nagging and yelling about the lawn. If the grass is not mowed by noon on Saturday, neither boy gets his allowance that week. Dad announces that it is not his responsibility to remind them to do their chore.

The parents decide that they cannot insist on the piano lessons, since both boys have shown a lack of enthusiasm for practicing. They make a rule about practicing, with the only consequence being that the lessons will stop if the boys do not practice. Of course, the parents would prefer to have the lessons continue, but not at the price of nagging and yelling. They tell the boys their reasons for valuing music lessons so highly, and they say that they will stop paying for lessons if the amount of practicing the teacher recommends is not done each week. They will still sometimes remind the boys to practice, but they will not take the responsibility upon themselves to ensure that the boys meet their requirement. They leave up to each boy the decision about whether to continue the lessons, on those terms.

If these children were yours, you might make different decisions. That is why I am not interested in telling you what rules to make or what consequences you should impose. Instead, you can apply this system to your own values and concerns, and to the specific problems that come up with your own children.

The differences between rules and preferences. Rules are the things you insist upon, whereas preferences are the rest of the things you have opinions about. There are several important differences.

- Mom and Dad don't have to have the same preferences; they do have to agree on rules. One parent may think pierced ears are terrible while the other thinks they are okay. The child can be aware of both parents' views and make her own decision. If either parent wanted to make a *rule* about it, however ("All girls in this family must [or must not] have their ears pierced before age fifteen"), he or she would first have to get the other parent to agree.
- Preferences do not have to be consistent; rules do. Children can live fairly comfortably with the fact that we adults are often inconsistent or changeable in our preferences. I might state flatly that video games are an awful waste of a child's time yet turn right around and have a great time playing Cosmoblast with my son. He will infer something like "Adults are often inconsistent in what they claim to approve or disapprove of," which is true. But I must not be that way with rules. With rules, I have to be consistent.
- A rule has to be perfectly clear, whereas a preference can be conveniently vague. To a child who is going outside to play, you might say, "Don't go too far." That is only a preference, because it leaves the meaning of "too far" to the child's own judgment. If you want to make it a rule, you have to say, "Don't leave the yard" or "Don't cross the street" or "Don't leave town." Similarly, saying, "Don't go too far," to your teenage daughter, referring to her boyfriend, would only be a preference. A rule—if you could enforce it—would have to state explicitly whether turning out the lights is "too far," whether taking off clothes is "too far," and so forth.
- The most important difference is that when rules are ignored, the child is going to be punished; when preferences are ignored, you may get upset, you may give a lecture or burst into tears, but there is really no consequence for the child unless you decide to make a new rule for the future. How strongly do you feel about pierced ears? Strongly enough to punish your child for going against your wishes? If not, then it isn't going to be a rule. And it doesn't have to be a problem either, unless you continue to make an issue of it.

Many of the difficulties parents get into with so-called "problem children" can be traced to the parents' failure to make that last distinction clear. The children are yelled at or nagged at about all kinds of things, but they do not get the idea that their parents care much more about some of those things than others. They do not see the difference between "opinions about" and "insist upon." With a set of rules, you make that special set of concerns crystal-clear, thus freeing the whole family from the destructive burden of nagging, arguing, and resentment.

Every rule should be written down. You do not have to think of every rule you might need, in advance. (In fact, the fewer rules, the better!) You can add them to the list as they become necessary. But no child should be punished for actions that are not explicitly prohibited. This means that the first time your fifteen-year-old helps herself to a beer from the refrigerator, or the first time your two-year-old draws on the wall, if that kind of behavior is not mentioned in the list of rules, you should tell the child not to do it again, but you should not punish her. Show the child that you are writing, "No alcoholic beverages," with a consequence, or "No drawing, painting, or marking on anything except drawing paper," with a consequence. (Don't worry about two-year-olds not being able to read; they will remember what you tell them it says.) And the *next* time it happens, you punish the child as promised.

Liberty versus Probation

The system proposed in the following chapters is based on the principle that children should lose freedom when they act irresponsibly, gain freedom when they demonstrate responsibility.

This involves two fundamentally different modes of life, which I call *Liberty* and *Probation*. Each mode has its own set of rules and consequences, and there are also rules about how a child can move from one mode to the other.

Liberty. Within the Liberty mode, parents assume their children are following the rules and telling the truth, unless evidence arises to the contrary.

In a free society, none of us is entirely free; the law restricts us, and there are laws that restrict some of us more than others. There are laws applying only to psychologists, other restrictions applying to physicians, broadcasters, beauticians, union members, government employees, and many other groups. Minors are subject to the greatest restrictions. They are denied the rights to vote, to drive, to buy liquor, to choose not to go to school, and to refuse medical treatment.

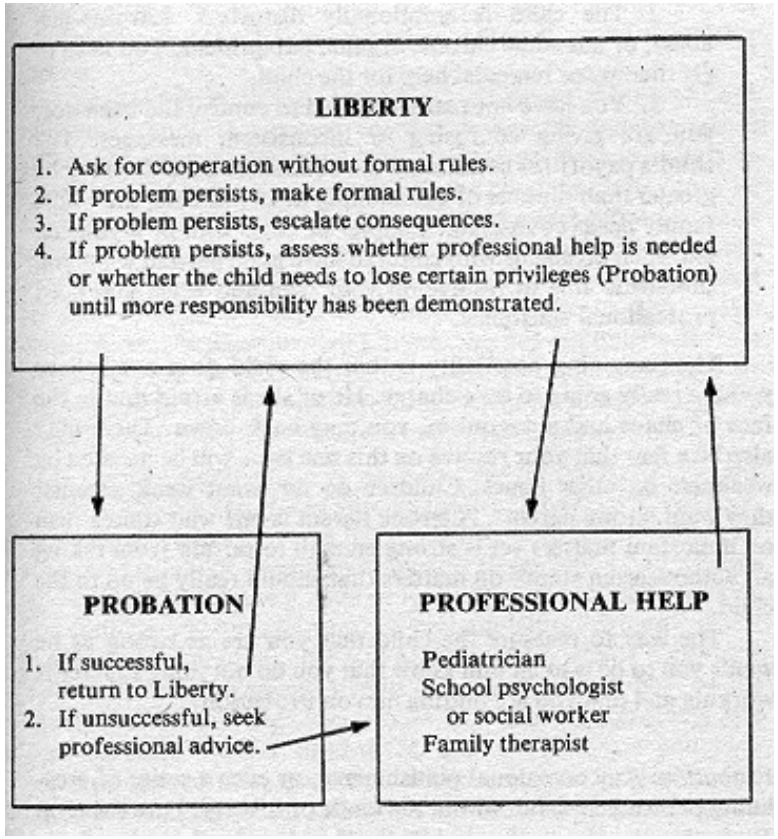
Despite all the restrictions of the law, liberty is still a great privilege. If we abuse it, we lose it. The idea behind Liberty for children is the same: They can enjoy a great latitude, trust, and freedom of choice within the boundaries created by certain rules. Their parents must make those rules clear and consistent, and keep amending them as the children mature.

As the diagram indicates, if the first consequences you apply don't change the child's behavior, you can escalate the consequences. Still within the Liberty mode, you experiment to find out how much restriction the child seems to need.

If the child continues to repeat the undesirable behavior despite escalating punishment, something must be wrong-with the child, with the rules, with you, or with all three.

Problem assessment. Suppose those minor punishments (the routine consequences listed in your rules) are not working. The decision about what to do next requires a family meeting in which everyone tries to discover any reason why the child *cannot* do what you expect of him. It is not a question of why he *chooses* not to obey but of whether there is any physical or psychological impediment. Here are some possible circumstances in which you would *not* impose Probation:

1. The child is physically ill. In that case, he should be treated as in "Sick Bay" (a temporary mode requiring a special set of rules) until well enough to return to the Liberty mode.



2. The child is emotionally disturbed, learning-disabled, or has some chronic organic impairment. You need to get therapy or remedial help for the child.

3. You have not really resolved to control the behavior; you are giving confusing or inconsistent messages. The child's payoff for continuing the obnoxious behavior may be greater than the cost of abandoning it. In this case, the whole family needs counseling. Chapter 21 deals with how you can tell when problems with children have gone beyond what you should be able to resolve on your own and when you need professional assistance. The remaining possibility is that the child does not believe you are really going to take charge. He or she is afraid that in the face of chaos and antagonism, you may back down. There may also be a fear that your resolve on this one issue win be negated by weakness on other issues. Children do not want weak parents; they want strong parents. A strong parent is one who stands firm on important matters yet is strong enough to refrain from taking an authoritarian stance on matters that should really be up to the child.

The way to reassure the child that you are as strong as he wants you to be is to let him know that you do not think Liberty is working and that you are putting him on Probation.

Probation. Any occasional punishments, or even a series of escalating punishments, fall within the mode of Liberty. I use the term *Probation* to refer to the times when freedom has been lost for a period; the child can no longer simply obey the regular rules, and he must earn his way back to Liberty by *proving* himself under more restrictive conditions.

Probation is a totally different mode of family life because the burden of proof is now on the child. He will have to regain your trust before he can return to Liberty. Chapter 9 is devoted to Probation.

Problem reassessment. If the extra restrictions of Probation are not sufficient incentive to the child, and if you are not willing to accept a standoff, then you need to consider the same four possibilities listed under Problem assessment above. There is a third mode, Crisis, which combines the third and fourth of those choices: professional help and (if so advised) an even tougher stance.

In chapter 20, "Crisis," we shall talk about the ToughLove movement and other parent support groups for families whose teenagers are out of control. The purpose of these groups is to make an adolescent dissatisfied with the condition into which he has gotten himself and to make sure he knows how he got in as well as how to get out. At this point, the parents absolutely refuse to make any accommodation to the child—refuse to be victimized by abusive behavior—until there have been radical changes. The Crisis mode, besides involving more onerous conditions for the child, requires an intensive commitment of time and energy by the parents to solve a severe problem. We hope you are not going to need chapter 20. This book is a crisis *prevention* system.

Are you really going to have to "get tough"? No. For the majority of children whose parents resolve to be clear about rules and consequences, the years from birth to age eighteen will consist of a total of about seventeen years and eleven and a half months of Liberty, plus maybe a week or two, total, of Probation. Only a few families will have to resort to Probation more extensively. Of those, a very small number will actually reach what I consider a Crisis. Your children will live in the Liberty mode most of the time. The value of the other modes is to provide something you can fall back upon if needed. So long as both you and your children realize that the other modes exist, as viable but less desirable alternatives to Liberty, you won't need the Probation mode much or the Crisis mode at all.

You are also likely to find that you need fewer rules after reading this book than you had before and that you seldom have to punish your children. A few clearly stated rules, consistently enforced with mild consequences, are far more effective than a long list of do's and don'ts maintained only by nagging, or by ignoring misbehavior for a while, then cracking down with an excessive punishment.

CHAPTER THREE

Who Makes the Rules ?

Parental clarity involves three types of "management" decisions: writing rules in the first place, deciding on punishments when the rules are violated, and amending rules if they are not working as intended. In all three cases, *the parents together* have to make these decisions. Even if you disagree about other things, you must be a united front with respect to the rules.

There are some circumstances in which one parent may delegate authority to the other—for example, when a challenge to the rules has to be dealt with immediately by whichever parent is home at the time. Even then, however, it is really a decision of the management team (one parent agrees to support the other's ruling, whatever it might be), and the children must not be allowed to undermine the team's authority by appealing to the one who was not around at the time the ruling was made.

A child's *parents*, for this purpose, are not necessarily the mother and father as defined by law (the biological or adoptive parents). They may be mother and stepfather, father and stepmother, one parent and a live-in partner, foster parents, even grandparents or grown brothers or sisters if the original parents are dead or absent. What matters is that they are the adults whom the child recognizes as having parental responsibilities. Even if only one of them is related to the child, that parent's spouse or partner living in the same home usually has to act as a co parent with respect to rules.

In the simple, intact family, mother and father have to make the rules together as a team. This cannot be said too often. For example, it is almost impossible for a mother to enforce a set of rules if the children's father lives in the home but has no part in creating the rules or does not back up his wife when she tries to enforce them. It is equally impossible for a father to succeed with such a system without the active participation of his wife.

Your family may not fit the standard model (mother, father, and their mutual children). If not, you will want to read chapters 17, 18, and 19, which deal with the special challenges you face. But at this point in the book, you need to decide to whom the word *parents* refers in your family.

> EXAMPLE: Sandy, a single mother, is living with her children in her parents' home. The grandparents have made some rules about their house ("No jumping on the furniture" is one), but Mother alone is the decision-maker about bedtimes, homework, fighting among the kids, and other rules affecting their welfare. Sandy's boyfriend, her parents, and her ex-husband are only consultants.

> EXAMPLE: Bill and Sue are divorced. Sue and her new husband make the rules for their home, while Bill alone makes the rules that apply when the children are visiting him.

In a divorced family with remarriages or equivalent long-term relationships, each set of partners has to make rules autonomously for their own household.

> EXAMPLE: Ron and Linda have a "his, hers, and ours" situation. His three children from a former marriage and her two children live with them, as well as the children they had together. Both parents function as a team with respect to all the children. Their *relationships* are naturally different with the individual children, but the way they make and enforce *rules* is not different.

If you are among the millions of divorced parents with new partners in our society, the commitment to move in together and cooperate in the management of a home has to mean a joint commitment to parenting, even if you aren't legally married. The issues are not legal ones. Married or not, you might be tempted to say,

"She's your daughter, so you be the parent; I just want to be her friend." That usually creates more problems than it solves.

I don't mean to say that a stepparent should try to have the kind of relationship with a stepchild that a full parent can have (see chapter 18). The role of stepparent is a different role, never taking over the natural parent's role.* But so far as enforcing rules is concerned, it is *family management teamwork* that matters, not biological ties or depth of feeling.

In other words, a team consisting of a natural parent and a stepparent should handle rules and punishments exactly as any other parents should. It is not as easy, of course. But the best ways for stepparents to communicate clear rules are the same as for natural parents. In fact, in Part II, when we take up the task of building self-esteem and competence, I shall again be saying the same thing to stepparents, foster parents, grandparents (and so forth) as to biological parents.

Regardless of how they are related to the children, some parental couples are going to have trouble agreeing on rules or punishments. That is when many couples give up the idea of teamwork. The father lets his wife deal with the children, or the mother resorts to "wait until your father gets home." *This is guaranteed to make the children act up.* If the parents can sit down together and debate the pros and cons—no matter how long it takes—so that they finally come up with an explicit written rule which both agree to enforce, and if they proceed to stick to it without undermining one another later, their children will almost always shape up.

What should you do if you can't get your partner to cooperate in this effort? Perhaps your spouse travels a great deal or feels hopelessly incapable of managing children. Don't give up. Make up a set of rules on your own as if you were a single parent, but then show them to the other parent and get at least a tacit agreement. Then you can present them to the children as coming from both of you.

The time your rule-making team needs professional help is when you cannot agree on rules or when you yourselves break the rules because you keep getting embroiled in extraneous conflicts. We shall have more to say about that in chapter 21.

* An exception is when a stepparent legally adopts the children; then they drop the "step-."

Some non-exceptions

There are certain "special" situations that can increase stress upon parents, children, or both—and which usually increase the necessity for a clear set of rules. However, these variations will not be treated as exceptional in this book, because what I have to say applies just as well to them as to all other families.

Working mothers. Historically, most mothers have also had to produce food or to earn income for their families. The mother whose only job was to manage a home on her husband's income was the exception. In recent centuries, her "privileged" position became a kind of upper-class fashion (against which women of achievement had to fight), and in our parents' generation it became a middle-class pattern. Now it is going the way of all fashions. As Dr. Spock recognized when he revised his 1945 *Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care* in 1975, methods of child-rearing that require mothers to stay home all day are no longer adequate for the majority of families.

Accordingly, I do not assume that mother and father are the only people who will be taking care of the children when they are not in school. However, no matter who else is involved in caring for your children, the rules we are concerned about in this book are the rules you, the parents, make. You may decide to ignore some of the things the baby-sitter or day-care worker handles differently than you would. You may also decide to incorporate some of his or her suggestions in your rules. And there may be other rules that are so important to you that the sitter must cooperate in enforcing them: "If you don't do it our way, we'll have to find someone else."

In loco parentis. On the other hand, what if you have the charge of someone else's children in their home, or in yours, or in a daycare center or nursery school? Or what if you are a foster parent? The methods in this book are perfectly applicable to you. Only be sure to clarify with the children's parents (or with the agency that has custody of them) where your responsibilities begin and end. The

difference between "at-home" rules and "elsewhere" rules, to be explained in the next chapter, will be particularly important for you.

Special children. No matter what is special about your children—whether they are adopted, physically or mentally handicapped, exceptionally intelligent, or emotionally disturbed—they still need rules. You are still the parents who must make the rules. Everything in this book applies to your family as much as to any other.

Some parents who feel sorry for such children, or awed by them, may unconsciously try to compensate by being overly permissive. Not only can this make the children feel even more different from other children than they are, but it also makes them feel insecure, because they are denied the structure any developing child needs.

Undoubtedly you have already learned a great deal about your particular child's special needs. Insofar as rules and discipline are concerned, *every* child has special needs. This system allows you to tailor the rules to a child's age, capability, and personality. It is flexible enough to be used with special children, too; the methods are the same.

CHAPTER FOUR

Making the Rules

Let's begin with the question of *when* you need rules. Not everything you want your children to do has to be laid down in the form of a rule. You can ask children to do things simply because they are sensible things to do ("After your bath, please hang up your towel to dry") or because they will make your life simpler ("I'd appreciate it if you'd write all my phone messages on the pad in the den"). If that doesn't work, *then* you need to translate those preferences into rules.

EXAMPLE: Dad is a contractor who works out of his home. His telephone messages are important. He has mentioned this to his children several times, but still his clients and suppliers complain in disbelief, "Didn't you get my message? Your kid said he was writing it down."

This is the time for a rule. Not for detective work to figure out which child is guilty. Not for complaining, yelling, or threatening. Dad merely tells the children calmly (after discussing the problem with Mom), "Failure to get my messages has become a big problem for me. Every message must be written on this pad. If you're not in this room when you take the call, ask the person to hold while you come in here so that you can get all the information down on the pad. The rule is, if anyone tells me they called earlier and I didn't get the message, Mom and I are not taking any messages from any of your friends for forty-eight hours."

Dad chooses the duration of punishment, forty-eight hours, after giving it some thought. It is long enough, he guesses, so that a few calls will probably come in for the children. (Even if they are home, he can tell the friend politely,

"I'm sorry, I can't call Bob to the phone tonight; we're having a problem about the phone. Call back tomorrow.") On the other hand, it is short enough not to build up a grudge. If it proves to be too short—if the kids are still careless—Dad can make it seventy-two hours next time.

In this case, Dad has decided that all the children should suffer the penalty if any one of them fails to take a message. Since the penalty is so mild, the amount of unfair "suffering" won't really do any harm. There are two advantages: Dad does not have to play detective, and it will be in the children's interest to cooperate with each other in seeing that no one forgets.

In short, when a problem develops that makes you feel like nagging, yelling, or imposing some vengeful punishment, don't. Instead, sit down with your partner and translate your most important concerns into rules.

Like Dad's rule about phone messages, every rule should be in the form "If ... then …." It states what you plan to do next time. The child can feel secure about not being punished without advance notice. And you can feel secure, too, having a rational, effective plan ready to deal with any repetition of the problem.

Logical consequences

Dr. Rudolph Dreikurs, a child psychiatrist who wrote many books for parents a generation ago, made an important point about consequences. He discussed the difference between logical and arbitrary consequences. *Logical* consequences are restrictions that have an obvious meaningful relation to the problem a parent hopes to solve. It is logical to withhold allowance from a child who has not done his chores, because you can easily point out the connection between sharing family resources and sharing family tasks

Arbitrary consequences lack that logical connection. They should be parents' second choice because they have less educational value than logical consequences. If you withhold allowance from a child who calls his sister names, you are teaching him about acceptable and unacceptable behavior in the family, but not about any direct connection between money and name-calling in the real world. A logical consequence for name-calling might be to send the child to his room; name-calling is antisocial.

Dreikurs further pointed out that the best logical consequences are *natural* consequences, which not only have a logical connection to the problem behavior but actually follow automatically upon it if the parent lets them. For example, a child leaves his bicycle unlocked in front of the house, violating a family rule. A natural consequence would be "If your bicycle is stolen, it will not be replaced."

Try to use natural consequences whenever possible. They are the best way for children to learn the contingencies of life itself, without feeling resentment against their parents.

Sometimes, however, there are no natural consequences. Suppose the child doesn't make his bed. If bed-making matters to you, then you will have to try to think of a logical consequence (for example, not being allowed to bring friends into the house, because the house is "not presentable"). Even when logical consequences are not immediately apparent, creative parents can almost always think of some sort of logical rationale. For example, taking twenty-five cents off your daughter's allowance for not making her bed would be an arbitrary consequence: but if you subtract it from her allowance and add it to her brother's for making her bed *and* his own, it becomes a logical consequence.

Sometimes natural consequences are not feasible because they are too severe. If your son misspends his bus money for the week and his school is five miles away, you may not feel he should have to walk there and back. A logical consequence might be to advance him the bus money and take it out of his allowance over the next few weeks.

Another example is a six-year-old who crosses the street without watching for cars. No parent is willing to wait for the natural consequence of that. Instead, we impose a logical consequence whenever a child of that age runs across the street without looking, whether there is a car coming or not: We suspend his or her earlier-won freedom to cross the street. Until further notice, the child has to ask permission and have an adult watching.

The same behavior in a two-year-old has no logical consequence, because the child has not yet earned the freedom to cross the street. So we have to resort to an arbitrary consequence, a spanking. The Dreikurs method is to try natural consequences first, if they are feasible. If not, then try to think of logical consequences that you can impose. Use arbitrary consequences as a last resort.

EXAMPLE: Ten-year-old Barbara is slow at getting ready for school every morning. The carpool usually has to wait for Barbara, and sometimes all the children are late for school.

Natural consequence: Leave without Barbara, if it is feasible to do so without creating other problems. Otherwise:

Logical consequence: Make Barbara go to bed earlier so she won't be so groggy in the morning.

Arbitrary consequence: Fine Barbara ten cents per minute after the time when she should be in the car. This is the least desirable method because there is no logical connection between the fine and the problem behavior.

Written rules for each child

Why do standing rules have to be written down? Because unwritten rules are never explicit enough. Even if you announce a rule explicitly at the dinner table when you have everyone's attention, the next time you remind someone of the rule, you won't word it exactly the same way. Did you say "in bed" by 9:00, or "in the bedroom" by 9:00? Did you mean "in bed, lights out" or "in bed reading"?

Many families post the standing rules on the refrigerator door. Others keep them out of sight of visitors, since they are no one's concern but the family's. Either way, I think it is a good idea to do a neat, impressive job; at least have the family member with the nicest penmanship do it, and redo the sheet whenever amendments become numerous. You may want to use extra-large sheets of paper or poster board. If someone in the family knows calligraphy, this is a chance to practice it.

It might also be a good idea to keep a copy of the rules in a safe place, in case anyone destroys the public copy. (You don't need a rule against that. It happens rarely, because even when the children may not like some of the rules, they appreciate having them written down for the sake of clarity and consistency.) As long as you have a copy of your rules, the children are going to be held responsible for them even if they "lose" the public copy. You needn't replace it unless they ask you to.

Of course, you will also make some rules that apply on a single occasion; for example, "If there is any more fighting in the back seat, we are going to turn around and go home!" or "If the stereo is turned up again, your friends will have to leave." These are not the sort of rules that one would write down, but everything else I say in this book applies just as much to single-occasion rules as to the more permanent, written rules. Once you establish credibility as a clear and consistent rule enforcer, with a written set of standing family rules, your children will respect the spontaneous, temporary rules as well.

If you write down rules for one child, you should write some for every child in the home, even if the other children are presenting no problems. Otherwise the rules will only increase the "problem child's" feeling of alienation. If he does ask, "How come George never has to …," the answer can be, "You follow the rules we make for you, and let George worry about the rules we make for him."

The rules are different for different children because of disparities in age, maturity, proven capabilities, and special needs. You will continually reassess the rules for all your children as they mature.

Following are some sample rules for a family with four children: Karen (age seventeen), Bob (thirteen), Laurie (ten), and Billy (eight). The list for this family is organized in eight categories, which you may find helpful as you think about areas of concern in your own family. However, there is nothing sacred about these categories; there could just as well be two, or five, or only one category. Don't feel that you have to have rules about any of these particular issues; every family is different.

Some of this family's rules will strike you as too liberal, others as too strict, still others as just plain silly. That is to be expected: Your rules will depend on your values, your lifestyle, your community, your family type (intact family, single parent, stepfamily, etc.), your income level, and, most of all, upon the maturity of each child.

You should start with fewer rules than these. I imagine the following list as having evolved for this family over a period of several months. In fact, I went out of my way to think up many different kinds of rules for this illustration. I have never known a real family to need this many rules.

Don't make any rules unless you need them. In those areas where you have not found yourself nagging or complaining to your children, you don't need rules.

Rules about taking care of yourself	**Consequences**
Bedtimes (in bed, lights out) school nights-Billy 8:30, Laurie 9:00, Bob 10:30, Karen no rule other nights-Billy, Laurie: 9:30; Bob, Karen: no rule	Bedtime 15 min. earlier next night
Baths or Showers Billy, Laurie-Saturday nights and all school nights	If late bath makes you late for bed, see above
Tooth brushing (Billy) Remember without being told	If caught forgetting Mom or Dad will brush

There are two good reasons for bedtime rules. One is that young children are not always wise enough to go to bed early enough to get the rest they need. They do not think ahead to what time they have to get up in the morning. The other legitimate reason for sending children to bed is that parents need some time for themselves at the end of the day.

However, it may not be important that your child always go to bed at a particular hour. You may feel it is more important that the child should go to bed whenever you say it is time. In that case, your rule should say, "No arguing, tantrums, or dawdling when told to go to bed." Specific times for each child, as in the example, are merely a convenience so that parents do not have to defend their judgment night after night.

In most families, the discipline issue only arises if the child delays when told that it is bedtime. The consequence for that can be flexible. Write "to be determined" in the consequence column, so you can make it follow logically from the specific circumstances.

EXAMPLE: "I can't—I haven't finished my homework."

"Then you will take the consequences at school for not having done your homework. You shouldn't have waited until 9:30 to start it."

Or: "Then you may finish it, but for the rest of this week you will have no TV in the evenings."

Or: "Then you may finish it, and we're writing down a new rule: 'From now on, no video games until all homework is done.' "

This kind of flexibility allows parents to tailor the consequences to the circumstances in which the rule was not observed. The main advantage of leaving punishments "to be determined" is that you keep your options open. The disadvantage is that you have to make and defend a decision every time, with infinitely varying extenuating circumstances.

With bathing and brushing teeth, the purpose is different from that of the other rules. Karen and Bob have already had the natural consequences (body odor, rotten teeth) so deeply ingrained that they are self-motivated, and need no rule. Billy and Laurie must bathe on certain nights, early enough so they can get to bed on time. The natural consequence of late or slow bathing is that one will not satisfy the bedtime rule, which in turn will have its logical consequence. (If, instead, a child began refusing to take baths at all, one would need an additional consequence for that.)

These parents have found an effective consequence for the child who habitually forgets to brush his teeth. He would rather do it himself than have someone else do it to him. After one or two times when a parent follows through as promised, Billy will take this responsibility upon himself. In the next edition of the rules, tooth brushing will no longer need to be mentioned.

Rules about when to be home	**Consequences**
After school, time expected home: Billy, Laurie—3:30 Bob—4:30 Karen—6:00	If late without asking permission, must come home directly from school, next three days
Evening curfew: School nights-Bob 9:00, Karen 10:30 Other nights- Bob midnight, Karen 1:00 A.M. (unless arranged in advance)	Curfew set earlier by the number of minutes late, for one week

Rules involving times-whether they be mealtimes, bedtimes, curfew times, or times by which one is to have done something-CAN be handled in a much more straightforward way than most parents realize. The secret is to *make the child take the consequences even for circumstances beyond his control*. I will explain why this is fair and reasonable in the next chapter.

The consequence when Bob or Karen is late—setting back the curfew—is the quintessential punishment in this system. The logic is clear: "We seem to have given you more freedom than you could handle responsibly, so we'll take back a little." The reward for respecting the rules is to gain gradually more freedom. That process is temporarily reversed when the amount of freedom seems to be too great.

There is also something else that makes this punishment effective. It allows you to start small. When Karen is ten minutes late, her parents do not need to ground her for a whole evening just to make their point—and make her resentful. Instead, they set her curfew back ten minutes, for a week. As I shall explain later, it is the consistency of consequences, not their intensity, that gets the message across. If, after Karen tests the rule a few more times, they conclude that this has not had the desired effect, then they can change the penalty to "two minutes earlier per minute late" or change the duration of the penalty to two weeks, three weeks, and so forth. *When you start with the smallest consequence that you think might work, you have room to escalate it as needed.*

Why did the parents write down an explicit consequence for missing curfew? Why not be flexible, as I suggested they could have done with the bedtime consequences? Although it is convenient to be able to use your discretion in some situations, there are two important advantages to spelling out the consequence in advance if you can. First, the decision does not have to be made in the heat of anger when the child is testing you. When you have been waiting up anxiously for a child whom you imagined lying dead on the highway, and who now strolls in unscratched, there is a chance that you might overreact and over punish, which would be counterproductive.

The other advantage is that when children know exactly what will happen if they fail to comply with your limits, they can give their friends a convincing explanation for wanting to comply. When a curfew violation has a fixed penalty attached, the teenager has no

difficulty explaining to her friends why she wants to be home by a particular time. Instead of telling them, "I'm supposed to be home by 10:30," she can say, "If I'm not home by 10:30 I won't be able to go to the basketball game Friday night." The consequences of violating curfew have to provide the rationale not only to the child but to the peer group as well. (Adolescents often tell their friends that their parents have made a stricter rule than is really the case. They use the parents as "bad guys," to get out of social situations they do not feel ready for.)

In general, it may be best to spell out consequences clearly, in advance, for major rules having to do with the boundary between parental authority and peer temptations (curfews, drinking, drugs, etc.) and to be more spontaneous and flexible about punishments for minor disobedience of rules such as those concerning bedtime and chores.

Rules about freedom of movement	**Consequences**
Billy & Laurie—parent who is home must know where you are; if neither of us is home, call Mom at work	Grounding -duration to be determined
Bob–we must know your destination, time to expect you home; railroad tracks are OFF LIMITS	ditto
Karen–we must know where you are in evenings; location of parties, etc.	ditto

These are what I call *elsewhere* rules, rather than *at-home* rules. They can only be enforced if and when it comes to the parents' attention that they were violated. In theory, any of the children could lie about where they are going or where they were. However, if lying has not been a problem in your family, you should assume that your children are going to continue to tell the truth. *Trust each child to the full extent that he has shown himself trustworthy in the past.* (I will have more to say about trust in Part II.)

On the other hand, these children know, without needing to have it spelled out, that if something were to happen when they

were not where they were supposed to be—if Billy had a flat tire on his bicycle, for example, on the other side of a road he was not supposed to cross—the consequences would be serious. One incident might be handled by grounding, but by the second or third incident the child would have lost the parents' trust, and his mode of life would be changed from Liberty to Probation.

Chores	**Consequences**
Breakfast, lunch, snacks-everyone does own dishes	If dishes left in sink or kitchen a mess, you take one of Dad's nights
Dinner dishes: Mon., Tues.: Bob & Billy Wed., Thurs.: Karen & Laurie Fri., Sat., Sun.: Dad	
Bob & Karen-grass cut & raked by noon Saturday, except when Dad says not needed; shovel snow within twelve hours	$5 of allowance revoked that week
Laurie & Billy help Mom fold & deliver clean laundry to rooms every Sat.	Lose 50¢ of allowance
Put your own dirty clothes in the hamper	
Bed sheets--help each other change as needed	

The schedule of chores is best worked out at a family meeting. The parents announce what has to be done but give the children maximum participation in deciding who should do what, and when. That puts the burden of proof on the children to show that the plan they work out is a good one; if it does not work, then Mom and Dad will come up with a plan that the kids like less.

There are dozens of different ways to handle the dishwashing problem. In some families, everyone helps after each meal. In some families, the job rotates by the day or the week. I know families in which Mom does all the dishes (as well as the cooking), others in which it is Dad's job with a different helper each night. And there are many families who rarely eat together; they all take care of their own meals and dishes.

Whatever system you and your children work out, you need a clear procedure to follow when someone "forgets." This family has decided that if the omission is discovered in time, the person who forgot can be summoned back from whatever he or she is doing, even if that means interrupting a TV program or a phone call. If the person has already escaped, then someone else will wash the dishes, but the offender will have to take over one of Dad's weekend dinners.

At the family meeting, you can veto any proposal that would be unfair to someone or that would not get the jobs done in good time. However, it is worth trying it the kids' way whenever their plan has a reasonable chance of succeeding. You can let them know in advance what Plan B will be if they don't make Plan A work.

In this family, the consequence for not putting dirty clothes and sheets in the laundry hamper is a *natural* consequence: They will not be washed. If that is not a sufficient incentive in your house, then you will need an additional consequence, such as a fine.

Allowance (Irrevocable + revocable = total/wk.)

Billy	.75	+ .75	=	$1.50
Laurie	.75	+ 1.25	=	$2
Bob	15.00*	+ 10.00	=	$25
Karen	25.00*	+ 10.00	=	$35

** Only when school is in session*

Giving allowances is not really a rule—it is something the parents promise to do each week. It is convenient to write the allowance on your list of rules because, like the rules, it will be different for each child and because a specific portion of the allowance can be listed as revocable if chores are not done.

I think it is a good idea to treat part of the allowance "irrevocable," to be given to the child even if the other portion has to be withheld as punishment. Older children may need bus fare or lunch money every school day. In the example, I assumed Bob and Karen

need $3 and $5, respectively, for lunch but only on school days. They eat out a lot with their friends, too, but if they don't have any money left, they're welcome to eat at home.

Once you give the children their allowance, you are giving them the freedom to spend it as they choose. Otherwise, it is not really their money. So there should not be any rules about how the allowance is spent. Don't require the kids to get approval for every purchase; if you think they *routinely* misspend their allowance, you can reduce it. For the same reason, it makes little sense to require children to save part of their allowance. If you want to teach them about saving, open savings accounts for them and give each child money for regular deposits; but that is not an allowance.

Notice that Karen gets no more spending money than Bob. In fact, many teenagers get no allowance beyond what they need for school. Their parents feel-and I strongly agree-that adolescents should earn their spending money. (When they have a job that brings in more than a few dollars per week, there is nothing wrong with requiring them to save most of their earnings or, depending upon your family's situation, contributing toward the household expenses.) In this hypothetical case, however, the parents find it convenient to give Bob and Karen an incentive to get the yard work done promptly.

Some parents go too far with the idea of allowance in exchange for chores. Getting the chores done is probably not your main purpose in giving an allowance. Your primary goal may be to give your children the experience of being responsible for some money of their own and learning that money is a finite resource requiring choices: "If I play any more arcade games, I won't be able to buy that record." The purpose of chores is to make children carry a fair share of the work involved in maintaining a home, whether they need the spending money or not.

Therefore, if Bob and Karen start to shirk their lawn-mowing duties and forgo their allowance, the parents will have to change the rule. One thing they can do is insist upon the chores and use some logical consequence other than money (for example, they might stop doing certain favors for Bob and Karen). On the other hand, if they think the children are being helpful enough around the house and are taking their other work seriously, they can simply hire a neighbor's kids to do the lawn. That would probably be cheaper than what they were paying Bob and Karen in allowance.

Priorities for use of time	**Consequences**
Everybody—finish homework before TV, phone, etc.	No TV or phone on following night
Bob & Karen—participate in at least one formal extracurricular activity involving at least two practices, rehearsals, or meetings per week-or an after-school job	
Everybody-if problems with grades, priorities will be reestablished after each report card	

Rules such as "homework before TV" are easy to enforce, if a parent is home in the evening. Obviously, it requires some thought as to how to design the rule so that you can enforce it in your family. But you don't need to worry in advance about all the possible evasions that might occur behind your back. The fundamental principle of the Liberty mode is trusting children until or unless they violate your trust. Make the rule only as iron-clad as it needs to be for that particular child.

It is worth asking *why* one thing should be done before another. In this family, homework was habitually put off until there was not enough time to do it carefully. Your child might be more responsible about homework, even if he does watch a favorite TV show right after dinner. Your real purpose is to support the *long-term* priority: Education is more important than entertainment. That does not necessarily have to be reflected in the order in which things are done, so long as they *are* done.

An entirely different reason for priorities, besides getting things done, is that they express the parents' values. Children need to know where their parents differ from the predominant values of their society. Some friends of mine never open Christmas presents until after church; once a year, they get a reputation for being hard-nosed, but they communicate a symbolic message to their children about their values. Similarly, some families prohibit TV except on the weekends. The children may complain, but they also enrich their lives by finding other things to do. You can make any

rule about priorities that you can justify in terms of your own values, as long as you are prepared to follow through.

The rule about extracurricular activities might have been written to combat an "I don't care" attitude on Karen's part. Mom and Dad are saying, "You have to care about something. You can choose—or we'll choose for you." The consequence is implied. If Karen or Bob were to decide to test the parents on this, an explicit consequence would be needed—perhaps curtailing informal recreational activities in which the parents see no value.

Not all parents would go that far, but some go even further, demanding participation in such specific activities as football or choir. That might be unreasonable. Your judgment about the child's aptitudes for, and future benefits from, a given activity is likely to be based as much on your fantasies as on any objective evidence. How well a child succeeds in the activity and how much he or she benefits from it depend largely on motivation from within. I think children are helped more when we give them a strong incentive to get very involved in *something* but also give them as much choice as possible about what that something is.

Rules about priorities are generally of the type that you would apply to all the children in a certain age group. H you make one teenager give a higher priority to schoolwork than to sports, be sure you give all your teenagers the same message. I was intrigued recently when I heard a baseball star talking about his aspirations for his children. He said he hopes that his son can follow him into major-league baseball and that his daughter can become a doctor. If that meant that he were to show no concern for his sods grades as long as the son excelled in sports but not allow his daughter the same choice, it would be unfair to both children.

I am not suggesting that both children should be expected to get equally good grades or be equally good athletes. That obviously depends upon their individual talents. But whatever is expected to come first—schoolwork or sports or other activities—should be the same for both children.

Respecting others' rights and feelings	**Consequences**
No swearing (words on Mom's list) especially at someone in family →	$1 per swear word used $2 per word
No insulting names	25 cents
No borrowing without permission	person wronged will deal with it—but ask parent's help if needed
No punching or hitting	both parties may be punished
Quiet down when asked	Sent to separate rooms
Telephone: leave message on fridge	No message taken for you, forty-eight hours If culprit unknown, all kids take consequence
No arguments about phone	Children's phone unplugged for one week
Billy & Laurie have priority on TV, electronic games, etc., after dinner until bath or bed	

Mom has a list to which she can add any new word that she or Dad finds objectionable. They do not have to tell the children in advance all the swear words they can think of. Of course, each word is only added to the list the first time they hear it; the consequence starts the next time.

The "quiet down" rule is worth noting, because it illustrates how you can write a rule in general terms and then be specific about it on the spot. "Be quiet" would not, in itself, be an enforceable rule. "Be as quiet as you are asked to be" is perfectly enforceable. The same level of noise that is acceptable now may be unacceptable an hour from now, if someone is trying to nap.

With teenagers, you almost certainly need rules about the telephone. A separate phone number for the kids is a boon for parents, not only because it keeps your line free, but also because the privi-

lege can be withheld to good effect. Suspension of phone privileges is a logical consequence for many rules involving communication, courtesy, or priorities.

For example, loss of telephone privileges for one night might have been a logical punishment, in place of a fine, for swearing or name-calling: "If you can't talk decently to your own family, you can't talk to others." (That would not work in this family, because the younger children don't use the phone much and the parents want a consequence that will apply to all four kids.)

Rules about motor vehicles	**Consequences**
Karen—replenish gas used, let no one else drive our car	Loss of car privileges, duration to be determined
Not allowed in *any* car if driver has had *any* intoxicating substance	Loss of license for one year

It is too bad when the automobile becomes a focus of contention between parents and sixteen- to eighteen-year-olds. Admittedly, it is a nuisance to have to share something that has previously been all yours. Under the right conditions, though, the day your teenager gets a driver's license can be the greatest relief for you, as a parent, since nursery school. Consider these wonderful facts:

- It marks the end, or at least the beginning of the end, of your career as a chauffeur.
- The rules you make about care, maintenance, and responsible handling of your automobile are your first real opportunities to treat the adolescent as an adult. When you hand over your car keys, you are conferring the full respect and the same awesome responsibility—the power of life and death—that any adult driver has. You do not even need to say it; adolescents know it and, in most cases, are eager to prove themselves worthy of that trust.
- The privilege of borrowing your car and possession of a driver's license are probably the two most desired freedoms that you can restrict. Most states grant licenses to sixteen-year-olds only with parental permission and with the provision that *parents can revoke them*.

The rules may state explicitly when and how the car is to be used. Some parents find it convenient to limit the number of miles driven per week or the number of hours the car is away from the house. Alternatively, you can get an itinerary and time of promised return every time you lend the car, and make a rule about what will happen if those commitments are not kept. If you decide not to make a rule about such things, then don't complain about the miles or the hours.

Suspension of driving privileges, besides being the obvious logical consequence for abusing the privileges themselves, is an appropriate consequence for all kinds of life-threatening irresponsibility—for example, being in someone else's car when that person has been drinking. The seriousness of that kind of behavior calls for a severe consequence, which you can be clear about before the occasion ever occurs. It is an exception to our general principles about not writing a rule until after something becomes a problem and starting with a small consequence that you can increase if necessary. The child who once drives while intoxicated, or rides in a car with an intoxicated driver, may not live to get a second chance.

Other rules	**Consequences**
No bikes left out—close garage door.	Bike impounded for one week
If you want to be picked up somewhere at a certain time, you have to ask in advance. Last-minute calls only if it's an emergency (if we're convinced there was no other safe way for you to get home) & if it's not just an attempt to avoid consequence of being late.	
You are responsible for friends' conduct in our house.	
No more than two friends (total, not per child) in the house when parents aren't home.	No friends visit, duration to be determined
Each child may have one party per year, planned together with parents, and parents will be here during the party	

You can make rules about anything that you and your spouse agree is important enough for you to be willing to follow through

with consequences. As a family counselor, I never answer "should" questions, such as "Should children be required to…?" The question is whether it is important to you. If not, stop hassling the children; if the bicycle is left out in the rain, let it rust. If it is important to you, then instead of nagging, make a rule you know you can enforce: "If a bicycle is left outside, it will be confiscated for two days."

Parties, like cars, raise major issues for parents of teenagers. We shall discuss those issues in detail in Part II.

Rules are not always the answer. Before closing this chapter, I had better say that making rules is not the best way to deal with every issue. Here is an example where the parents try to make a rule and fail, because they threaten the child with a punishment they are not really willing to follow through on.

EXAMPLE: The Ryans have attended church as a family every Sunday since their children were little. Catherine, seventeen, announces that she does not share her parents' convictions and refuses to go to church with them any longer.

MISTAKE: Her parents make a rule: If we don't pray together, then we don't stay together. If Catherine will not attend church with the family, she had better find somewhere else to live. Catherine finds a family that is willing to provide room and board in exchange for child care. She has called her parents' bluff. Now they back down but remain angry and hurt, and the issue is unresolved.

BETTER: There is nothing wrong with making a rule about church, but only to the extent you would really follow through. In this family's case, a two-way exchange of feelings would be more constructive than a firm rule, since the parents do care strongly about church, but not so strongly 'as to reject their daughter. In my experience, battles over ideology-whether political or religious-are better waged through active listening than through parents' insistence on having their own views accepted.

CHAPTER FIVE

Enforcing the Rules

The best way to be sure that your family rules will work is to avoid making rules that you cannot enforce. In order to be enforceable,

- A rule must be clear and specific.
- A rule must deal with observable events that will come to the parents' attention whenever a child decides to test the rule.
- A rule must have a legitimate purpose.
- A rule must have a consequence with which the parent is prepared to follow through.
- A rule must offer a choice: responsibility or restriction.

A rule must be clear and specific. Forcing yourself to put every rule in writing helps you think about whether it is going to be clear enough to all concerned. However, the mere fact that something is written down is no guarantee that it won't be vague or ambiguous.

NOT ENFORCEABLE: "Get plenty of vitamins."

BETTER: "Swallow one tablet from this jar every morning."

The Scout Oath is not a set of enforceable rules. Of the Ten Commandments, only two can be expressed as enforceable rules. *

* The rules against murder and theft seem to me specific enough, if earthly consequences were added. The other commandments are either too vague to be enforced—honoring one's parents, for example—or concern misbehavior that is unlikely to leave evidence—committing adultery, coveting, and so forth.

Your children will take upon themselves the job of finding loopholes in your list, flushing out every rule that is not specific enough. If the rule does not cover a particular action that a child tries, thank him or her for helping you with the system. Don't apply any punishment, but change the rule to make it clear for next time.

Of course, you are not going to write down a temporary rule (for example, "We're not leaving for the beach until everything in the playroom is put away"). However, once you have mastered the art of writing and enforcing your standing rules, you will find yourself automatically growing much more clear and specific about single-occasion rules as well.

A rule must deal with observable events. You are not a detective. For a rule to be enforceable, it must come to your attention when it has been violated. You cannot enforce a rule against truancy if the school does not report it to you. You cannot enforce a rule against drinking, but you can enforce rules against drunken behavior at home or being arrested for drunkenness. You cannot enforce a rule about using birth control in premarital sex—or about having sex at all—but you can let your teenagers know in advance the likely natural consequences of irresponsible sexual behavior.

In the previous chapter, we distinguished between *at-home* rules and *elsewhere* rules. Most of the at-home rules are the type that you make for the comfort and convenience of the household: chores that need to be done; rules about mealtimes, neatness, privacy, and TV. In general, one does not have to make such rules about the child's behavior outside or in other people's houses. Children who learn to respect at-home rules generally respect the rules of society at large. Their friends' parents are likely to be more restrictive than you about some things and less restrictive about others; but this never leads to confusion. Even two- to three-year-olds quickly learn to behave differently in different places, so long as each place has its own clear set of rules.

Those few elsewhere rules that you do make will usually be for the sake of the children's welfare or safety. These rules present bigger problems of detection and enforcement than do the at-home rules. "I can prevent him from smoking grass at home, but how do I know if he's smoking it elsewhere?" One thing you can do, after expressing your opinion about the dangers of marijuana, is to make a contract based on the child's honor-bound promise. But do not list the behavior itself (for example, smoking a joint in secrecy) as one

of your explicit prohibitions. Do not have a rule against anything that you would probably not know about when it happened.*

How can you translate a concern about something that might be done in secret into an enforceable rule? You may feel very strongly about drugs or teenage sex. With a younger child, you might have strong feelings about lying or eating too much candy. First ask yourself whether you would know when these things were going on. If not, then figure out what it is that really concerns you. We are generally worried about possible specific *effects* of immature behavior.

For example, make a list of the possible bad results of marijuana use. From that list choose the ones that will be clearly visible to you if they occur. Marijuana might lead your son to neglect his schoolwork, or to be late for school, or to get in trouble with the law.

> NOT ENFORCEABLE: "If you go to school stoned, we will ground you the next weekend."
>
> BETTER: "If the school reports any truancy or lateness, we will …"

I am not going to tell you to stop worrying about things your children might do secretly, such as experimenting with pills. These are realistic fears, and you should share them with the child, but not in the form of rules. For the purpose of effective rules, focus only upon *observable* behaviors. This is where so many parents go wrong: By dwelling upon their worst fears, they distract themselves from setting any enforceable rules at all.

> EXAMPLE: The mother of eight-year-old Maria worries about candy and other snacks between meals. Her own sister is a compulsive eater, and she has read that this problem can begin in childhood.
>
> MISTAKE: She constantly tells Maria how bad it is to stuff herself with snacks after school, keeps asking her if she has been snacking, and tells her that she will wind up obese and unhappy like Aunt Matilda.

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* Honor and trust are discussed in Part II.

BETTER: If Mother and Father would sit down and list their real concerns about between-meal snacks, they would include several observable facts: Maria's weight, for example, or her lack of appetite at mealtimes. They can tell her that meals are the only time Mother can ensure at balanced diet and that Maria is therefore expected to be hungry when she comes to the table. Her parents can ask the pediatrician what her normal weight range should be. If she goes above that range, she can only eat at mealtimes. So long as she is within the healthy range, however, and has a good appetite at mealtimes, she should be allowed to decide for herself whether she is hungry at other times, such as after school.*

Since so many children today have parents in two different households, I ought to point out that each parent's at-home rules apply to his or her own home, and only their elsewhere rules apply when the child is in the other parent's charge. You can enforce a rule about Johnny making his bed each morning or turning off the TV at 9:00 in your house, but it is up to the other parent and his or her current spouse to make and enforce the rules pertaining to their house. (See chapters 18 and 19.)

Rules must have a legitimate purpose: To ensure children's safety or welfare, to benefit the family, or to promote harmony. Children normally understand their parents' responsibility to be concerned about their behavior. What you are trying to get through to your children above all else is that you care about them and what happens to them. They may think you are old-fashioned, overly concerned, or just plain silly, but they will appreciate your rules anyway, so long as they respect your role as parents and household managers.

NOT ENFORCEABLE: "If I hear one peep out of either of you on the rest of this trip, I am going to stop the car. "

BETTER: "If the noise level becomes a distraction to my driving, I will have to stop the car."

* An obese child needs therapy (chapter 21), but harping at any child about the evils of food is only likely to create a lifelong problem.

This system is not a way of getting your children to fulfill all your hopes for them—to become straight-A students, star athletes, or virtuoso musicians, and never bother you with any problems. Many children unfortunately get the message "If you have any negative feelings, any failures, any deviation from our standards, then our love and respect for you will end." That sort of message does not bring out the best in anyone.

When parents use their power for legitimate ends, the children soon grow more comfortable with rules than without. And as long as you yourself know that your rules are fair, you will feel comfortable in enforcing them.

Resolve not to break the rule. It is not quite enough that you have specified the rule in terms of an observable event. Equally important is your determination to follow through with the consequence.

NOT ENFORCEABLE: "If you ever take money from my purse again, I'll break your arm."

BETTER: "If you ever take money again without asking, you'll pay back double out of your allowance."

In the first case, the parent would end up breaking the rule instead of the arm, thereby losing credibility not only for the rule about taking money but for all other family rules as well. Never make a rule in the hope that it will not be put to the test. Assume that it *will* be tested at least once, and make sure that you and your spouse are prepared to carry out the consequence.

Notice that I use the word "break" for what parents can do to a rule, not for anything children do. Only parents have the ability to break a rule, because each rule says, "If you do *X*, we will do *Y*." If the child does *X*, is the rule broken? No. It is being tested. The rule will be confirmed if the parents do indeed follow through with consequence *Y*. If *X* does not lead to *Y*, then the parents have broken the rule.

EXAMPLE: John is supposed to lose part of his allowance if the lawn is not mowed by noon on Saturday. One day he sleeps until eleven-thirty, then tells his mother that he has a commitment to go bowling with some friends. He promises to mow the lawn when he gets back.

MISTAKE: His mother gives him the full allowance. Later, he comes home too tired to do anything but eat. The next day it rains.

BETTER: The first time this happens, of course you are going to give the child the benefit of the doubt. He is proud of his bowling trophies, and so are you. You would rather have an amicable relationship than run your family like the Marine Corps. I agree with you. But if it happens again and you break the rule by not following through with the con sequence, you might as well cross it off your list. Once the child knows you do not really mean what you say, the credibility of every other rule you try to make will diminish.

MISTAKE: Christine is caught shoplifting, and her parents tell her that if it happens again, they will ground her for six months. It does happen again. Christine is grounded for a week. Again she is told, "Now listen, we mean it: There better not be a next time, or you will be grounded for six months!"

BETTER: These parents should have thought more carefully about what their actual response would be. Having made the mistake once and realized it, they should tell Christine, "We made a mistake when we said we would ground you for six months. Now we realize that we were making an idle threat. We don't really want to put you under house arrest for that long. We just want to take you out of circulation for a while so that you can think about what kind of life you want to lead. You are grounded for one week. We're trying to change, as parents. We're using a system in which we tell you what the consequences are going to be and stick to them. If it happens again, we will encourage the store to have you booked, and we will ground you for two weeks."

In general, you should follow through with what you said the consequence would be. But if you realize that you have made a mistake, it is better to label it as a mistake than to pretend otherwise.

If you make a mistake in the other extreme, promising a consequence that you now think is too mild, you can announce a tougher consequence for the future, but it should not apply until the next time the problem occurs. In other words, as much as possible, children should be warned about consequences in advance.

A rule should offer the choice between responsibility and restriction. Violating the rule should lead the child backward, away from mature independence, toward the restricted, dependent life of a younger child.

NOT ENFORCEABLE: "You must be home by eleven-thirty."

BETTER: "If you don't come home by eleven-thirty, your curfew will be earlier tomorrow night."

Children, like adults, would rather have choices than be ordered around. The wise nursery-school teacher asks, "Would you like to put away the crayons first and then the paper, or the paper first and then the crayons?" She lets the three-year-old feel in control and gets satisfactory results either way. A high-pressure car salesman will use the same device: "Which model do you want?" When you make a rule with a consequence, you are giving your child a choice: Come home on time or be grounded; mow the lawn or lose your allowance; stay sober or lose your driver's license.

Can parents really be satisfied offering that kind of choice? Doesn't it represent a *failure* when the child takes the consequence instead of following the rule? It will not be a failure in the long run, if the consequence leads the child a step backward, toward less independence and greater restriction. You are really asking the question "How mature, responsible, and free do you want to be? These rules are the conditions of the freedom that you can have if you want it. You can always fall back to less freedom if you can't handle it responsibly."

Children cherish their freedom as much as you and I do, but at the same time it scares them. Remember when your daughter was a newborn, screaming her head off? You were able to quiet her by picking her up and holding her firmly against your body, supporting her arms, legs, head—and soul. Fifteen years later, believe it or not, she still wants that kind of security: maybe not to be physically held, but to know that home and family provide a firm resting place, a haven from the uncertainties and risks of growing up and out into the world.

Parents must continually readjust their rules to provide a child with the amount of freedom that is appropriate at each particular time in his life. In the ideal state—the mode of life I call Liberty—

children can ask for independence, can show that they are ready to handle it responsibly, but they can also be pulled back into a more restrictive shelter when those responsibilities become too much for them. They are grounded, for example, whenever they choose to get themselves grounded. They go to summer school when they choose to fail algebra. They do without TV when they choose to postpone doing their chores. Fully aware of the rules of Liberty, they must choose whether to conform or take the consequences.

You need not harp on that message; it is implied by the rules themselves when the consequences involve reductions in freedom. When children get themselves punished, you will find it effective to emphasize that this is not something you did to them but something they chose after you presented the alternatives. It was their decision to suffer the consequence. Maybe next time they will decide to respect the rule instead.

One night recently, I pulled out of a parking place and did a quick U-turn. I judged, correctly, that I had time to make the turn and accelerate before the oncoming traffic reached me. I also judged, incorrectly, that the nearest headlights were unlikely to belong to a police car. In choosing to pull into traffic without due caution, I made a decision to accept the possible consequence. Now I have to make another decision: whether to pay fifty dollars and suffer a blot on my driving record or to lose a couple hours' work by appearing in traffic court for a reprimand. That's life. All the arguing in the world is not going to change the fact that the original decision to disregard the letter of the law, the current decision about which consequence to accept, and the future decision about U-turns into traffic rest with me. They are a part of my freedom as a citizen of Chicago.

Creating that kind of freedom for your children is not difficult. All you need are rules that are as explicitly stated and as consistently enforced as the best and most essential traffic laws. The fewer rules, the better. The more reliably their violation is detected and the more swiftly and decisively it is punished, the better. And the less preaching, nagging, and complaining, the better. When you enforce a few rules and stop hassling your children about everything else, you give them a precious form of freedom: the freedom from being nagged at.

Why not rewards instead of punishments?

All this emphasis on negative consequences makes many parents uneasy. "Shouldn't we be watching for good behavior to reward, rather than bad behavior to punish?" Some child development experts strongly advocate doing just that. They say little or nothing about how to punish children effectively. They seem to find punishment a distasteful topic, with the result that you may feel guilty and incompetent when, inevitably, you do have to punish your children.

Am I saying that punishment is more effective than rewards? Emphatically, no! This system is really one of positive reward. Treat your children positively, by

- Acknowledging their maturity and giving them more autonomy as they grow into adolescents and then adults.
- Not nagging at, hassling, criticizing, yelling at, or complaining about them.
- Listening to them and building a relationship based on mutual respect.
- Praising them sincerely, every chance you get.
- Using *consequences*, when you have to punish them, that reduce their freedom without diminishing self-esteem.

Some kinds of punishment are abusive, but consequences are not. More children are abused mentally and emotionally than physically. Parents harp on things that bother them, without making any serious effort to produce a change. The scars of emotional abuse are often hidden beneath the surface, but they last a lifetime. In fact, they are passed on to the next generation. Some of this abuse takes the form of direct verbal disparagement of the child as a person. The rest masquerades under the name of punishment, not in the form of specific consequences for ignoring clearly stated rules, but inconsistent, impromptu punishment: the parents' revenge for being angered or disappointed. Because it is inconsistent, such mindless punishment leaves the child feeling vaguely guilty, without feeling capable of choosing a better way to behave.

Consequences, on the other hand, are punishments that are consistent and that the child is warned about in advance. They have

nothing to do with revenge or with making the child suffer. Consequences based on restriction are part of a systematic effort to adjust children's freedom to just the amount they can handle.

Rewards alone don't work. Believing in accentuating the positive, you might wish you could rely entirely on rewards instead of negative consequences. Unfortunately, that means ignoring inappropriate behavior while waiting for an opportunity to give praise or a material reward. But inappropriate behavior will not simply go away if you ignore it. It is often its own reward.

For example, television is more rewarding than homework, in a child's short-range view. How do you induce him to choose homework over TV? You make TV the reward for finishing homework. You can only do that if you also restrict the child's freedom to watch TV until the homework has been done. There is no way around it: You cannot use TV as a reward unless you also impose a negative consequence (no TV for a week, for example) whenever the child turns on the TV before finishing his homework.

An all-positive-consequences approach is a bad idea for another reason. Many so-called rewards can be harmful. Sincere praise never hurts, of course, but many of the more tangible kinds of rewards—toys, candy, money—create worse problems than they solve.

For example, once the child has more toys than he has time to enjoy, you lose your leverage. You might run out of effective bribes with which to purchase his cooperation. This dilemma leads to the use of consumable rewards such as ice cream or candy. When that kind of reward is used on a regular basis, children often learn to associate junk food with parental love or appreciation. As they get older, food becomes a means of emotional rather than physical nourishment.

There is a good reason not to teach your children to expect any material rewards for following routine rules. Paying children to obey the basic rules of Liberty within their families is as if society were to pay adults to obey the law. Imagine being given a dollar every time you go to the bank without robbing it, a candy bar every time you go to the supermarket without shoplifting or a gold star every time you are sober when you get behind the wheel of your car. Is respect for the law some sort of exceptional personal service to the community?

Rewards should be given for things *beyond* the child's obligations as a family member. As an inducement to do something onerous or particularly time-consuming, like cleaning out the garage, it does no harm to pay children. Nor is there anything wrong with offering an incentive like a new bicycle if certain improvements are achieved on the next report card. But children should never be offered extra inducements for standard chores or for obeying rules. If they try to wheedle rewards out of you by citing their good behavior, you can reply, "These are the things you are expected to do as a matter of course. Their reward is that they enable us all to live together in health, harmony, and mutual respect."

Allowance. An allowance is a somewhat different matter. If you think an allowance is a way of giving the child increasing freedom and responsibility, then there is nothing wrong in withholding it as punishment for his failure to do the things he is expected to do routinely. Just watch out for a trap: If each chore or personal responsibility has a monetary price attached to it, the child can simply choose to forego that wage; then the chores don't get done. A good way to avoid the allowance trap, if you are going to withhold it in connection with chores, is to dock your child's pay for each period of time in which the chore has not been done.

EXAMPLE: Peter, fourteen, receives an allowance of five dollars a week during the summer. Every week he is expected to mow the lawn no later than Friday. The five dollars are withheld when he fails to do so.

MISTAKE: One week the lawn is not mowed by Friday, so Dad tells Peter he will receive no allowance this week. The lawn, therefore, does not get mowed until the following week. Dad gets no consolation from the sweat pouring off Peter as he pushes the mower through a two-week growth, much less from the fact that the lawn looked like a mess all week and now looks uneven because it was too high to mow properly. Everybody loses and everybody remains angry.

BETTER: Peter's parents offer him five dollars per week for mowing the lawn by Monday. He is to receive only four dollars if he mows it the following Tuesday, three dollars on Wednesday. If it is not done by Wednesday, one of his parents will cut the grass or they will hire someone else to do it. How-

ever, since it will not be done until the weekend, they will not need Peter to do it the following week, either. His net loss of income will be ten dollars.

It may be inconvenient for you to have to find someone to cut the grass whenever your child does not need the money. (Some children are eager money-grubbers, whereas others value their leisure too highly.) In that case, do what any employer would do with an unreliable employee. In the above example, Peter would also be told that if his parents have to find a replacement for him more than once this summer, he will lose his job.

If you really want to insist that each child do his or her chores, you may have to apply more severe consequences than withholding allowance—for example, prohibiting a child from having friends over or from going out until the chores are done.

If allowance is linked to several rules (for example, the parents in chapter 4 docked their children for not doing chores as well as fining them for swearing and name-calling), you run the risk of having to dock the child for more allowance than he gets. Once the child has lost his allowance for two or more weeks into the future, he might as well tell himself he simply gets no allowance and forget about your rules.

Consequences

A consequence is the punishment part of a rule. Impromptu attempts to "get back at" children, "give them what they deserve," or "teach them a lesson," when they had not been warned in advance, do not qualify as proper consequences. Here are some principles to follow in imposing consequences.

Only punish violations of clear rules. Once you have adopted this system of written rules, children should never be punished for doing anything that is not clearly forbidden, nor for failing to do anything that is not clearly required. If their behavior calls for a new rule, tell them so and write it down for the future.

On the other hand, children should *always* be made to experience some consequences for infractions of any written rule. As much as possible, the consequence should be specified in the rule. But even if you leave yourself some flexibility as to what the consequence will be, your written rule still makes it clear that there will be one..

For one-time rules, which only apply on the day you state them and hence are not written down, you should only punish the child if you have been reasonably clear about the consequences in advance.

EXAMPLE: Jack is taking two of his children and two of their friends to an amusement park. They are caught in slow traffic on a scorching day, and he has a severe headache. He asks the children to stop shouting. He tells them to keep their voices down. He begs them. He yells at them. Each time, they are quiet for less than a minute. Jack feels like calling the whole excursion off-but that is against the principles of this book. *First*, he should say, "If you can't talk quietly, I'm going to turn around and go home." *Now* the children have had fair warning.

Natural consequences are your first choice, when feasible. A natural consequence happens as a direct result of the child's actions. If the rule indicates that you won't do anything to protect the child from the natural consequence of a certain action, then it is up to him to assume the risk.

EXAMPLE: Sarah has a reputation for carelessness, so when her parents buy her new skates, they say, "These skates should last you through two seasons. You're responsible for them; if you lose them, they won't be replaced."

Sarah comes home one day in tears, reporting that her skates have been stolen. She left them on a bench for just a minute, and when she came back, they were gone. The police, and I, consider the skates *lost*, not stolen. No new skates, unless she buys them with her own money. (If the skates had been snatched out of her hands by a bully, the police would treat it as robbery. In that case, Sarah's parents should replace the skates if they could afford to do so.)

Actually, there is always at least one natural consequence: Someone is upset about the child's action. Otherwise, there would be no rule. Even if the natural consequence has proved insufficient to change the child's behavior, and you have to add more tangible

consequences, you should still be sure the child knows how his actions have affected others.

EXAMPLE: "You called me from Ricky's house to ask permission to play over there, but you didn't tell your sister. She didn't know whether to keep looking for you at school or to come home. As a result, she missed her ballet lesson. The consequence for you is that we're changing the rule: You are not allowed to go anywhere after school without arranging it the day before." The child is told of the natural consequence (inconvenience to his sister) at the same time the logical consequence is imposed (restriction of flexibility).

In a study of children's social development and responsibility, Professor Martin Hoffman, a psychologist at the University of Michigan, found that parents who emphasized the effects of their children's behavior on other people increased their children's rates of helpful and considerate behavior. Make your children understand the natural consequences of their actions, even if you have to use extra consequences to get their attention.

Other logical consequences. What do you do if your feelings are the only natural consequence (for curfew violations, for example)? Or suppose the natural consequence would be too mild or too severe (drunken driving). In that case, try to devise a consequence that has a meaningful connection to the actions you are concerned about. If the child has abused some freedom, take that freedom away for a period of time. Take away TV privileges if homework is not done first. Set back a curfew if the normal curfew is not observed. If the child has not respected someone else's rights, then restrict his ability to impose upon others.

EXAMPLE: Stephanie sometimes fails to ask permission before borrowing clothes from her sister and mother. If she asks, they usually say yes. But if she borrows again without asking, Stephanie will lose all borrowing privileges for a month.

EXAMPLE: Eric, thirteen, has been slipping away after dinner without helping to wash the dishes. He is told that whenever he does this, he will have to prepare his own dinner the next night, after which he will have to clean up the kitchen without help.

Only use arbitrary consequences if there is no feasible logical consequence. Even then, you may be able to present your arbitrary consequence as a logical one. With a little imagination, you can almost always rationalize a logical connection between the consequence and the behavior.

EXAMPLE: One of Robert's chores is to change his cat's litter once a week. The rule states, "If you don't change the kitty litter, then Mom will do it, and since that takes about the same amount of time as driving you to soccer practice, you will lose one ride that week."

The more immediate the consequence, the more effective it will be. Anyone who has ever housebroken a puppy knows that catching it once in the act is worth ten times dragging it back to the evidence of its crime. This is just as true of young children. Even a five-minute delay may wipe out most of the beneficial effect of a consequence for a two-year-old. (Then he feels attacked out of the blue, which is counterproductive.)

By the time he reaches school age, a child's learning abilities outstrip those of any other animal. Language allows us to bridge time. However, if it were easy to put the memory of what we did yesterday together with the consequences we are suffering today, one's first hangover would be one's last. It is hard even for us to learn from delayed consequences; we can appreciate, then, how impossible it is for the young child.

Unfortunately, natural consequences—the best, in other respects—are often the slowest to occur. Therefore, with young children, an immediate logical consequence or even an immediate arbitrary consequence will work better than one that is natural but delayed.

MISTAKE: "If you are noisy while Grandpa is having his nap, then he will be too tired later to take you to the park." This natural consequence is too abstract for a young child to take seriously.

BETTER: "If you are too noisy while Grandpa is having his nap, your friend Jennifer will have to go home."

A consequence does not have to be severe to be effective. In fact, the opposite is true. Severe consequences are less effective in the long run, because they are likely to provoke more anger than cooperation. The more you hurt the child's feelings, burden him with guilt, or simply spoil his fun, the more he wants to hurt you back. He probably will not express his anger directly, because you are too powerful; it will be expressed indirectly through more misbehavior.

What is important about punishment is its consistency, not its intensity. The intensity would matter more if the consequences were intended to hurt the child, but that is not the case. Within Liberty (and also within Probation), most punishments are really only symbolic.* For example, a child who is docked twenty-five cents for name-calling does not suffer in any real sense. The twenty-five-cent fine is a token, a ritual performed in the family so that the child can be reminded of the rule. In paying the fine, the child expiates the offense and acknowledges the parents' right to make rules.

Most children would rather conform to their parents' rules than resist them. But they often need a face-saving excuse to comply. Children have difficulty sacrificing immediate personal pleasure for the sake of the group. Although their real reason for complying is their natural devotion to the family, they may have trouble admitting it to themselves. Incentives and consequences help them express their motives in basically selfish terms. They feel more comfortable with "Do *X* and you can have *Y*," or "If you don't do *X*, you can't have *Y*," than with "Please do *X* for me."

Start with the smallest consequence you think might be effective. You can always increase it if necessary. As soon as they realize that their actions are causing the rules and consequences to become tougher, children normally lose interest in resisting. But you cannot escalate the consequences in that way unless you start with small ones and increase them very gradually. Otherwise, you

* In the Crisis mode (see chapter 20), you will have to use serious, not just symbolic, consequences.

are soon imposing massive punishments, which incite rebellion rather than quelling it.

EXAMPLE: When Dorie first begins dating, her parents tell both her and her date that she is expected home by 11:00. She makes it the first time, but soon she begins stretching the time-ten minutes, twenty minutes, then nearly thirty minutes late.

MISTAKE: Her parents ignore what they consider a reasonable amount of looseness about the curfew, but when she finally stays out past 11:30 they ground her for a week. "I was only a few minutes late," she protests.

"You were over half an hour late," they reply.

"Last Friday, I came home at nearly eleven-thirty and you didn't do anything. So now I'm just a couple of minutes late and you ground me. You're grounding me a whole week for just two minutes?!"

Dorie is right. Her parents made two mistakes. They didn't make their rule and consequence precise enough in advance. And they came down unnecessarily heavily when they finally responded. Of course they were aggravated, but they themselves had allowed Dorie's misbehavior to occur for so long.

When a child's actions cause physical damage, the consequence should include making good the damages. In this case, the punishment is more than just a symbolic token. You usually want the child to feel the full effects of his irresponsibility. If there was some monetary loss, let the child pay for it if possible. That might mean working for the person who suffered the loss, until the debt is paid off. Or perhaps he can repair the damages himself: replaster the wall, resod the lawn, recane the chair.

What do you do if there are no actual damages but there could have been?

EXAMPLE: Anthony throws a pillow at his sister in the living room, hitting the stereo, which stops working. There is a rule against throwing things in the house, for which the consequence is that the child will be held responsible for all damages. Anthony is expected to pay for the cost of repairing

or, if necessary, replacing the stereo. However, it turns out to be merely a loose wire; there is no repair cost. Consequently, there is no punishment.

That is perfectly acceptable. The rule has been followed to the letter, and Anthony is aware that he would have been held responsible if there had been damages. It is just like the case of the child who leaves her ice skates on a bench but is lucky enough to recover them from the lost-and-found the next day.

Children should make restitution not only for intentional damage but also for accidental damage if it occurs while they are willfully doing something wrong.

Older teenagers, especially, should be made to bear the full consequences of what they do.

MISTAKE: After Bill, a high-school senior, takes the neighbor's car for a joyride and demolishes it, his parents ground him for a month and refuse to loan him the money for a new amplifier he needs for his guitar, which would have enabled him to get weekend jobs with a rock group. Bill certainly gets the message that his parents are angry, but he knew that already. The trouble is, he gets two other messages: "We do not want you to be accepted by your peers and to work at a job that excites you" (implying, "We don't like rock music and we don't like you") and "We are willing to pay for the damage you cause; you are not responsible for the consequences of your actions."

BETTER: "You can forget starting college next year, because I have to buy Mr. Jones a new car, and you have to get a job to pay me back." This is an enormous penalty, but a fair and logical one. Bill is lucky the neighbor declined to press criminal charges. He is not mature enough for college. The extra year at home will be good for him, and the message is a positive one: Growing up means becoming responsible for your actions.

It is all right to make children take the consequences for circumstances beyond their control. Once in a while, of course, a child will have a reasonable excuse for violating a rule. But you should only accept the excuse if this happens rarely. Most children, at certain periods in their lives, test out the possibility that rules mean, "Be sure you have an acceptable excuse." This is not what rules mean. They mean, "Leave enough time so that you can get this done no matter what happens."

Take curfews, for example. The message should be: "You are responsible for being home at this time." If the child is late for any reason (flat tire, friends failing to drive her home, losing her watch, lunar eclipse, etc.), you can sympathize while you impose the consequence. Before you call me cruel and heartless, consider:

- We adults expect to bear the consequences of being late, even when it is not our fault. If we get a flat tire on the way to the airport, we don't call the airline and say, "Please hold the flight; we got a flat. "When our teenagers have similarly innocent reasons for missing their curfews, what we ought to say, to prepare them for real life, is "You had some bad luck. Through no fault of your own, you have to suffer the consequence of missing your curfew."
- Of course, if this sort of thing happens rarely, you would not be so strict and unyielding. When it happens frequently, however, there is no way you can sort out the legitimate from the illegitimate excuses. If you base your decisions about consequences on the child's ability to offer a plausible excuse, you may unwittingly encourage lying. If you accept flat tires as an excuse but not other kinds of reasons, your daughter's friends may begin to have a truly astounding number of flats.
- It cannot be called cruel or heartless to refuse to accept excuses, if the punishments themselves are mild and essentially symbolic. Is it "cruel" to change her curfew from 1:00 A.M. to midnight for a week?

Spanking doesn't work

Sparing the rod does not spoil the child. The fact is that spankings and other physical punishments are less effective than natural consequences, restrictions, or penalties; and they are often worse than ineffective, in that they may actually set back your cause. No one is in favor of physically abusing children. But spanking doesn't fall into the category of child abuse. It is obvi-

ously not the same as slapping in the face, punching, beating, or "whooping" with a belt. Most of us have resorted to an open-handed swat on the backside now and then. (In fact, I have even recommended it in the case of the two-year-old running into the street.) Nonetheless, it is best to avoid spanking. Although it is neither illegal nor immoral, there are many arguments against it:

- If you never hit your child, period, then you won't have to worry about where to draw the line. Severe spankings do hurt. They are done in anger. The angrier you are, the harder you hit. There is no clear boundary between serious corporal punishment and physical abuse.
- If parents spank with the intention of not really hurting the child-the "pat on the butt" many parents use with preschoolers—then the child soon realizes that the spankings are not serious. You want the child to know you are serious.
- A spanking is almost never a logical consequence of the child's actions.* Parents who resort to spanking often do so as their first option, without looking for alternative punishments in the form of natural or logical consequences of the child's own actions.
- To be most effective, a punishment has to be increasable in the future. Once you have hit a child as hard as you can or as hard as your conscience will let you, you have no further options. When, instead, you use restrictions, you can always add more minutes or days, or take away more nickels or dollars.
- The older the child and the more serious the misbehavior, the less feasible it is to administer a spanking. It is easy to take a two-year-old over your knee-not so easy with a fourteen-year-old. So we have to admit that if we do spank a young child, we are taking unfair advantage of our vastly superior size.
- Corporal punishment demeans the child, by implying that he is not worthy of the respect you accord to other human beings.
- Corporal punishment also demeans the parent. If I hit my son, it signifies my utter failure to communicate with him as a human being. As with other kinds of violent punishment, the parent who resorts to spanking ultimately loses. Winning your children's respect means convincing them to behave as civilized human beings without yourself behaving like a brute.
- Corporal punishment gives the child a model for violence as a method of solving interpersonal problems. Many parents worry about toy guns and violent TV shows yet routinely use violence themselves, instead of reason, when disciplining their children. Your own behavior has more effect on your children than a thousand TV programs.
- Any form of punishment that makes the parents feel guilty is less likely to be used consistently. Punishments are an inevitable part of making and enforcing rules for children. If you rely on a form of punishment that leaves you feeling guilty, you may hold yourself back from following through with your rules.
- Spanking upsets the child partly because of the humiliation and partly because it raises the possibility in his mind, at least unconsciously, that you may stop loving, feeding, watching over, and protecting him. You gain nothing, certainly not the child's loyalty, by sending that message, which has to do with love versus rejection. I have been advocating consequences in an entirely different dimension: freedom versus restriction.

The more you try to mitigate spankings, giving the child a rationalization, trying to convince him that it doesn't hurt or that he should not let it hurt, the lower your credibility goes. No child truly believes that his spanking is for his own good or that it hurts the parent anywhere near as much as it hurts him.

Some parents go to ridiculous extremes to try to avoid being bullies about spankings, without eliminating the spankings themselves. I have heard of fathers who make the child return blow for blow, so that the child can feel avenged for the hurt. This upsets him more, because no child is satisfied by hurting his parent (even if he felt like doing so, he would worry about what the further consequences of *that* were going to be).

Another technique is to make a boy hold out his hand for a slap and "take it like a man," without flinching. I am in favor of children learning to take their punishments maturely—girls as well as boys. But children who are bullied into "voluntarily" holding out their

* An exception might be, "If you hit your sister, I will hit you." But that still ignores all of the other arguments against corporal punishments.

hands (or bending over to be paddled, in the English boarding-school tradition) are certainly not being allowed to be men or women. They are doubly demeaned: physically hurt and, at the same time, humiliated by the mixed message "You are taking this voluntarily. You can run away or flinch if you want to; but of course, then you get two for flinching."

Humiliation equals abuse

Television actor/producer Michael Landon, who began his career as a track star, said that he learned to run fast when his mother punished him for wetting his bed by hanging the sheets out the window. He had to dash home from school every day to remove the sheets before any of the other kids saw them. I am not sure this is a reliable way to make your child a track star, but I am very sure it is *not* an effective way to deal with bed-wetting. Humiliation is never a good consequence to employ. Humiliation has much in common with corporal punishment: It is degrading, it takes unfair advantage of your superior position, and it presents a poor role model. To be embarrassed in front of friends is devastating to children's self-esteem. Yet their self-esteem is your most valuable ally as they go out into the world; it is never in your interest to undermine it.

In fact, humiliation is the worst type of punishment. Spanking is short and quick. Humiliation continues indefinitely into the future. The child whose mother advertises his bed-wetting can be teased about it weeks, months, or years later. A child whose father calls him a "mental cripple" for leaving the lawnmower out in the rain may be crippled by that self-image for life (unless previous humiliation has long since rendered him insensitive). You can, of course, apologize and explain that you didn't mean what you said. But you have no control over the after-effects, particularly with public humiliation. The child goes on being punished even after his behavior has improved.

When, instead, you stick to *restrictions* for your consequences, you can put an end to the punishment when it has achieved its purpose.

BETTER: Mr. and Mrs. Wilson take turns waking up at 4:00 A.M. to check nine-year-old Jack's bed. If it is wet, they wake him up and make him change his pajamas and help change the sheets before going back to bed. If the bed is dry when inspected, but Jack wets it later, then the inspection time is postponed a half hour on subsequent nights; if the bed is usually wet, then the inspection time can be made earlier. The object is to apply the consequence as soon as possible after Jack wets the bed.

The system is instituted along with a reward system. Jack gets a gold star each morning his bed is dry; ten gold stars are redeemable for a predetermined reward. Thus, when his parents wake him up, they are being a nuisance, but at the same time they are helping Jack to earn a reward.

The system continues until Jack's bed is dry seven mornings in a row. Then he is congratulated warmly and given back his freedom to sleep all night without intrusion. The system can be reinstituted if the bed-wetting problem returns. The parents' inconvenience for a week or two is more than compensated for by the benefits of ending the problem, for them as well as for Jack.

Just desserts

Food has acquired mixed-up meanings in our society, beyond just nourishment and good taste. For some people, it is the way they try to cheer themselves up. For others, it is a way to punish themselves, either by self-denial or by making themselves fat. Susan Orbach, a therapist specializing in women's emotional problems, pointed out in her excellent book *Fat Is a Feminist Issue* that many women alternate between bingeing and starving all their lives. They feet bad about themselves when they overeat but just as bad when they deprive themselves.

Ambiguous messages concerning food begin in childhood. If children are repeatedly deprived of food when their parents are angry at them, they can suffer lifelong emotional scars in the form of eating disorders. Using food treats as a customary reward for "being good" can be equally destructive. The child is conditioned that eating a treat—hungry or not—means he is "good." Therefore, *never reward children with food, and never punish them by depriving them of food.*

MISTAKE: Terry, eight, is at the dinner table with his two sisters and their parents, He gazes longingly as four plates of strawberry shortcake are served, topped with globs of whipped cream. "Thanks for not making your bed this morning, Terry," coos his younger sister, Christine. "There's more for us." Watching his sisters lick their lips, Terry is not reminding himself to make his bed every morning. He is reminding himself to thrash Christine. He is also likely, without being conscious of the reason, to stuff himself with sweets at the next opportunity.

WORSE MISTAKE: "No, Christine," Mother says. "I saved Terry's portion for him. He can have it tomorrow morning after he makes his bed." The more she tries to offset the deprivation, the more the strawberry shortcake looms in importance and the more inconsistent is the message to the children about making their beds. At best, the consequence was arbitrary; now it seems to be halfhearted as well.

BETTER: Terry's mother should find a logical consequence for not making the bed or an arbitrary consequence not involving food.

A trip to a favorite restaurant *can* be used as a reward, because the treat is the occasion, the setting, the chance to choose from a menu—not the food itself. Conversely, you can refuse to stop at a favorite restaurant if the children have been fighting in the backseat. You are not depriving them of food; they will still get a nutritious meal at home.

You can refuse to serve a hot meal to your teenager who shows up late for dinner. But he should be allowed to help himself to a cold supper if he is hungry. Never use hunger as a punishment.

On the other hand, no child was ever abused by a rule stating, "If you don't finish what you take on your plate, you get no dessert." But that is the *only* rule for which "no dessert" should be the consequence. It is a rule about not wasting food. It stresses the importance of nutritious foods as opposed to sweets. But it does not make the dessert a reward for anything other than eating a balanced meal.*

* The problem of getting children to eat certain foods is discussed in Chapter 12.

What if you are really angry?

Don't hide your anger. Telling children how their actions have made you feel is an important part of any punishment. They need to know the direct effects of their actions, including their effects upon your feelings.

MISTAKE: "Go to your room."
BETTER: "I'm so furious, I'm trembling! Go to your room."

MISTAKE: "Your curfew is one hour earlier for the next week."

BETTER: "For the last hour we've been worried and upset. We feel taken advantage of—insulted. Your curfew is one hour earlier for the next week."

Punish the behavior, not the person. Unfortunately, many parents do not know how to make their children sensitive to the parents' feelings without inducing guilt. There is a simple difference. A guilt-inducing parent is one who treats the objectionable behavior as a constant aspect of the child as a person, thereby attacking the child's self-esteem.

MISTAKE: "Only an inconsiderate person would do that."

BETTER: "When you did *X*, you weren't considering your sister's rights."

MISTAKE: "Why must you *always* do *Y*?"

BETTER: "That is the fifth time this week you did *Y*, and it is beginning to drive me crazy."

MISTAKE: "If you cared about your mother, you would do *Z*."

BETTER: "How can I convince you to do *Z*?"

Guilt is a poor way of motivating children. It induces them to feel bad about themselves. That is exactly the opposite of your real goal, which is to make Your children feel so good about themselves that they reject all opportunities to be bad. When you refer to the effects of certain actions, rather than to the child's worth as a person, you give the child an opportunity to increase self-esteem by

behaving differently.* Assume that the person does care about you, wants to live within the rules of Liberty, and usually does so. It is the specific act, on a specific occasion, that you need to punish, treating it as if it were a surprising departure from the child's true personality.

Children do not want their parents to be unhappy. In fact, psychologists who study the whole family system have learned that children's aggravating behavior frequently serves to "rescue" their parents by distracting the parents' attention away from other problems. The children are sacrificing themselves, unconsciously, to try to cheer their parents up! Your child cares about your feelings, though he or she may sometimes conceal that fact. So the most effective message you can get across with any punishment is to make clear what the child can do so that life is less difficult for everyone in the future.

It is fine to confirm the fact that you are angry. What the child needs to know most of all, however, is how to be himself without making you angry. He can learn to do that through the clarity, fairness, and constructiveness of your rules. He cannot succeed if you give vent to character assassination.

The complaining syndrome

If a rule is being ignored and you are frustrated, then you are not doing your job. Merely complaining about your child's behavior, without enforcing the rule, is worse than having no rule in the first place. Criticism and complaints are a waste of the energy you should have invested in prompt enforcement and in modifying your rules so they work.

We have all known or heard about parents who don't know the difference between discipline and authoritarianism or even abusiveness. It is easy to understand, therefore, why most of us have mixed feelings about punishing children directly and decisively. Yet the fact remains that complaining and criticizing—like their inevitable

* To help parents focus on the behavior rather than on the child, Dr. Haim Ginott, author of *Between Parent and Child*, insisted that no parental complaint should have the child as the subject of the sentence. For example, "It is your sister's right not to be hit" is better than "Don't [you] hit your sister" or "I am being driven crazy by all those dirty clothes that are left on the floor."

associates nagging, pleading, and empty threats—always make the problem worse. When rules are clearly presented, consistent punishments do not upset children much. Having a choice between following the rule and taking the consequence gives children security, shows them you care about them, and puts them in control of their lives.

Complaining, nagging, and character assassination are more likely to drive children to rebellion. The hassling inevitably overflows into areas that really ought to be the child's own business. An example is Al's gratuitous remark about his daughter's friends, in chapter 1, when he referred to her "driving around with those scuzzy friends of yours." This sort of complaining about things there are no rules against stiffens children's resistance to all of the parents' preferences, as well as to the legitimate rules.

When you feel like complaining, think *rules* instead.

EXAMPLE: Danielle's parents have a rule that she has to show them her completed homework or she may not watch TV. This rule gives her a choice, and the parents have to be prepared to live with it. It is not fair to complain if she chooses to spend the evening playing with the cat. She is observing their rule. Suppose they change it to "homework must be completed before any recreation after dinner." The next evening, Danielle decides to test the rule by turning on the TV. Should her parents launch into a diatribe? Why aggravate themselves? They can simply ask to see her homework and, if it is not done, turn off the TV. She may come back after the homework is done. If the same thing happens the next night, she may watch no TV for the whole evening—then no TV for two days, three days, and so forth.

If you ask twice, you're nagging

When it comes to bedtimes, chores, homework, piano practicing—even just getting out of bed in time for school—how many things do you find yourself reminding your children about, again and again?

Eventually, "reminding" leads to mutual aggravation. If you ask twice, you are nagging. Children hate to be nagged; you hate to nag; they resent you; you resent them. Yet they refuse to move until

you go to your limit, losing patience entirely, and either demean yourself by yelling at them or finally substitute a specific enforceable consequence for the meaningless "or else."

There must be a better way. The better way is to have an explicit rule in the first place, with a known consequence, and not to do any nagging at all. If the conditions specified in the rule are not met, apply the consequence.

Think about which of your rules should be *no-reminder* rules and which should be *one-reminder* rules. I cannot think why any rule should involve more than one reminder. You might feel that it is unfair to expect an eight-year-old to do her practicing every day without being reminded. In that case, the rule should state that you will remind her once. By the early teens, it is reasonable to expect practicing and chores to be done without any reminders at all. Say so in the rule. Bite your tongue when you see the children forgetting. Apply the consequence as promised.

Of course, chores and routines are not the only things that catch parents in the nagging trap. We also fall into it when we ask a child, for example, to turn down the stereo. Instead of asking a second time, put it in the form of a temporary rule.

> EXAMPLE: Not feeling well, you lie down, asking the kids to please play quietly. They proceed to chase each other up and down the stairs, screaming with delight. Don't yell; don't complain; don't nag. Don't punish them either; you are not allowed to punish them for anything that you have not previously made an explicit rule about. Say, "I'm going to have to make a rule, just for today because I don't feel well. If anyone wakes me from my nap before 5:00, we'll all go to bed an hour earlier tonight."

> EXAMPLE: Your sixteen-year-old and his friends come in at 9:00 on a Saturday night with a take-out pizza. They supplement this from your refrigerator, leave the kitchen full of dirty dishes and glasses, and are ready to go out somewhere an hour later. You say to your son, "Please leave the kitchen as you found it." He says, "I'll take care of it later. We're in a hurry." You can accept this if you want to, but if you do not accept it, *do not yell and do not argue about it*. Merely say, with quiet authority, "If you don't leave the kitchen as you found it, right now, the next time you want to bring friends into the house, the answer will be no."

The two above examples will only work if the child already knows, from your actions in the past, that you mean what you say and that you will do what you promise to do if your instructions are ignored.

This is probably the nicest benefit of clear family rules. You will never have to nag your children, about anything, ever again?

The "nothing works" syndrome

"What can we do? Nothing works." "The only consequence he understands is my belt." "The only thing she cares about is the phone, and we've taken her phone privileges away indefinitely, so there's nothing else we can do."

I hear these cries of helplessness from parents who are otherwise intelligent, imaginative,- and effective people. Something happens to their effectiveness under the stress of trying to cope with their children. The question is: Are they helpless because their children are so troublesome or are the children troublesome because their parents act so helpless?

Here is something you can do to get out of that "nothing works" syndrome. Make a list of everything you now do for your children. Include every cent you spent on them in the last month, every time you helped any of them with anything, every minute you devoted to their needs and desires at the expense of your own. Now cross out the following items:

- Bought food for them.
- Clothed them.
- Kept a roof over their heads.
- Provided health care.
- Praised them for worthwhile achievements or efforts.

Everything else that you do for your children is something that you can stop doing if they are uncooperative, inconsiderate, or abusive. Different parents have to choose for themselves, from their own list, which services they are prepared to withdraw and in what order. You can easily refuse to vacuum your son's room if he is leaving it a mess. It would probably take more serious misbehavior

before you would refuse to drive him anywhere or before you would make him cook all his own meals.

EXAMPLE: The Gilberts have found that "nothing works." For ignoring his curfew, fifteen-year-old Danny has been grounded time and again. They also ground him for calling his brother names, refusing to do chores when asked, and getting in trouble at school. When he ignores the grounding, he gets a double grounding. "It doesn't have any effect," they say. "He comes and goes when he wants. What are we supposed to do-tie him up?"

The Gilberts' counselor asks them to make a list of all the things they do for Danny, excluding the essential food, clothing, shelter, health care, and praise. With her help, they come up with the following ranked list. At the top of the list are the things they are most willing to stop doing for Danny. Toward the bottom of the list are the things they are least willing to stop:

1. Drive him to school.
2. Give him money for things he says he needs.
3. Allow him to play the stereo without earphones.
4. Do his laundry.
5. Let him watch TV in their bedroom if outvoted on choice of program in living room.
6. Vacuum his room.
7. Take messages for him.
8. Clean the bathroom he shares with younger brother and sister.
9. Let him use telephone.
10. Give him equal voice in choice of programs when the family is watching TV.
11. Cook meals for him when he deigns to be home.
12. Drive him to hockey practice and games.
13. Pay for his hockey equipment.
14. Allow his friends to come over.
15. Allow him to play the stereo with earphones.

With this list, the task of making and enforcing rules no longer seems impossible to the Gilberts. They would hate to

have to stop doing some of the things at the bottom of the list. (For example, they want to encourage—not oppose—Danny's enthusiasm for hockey and his relationships with friends.) But they now see, in the items at the top of the list, several privileges they can take away that will be more effective than grounding, less trouble for them, and more logically related to the different kinds of behavior they are concerned about.

You can surely list a dozen or more services you now perform routinely for your children. In addition to the kinds of things listed in the example, think about help you give them with schoolwork (especially with typing, preparing posters, and other projects), trips and excursions you take them on, parties you help them arrange, clothing and accessories you lend them, lessons you pay for. I am not suggesting that you stop doing those particular things. My experience indicates, however, that once you have made a complete list and ranked all the items in terms of your willingness to withhold them as consequences, you will no longer feel so helpless.

Something works; you just have to find it!

The "whodunit" syndrome

What do you do when you know that a rule has been ignored but you do not know by whom? Who spilled the popcorn on the floor in the family room? Who let the dog out? Who borrowed your tennis racket without asking?

The "who started it?" syndrome is a variation on the "whodunit." Who called whom "stupid" first? Who threw the first, punch? Who took whose stereo?

There is an easy, effective way to deal with both problems. Word your rules in such a way that if you don't know whom to punish, you can punish everyone who might have been involved. This saves you from playing detective, and it also does something even more important: It forces the kids to work things out as much as possible among themselves.

EXAMPLE: The Turners' three children share a bathroom. Two of the three frequently complain about each other leaving it a mess, and the third, the youngest, uses her parents' bathroom whenever possible. All three children deny respon-

sibility for the mess, and all three try to get their mother to make the others clean it up—or to clean it herself.

Instead, Mr. and Mrs. Turner make some rules: "No children are allowed in our bathroom; we are not cleaning your bathroom; and you can work out your own system of keeping it clean with your own standards."

In a family meeting, the Turners help their children work out a plan for policing each other whenever specific criteria are not met. The kids' bathroom soon becomes cleaner than the parents' bathroom. Mrs. Turner would like to get her husband to agree to the same system.

EXAMPLE: "If the lawn work is not done by noon every Saturday, none of you get your allowance that week." Children who are old enough to take care of the lawn are also old enough to divide up the responsibilities and make sure the job gets done.

EXAMPLE: "When fighting gets too loud and we tell you to stop it, if it doesn't stop within thirty seconds, you both get punished."

With fighting, I think it is a good idea to set forth conditions under which you are willing to ignore it and let the children solve their own problems, and conditions under which you are going to intervene. As the foregoing example suggests, you have a right to respond when the noise bothers you, or when the furniture is in danger of being destroyed. You may also be concerned about protecting one child from another; but let the more vulnerable child tell you when your help is needed.

There are several ways to deal with children's altercations with each other. Some parents hold the oldest child responsible for preventing any physical fights. Others punish both children, no questions asked. In some homes, the one who enters the other one's room is always punished if a fight ensues. Other parents manage to ignore their children's fighting unless something gets broken.

Your rule will depend upon the particular circumstances of your family. But don't worry too much about whether the rule will always do justice in every situation. The important thing is to let all the children know in advance how you are going to deal with their fighting. Any consequence is fair if you gave all parties fair warning.

Don't punish yourselves

One final point about enforcing rules: Often, the punishments you impose will inconvenience you as much as the children. There is no way to avoid that, and you ought to be willing to make some sacrifices in order to get your family functioning well. But do not carry it too far.

Ask yourselves whether the long-term gain is likely to be worth the short-term cost. It is certainly worth skipping a night of bridge or a day of golf in order to show a teenager how much you care. But it may not be worth canceling a long-deserved vacation during which Grandma has agreed to stay with the kids. You can say, "We're not letting you spoil this trip that we've been looking forward to for so long. Your punishment will be postponed until we get back." Write it on your calendar so you don't forget.

NOTE: In the many examples referring to teenagers' curfews throughout the book I failed to mention that life is much, much easier when your house rules for weekends and for week nights correspond to a law in your communit, which your police enforce. Such ordinances seem to have been passed nearly everywhere (enforced more in suburbs and small towns) since I wrote the first edition of this book nearly twenty years ago.

Similarly, it's easier to enforce rules about drinking and smoking when you can accept the community's restrictions instead of trying to be a little stricter or a little more liberal. –K.K.

CHAPTER SIX

Escalating the Consequences

A system of family rules is dynamic; it changes continually as children's needs and responsibilities change. In fact, the way you deal with any particular behavior problem in Liberty may move through three different phases:

1. Ask for cooperation without formal rules.
2. If problem persists, make formal rules.
3. If problem persists, escalate consequences.

In the first phase, you simply ask a child to modify certain actions. If this request gets results, then those actions don't need to be put in the form of written rules.

Some behavior problems, however, do require you to insist upon rules. That is the second phase, which is often effective with no more than an occasional need to apply consequences.

This chapter is about what to do if you have tried rules but the rules are being disregarded. You are following through by enforcing consequences, and the child is enduring the consequences.. but not changing the behavior. You need to deal with that behavior through a third phase of problem solving, still within the mode of life I call Liberty.

Moving into this third phase—escalating the consequences--does not mean that the system isn't working. It only means that you have not yet succeeded in adequately restricting the child's freedom. Various paths are open to you:

- You can merely *increase* the consequence. If your son is being fined ten cents every time he calls his sister a name and the name-calling doesn't stop, try raising the fine to fifteen cents, then twenty cents, and so on. This only works if you were right in thinking that the type of consequence you tried (in this case, a fine) would be effective. Then it is just a question of finding the right magnitude, by trial and error.
- You can change to a different consequence. For example, the consequence for your daughter's leaving clothes, papers, and books strewn all over her bedroom floor is that you refuse to vacuum the room. Suppose she doesn't care. If you don't want to put up with the dust gathering in her room, you can change the consequence. Would she straighten her room every week if she knew that otherwise you were going to pile everything on the bed on vacuuming day? If that would not work, could you dock her allowance? Or perhaps you could make the rule "If your room is picked up, I'll vacuum it; if not, you'll be required to clean it up *and* vacuum it before you can go out on the weekend." Knowing your daughter, what kind of consequence could you impose that would persuade her?
- You can tighten up the rule itself. For example, if the children are not allowed to watch TV until all homework is done, and you find out that one child has been handing in incomplete homework, you can prohibit that child from watching any TV at all on school nights.
- If none of the above work, you can put the child on Probation, which I shall explain in chapter 9.

All these alternatives give children a very important message: By ignoring my parents' rule, I have made things tougher for myself.

Before comparing the alternatives of increasing the consequence, changing the consequence, or tightening the rule, we need to discuss some general questions. *When* should you escalate? When should you *not* escalate? By *how much* should you escalate? And when should you *de*-escalate?

When you don't need to escalate: Misbehavior has a reason

If you only have to apply consequences once in a while, there is no need to escalate them. A child who occasionally ignores your rule may only be testing to see whether you are still serious about it. It is better not to move into the escalation phase until you have to. You can gather valuable information about the reasons for the child's misbehavior more easily in the *second* phase of Liberty than in the third. The second phase consists of:

- Written rules.
- Following through on the same consequence ea time a rule is tested.
- Finding out what valid needs the child is trying to meet by disobeying the rule.
- Teaching the child appropriate ways of fulfilling those needs.

Suppose a child blatantly defies one of your rules and you cannot see why. It does not seem to be merely a contest of wills; the child seems to have some reason for thinking it worthwhile to ignore your rule despite the consequences. You should be more interested in finding out what that reason is than in waging a power struggle. In this situation, if you were to escalate the consequences, you would eventually "win" the power struggle, and the child would lose—which is no real victory for you. If you can discover the child's reason, you may be able to solve the problem in a way that makes you both winners.

EXAMPLE: Nine-year-old Donald plays in the backyard of his apartment building. He has a key to the front door but not to the back door. After coming home from school, he often goes out the back door and leaves it ajar so that he will be able to get back in. There is a rule against this, because many people use the back stairs and might be tempted to enter the apartment.

Although Donald's mother grounds him each time, she continues to find the door open about once a week. In fact, the only days she does not find it ajar when she gets home from work are the days when he has already come back in from playing. Should she increase the grounding from one evening to two evenings per offense?

No. Donald's mother needs to find out what he is accomplishing by leaving the door ajar. He says, "I just forget to close it." That might account for doing it once, but not for persisting in the face of consequences.

There are a number of commonly used, but inept, ways of demanding explanations in such situations:

MISTAKE 1: Paranoid. "Why must you deliberately defy me?"

MISTAKE 2: Sarcastic. "Are you too stupid to remember a simple thing like closing the door?"

MISTAKE 3: Ridiculous. "Do you want our whole apartment to be emptied out?"

BETTER: The best way to encourage anyone—child or adult—to feel comfortable about telling you why he did something is to ask him to imagine what would have happened if he had not done it. Donald's mother asks, "What do you think might happen if you closed the door when you went out?"

"I'd have to go all the way around the building to get back in."

"But you run around a lot farther than that while you're playing. You can afford the extra minute that it takes to go around front."

"Not when I have to go to the bathroom!"

It turns out that Donald once wet his pants by waiting too long and then running up the back stairs before he remembered that the door was closed. Since the back door locks automatically when it is closed, Donald is given a key to that door and the entire rule becomes unnecessary.

This example illustrates the fact that firm rules are no substitute for communicating with children patiently and non-threateningly (see chapter 11). It may require several attempts before you understand the reason behind the child's actions; he may not be aware of the reason himself. If so, continue following through with your

consequences each time. But don't escalate the consequences, because that only makes communication harder.

In some cases the child may *want* the consequence. For example, he might be getting himself grounded in order to avoid certain activities with peers. In other cases, the child feels that following your rule would be worse than the consequence—in Donald's case, he is afraid he may wet his pants. If his mother were to escalate the consequence without finding out the reason for his disobedience, she might eventually succeed in convincing Donald to follow her rule even if it means wetting his pants. But neither she nor Donald would be happy with that result.

Most behavior problems can be dealt with in this second phase, by finding out what physical, social, or emotional needs the child is trying to meet. The second phase—the rule-enforcement phase—is a better time to try to discover those needs than the first phase. In the first phase, when you merely say, "Please remember ...," the child can only follow your preference if it does not conflict with any other vital needs. It might create a conflict that the child cannot explain to you, either because he does not understand it himself or because he is afraid that you won't understand. You have to go to the second phase, making a rule, just to clarify your position and encourage the child to confront the real problem.

So it is important not to think that making rules signifies a failure of understanding. The best possible outcome of enforcing a rule is that you and the child come to a *better* understanding. Once that has been achieved, as in the example above, you may not need the rule anymore.

When to escalate

When you feet sure that the child knows the appropriate way to meet his valid needs, yet he continues to challenge your rule, then you escalate. Assuming that his continued defiance is nothing but a test, you are less concerned now about *why* the child is giving you so much trouble. You are ready to say, in effect, "You're not going to get what you want by ignoring our basic rules. You'll have to find a more mature way to tell us about the difficulties you're having. It's your choice, but as long as you continue these actions, we're going to get stricter and stricter."

EXAMPLE: Every time she acts aggressively toward the new baby, three-year-old Sophie is sent to her room, which she does not like. Realizing that the aggression probably comes from normal sibling rivalry, Sophie's parents have begun to spend more time alone with her and go out of their way to praise her whenever she is helpful and considerate. Nonetheless, she continues to ignore the rule about being gentle with the baby.

MISTAKE: Her mother is strongly tempted to raise a welt on Sophie's backside. It would do no good, not only because a spanking is rarely effective but also because it is a form of attention, and Sophie should get attention for appropriate, not inappropriate behavior.

BETTER: Sophie's mother tells her how angry she is but controls that anger—and increases the "time out" in her room by one minute each time. If it was five minutes to begin with, Sophie's mother lets her know that it will be six the next time, then seven, and so on. Numbers of minutes mean almost nothing to a three-year-old, but she will soon realize that the banishment time is increasing significantly. If Sophie does not like being sent to her room, she will decide to start respecting the rule.

EXAMPLE: Seth, sixteen, is rebelling against his curfew. His parents need to have him home by 10:30 on Sunday through Thursday nights, because that is when they go to bed. They have made a rule that the next night's curfew will be earlier by the number of minutes Seth was late the previous night. Although they enforce this, it does not bring Seth home on time. At least once a week, he fails to get home by 10:30, greeting his parents with a cavalier "I know, I know, curfew tomorrow night is 10:06 because I'm twenty-four minutes late."

They increase the consequence to two minutes earlier per minute late, and Seth starts getting home closer to 10:30 when he is late. But he is still late too frequently. When they make the penalty three minutes earlier per minute late, he starts to take the rule seriously. From then on he is rarely late in getting home, and if so, only by a few minutes. The parents are satisfied with that, and do not need to escalate any further.

EXAMPLE: Alex's father drives him to school on his way to work, so Alex gets there about twenty minutes early. After dawdling and making his father late for work a couple of times, Alex is told, "The car is leaving at 7:45 whether you're in it or not." Often he is not ready and so has to walk to school, getting there late. Unfortunately, Alex's school does nothing except accumulate tardiness for the year. So Alex's parents need a different consequence. Alex is told that if he is not in the car by 7:45, he will have to go to bed a half hour earlier that evening.

Escalate by small steps

You started with the smallest punishment that you thought might be effective so that you would have room to increase it if necessary. For the same reason, you should increase it by the smallest difference that the child is likely to notice.

Do not double the consequence. You cannot double a number more than three or four times before it becomes ridiculously large. In the above example with the three-year-old, after increasing the banishment by one minute each time, the fifth time she was sent to her room she would have had to stay there ten minutes. If her mother had doubled the punishment each time, the fifth time it would have been nearly three hours. Similarly, if you are taking fifty cents off someone's allowance, you can increase the fine by a nickel each time; if instead you were to double it each time, after ten increases the fine would be $512!

EXAMPLE: Scott, eight, is a classic bedtime dawdler. His mother, divorced and holding down a full-time job, decides that she needs to be serious about having Scott in bed by 8:00 P.M., for the sake of his sleep as well as her own serenity. She writes the simple rule "Any night when you are not in bed with the light off by bedtime, the number of minutes late will be subtracted from your bedtime for the next night." For the next week, Scott goes to bed at the following times:

Night	Bedtime	In bed	Late by:
1	8:00	8:15	15 min
2	7:45	8:15	30 min

Night	Bedtime	In bed	Late by:
3	7:15	7:30	15 min
4	7:00	7:00	ON TIME
5	8:00	8:20	20 min
6	7:40	7:40	ON TIME
7	8:00		

Notice that when Scott goes to bed on time, he is rewarded by getting his eight o'clock bedtime back the next night. Within a few days, he makes up his mind to conform to the eight o'clock bedtime. His mother can still expect occasional tests of the rule in the future, in which case she ran enforce the penalty the next night.

Suppose, however, that Scott were to dig in his heels. His mother would have to resort to more persuasive consequences. The next step might be to say, "Only after you have observed the special bedtime three nights in a row will you return to your eight o'clock bedtime."

If Scott's mother does not consider it practical to set the punishment bedtime earlier than 7:00, she can make that the earliest it ever goes, still requiring three perfect nights before it changes back to 8:00. She can express the situation in terms of his voluntary choices: "You're keeping yourself on an earlier bedtime. Maybe you don't feel old enough yet to be allowed to stay up until 8:00."

De-escalate at every opportunity

Since it is to your advantage to have the punishments stay small—you are trying to convey a message, not devastate the child—it is a good idea to have a built-in *de*-escalation clause.

De-escalation means that the consequence will return to the original level if a designated time passes without a repeat incident. This rewards the child for respecting the rule.

Choose a time period a little longer than the amount of time that usually passes between violations. For example, if your five-year-old averages at least one tantrum per day, two days without a tantrum could be considered a sign of progress. If a teenager skips school about once every two or three weeks, a month without missing school would be a sign of progress.

EXAMPLE: Let's reconsider Seth, the sixteen-year-old whose curfew is moved up three minutes for every minute he is late. That might create a problem. If Seth has no plans to go out on Monday night, he has nothing to lose by being an hour or two late on Sunday. His parents decide, instead, on the following rule: Seth's normal curfew Sunday through Thursday will be 10:30 P.M. If Seth is late, then the curfew will be changed to one minute earlier per minute late, for a week. (If Seth comes in at 11:00 one night—thirty minutes late—his curfew becomes 10:00--thirty minutes earlier-for a week.) If Seth comes in later than the new curfew time, the curfew becomes earlier by another minute per minute late, and the week starts again. After keeping to the revised curfew time for one straight week, Seth will be restored to his 10:30 curfew.

EXAMPLE: Sarah's parents do not allow her or her friends to smoke in the house. When they find ashes or smell cigarette smoke (or incense, usually burned to conceal other fragrances), Sarah is grounded for one weekend evening. This has been happening so regularly that her parents decide to increase the consequence to two evenings; but it will go back to one if a week goes by without an incident.

The fact that the child begins to observe a rule does not mean you no longer need it; it may be quite a while before you drop the rule from your list. But you want to treat the occasional slip as a relatively minor matter. By de-escalating the consequence, you give recognition to the fact that the child has been making an effort.

EXAMPLE: In the list of rules in chapter 4, eight-year-old Billy and ten-year-old Laurie are required to check in with their parents before going from one place to another. For example, if they are at the playground and want to go to a friend's house, they have to come home first or telephone for permission, mainly to be sure that Mom and Dad know their whereabouts. Their older brother Bob has more freedom. "I'm going to be out riding around on my bike," he may say. "I'll be back by dinnertime."

Suppose Dad learns that Bob and his friend, contrary to the rule, were playing in the railroad yards. Suppose also that Bob has been grounded for doing this once before. Dad's first impulse is to do what his own father would have done: whack the daylights out of Bob. He can do something more effective than that. He can simply cross out Bob's rule and add Bob's name to the rule for Billy and Laurie.

"When can it change back?" asks Bob. This means he understands what his parents are doing.

"Talk to us in a month," Dad says calmly. "We'll take a look at how responsible you have been."

Mom adds, "I'm writing it on the kitchen calendar. A month from today: Review Bob's freedom of movement."

When you put a child under a stricter rule, no other punishment is needed.

MISTAKE: You have told your fifteen-year-old that if she ever gets drunk, she cannot get her driver's license until she is eighteen. After she does get drunk, you will have to think of something more severe; the driver's license threat cannot be used twice.

BETTER: You can make the consequence one that can be escalated, rather than a one-shot disaster. "Because of this incident, you may not get your license until you are sixteen plus one month. If there is another incident, we'll add two months on to that, then three extra months, and so on. But for every month that goes by between now and then without any drinking problems, we'll take off a month. So you can, if you want, get back the privilege of getting your license at sixteen."

Summary

Escalate when a child continues ignoring a rule, for no apparent reason other than to test your resolve.

Escalate by small steps, whether you increase the consequence, change the consequence, or tighten the rule.

De-escalate whenever you can justify doing so as a reward for behaving responsibly.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Art of Paying Attention

Good parents, as everyone knows, give their children plenty of attention. They play with them, attend soccer games and class plays, read homework assignments, praise every achievement, and are always available for a talk.

On the other hand, those same children are working hard to grow out from under their parents' surveillance. They don't always want attention; sometimes they want to be left alone. They want and need responsibility, which means that their parents gradually have to stop monitoring all their activities. All children need increasing autonomy as they develop.

How much attention is enough? How much is too much? Can you leave it up to the individual child to tell you when to pay attention? Unfortunately, you can't. Your child's behavior may indicate a need for more attention, but the behavior itself may be inappropriate. If you attend to the child at that moment, you will be rewarding the wrong kind of behavior.

As the following chart shows, there are two situations when children should be given less attention: One is when they are misbehaving in order to win attention, and the other is when they are behaving appropriately and want autonomy.

	Child wants more attention	**Child wants less attention**
Child's behavior is appropriate	Give MORE attention	Give LESS attention
Child's behavior is NOT appropriate	Give LESS attention	Give MORE attention

The chart also shows that there are times when children should be given attention they do not want. For example, suppose your child's math homework is habitually sloppy and incomplete. The child needs supervision but may not like you to get involved in going over homework assignments. Your unwanted attention is then an excellent logical consequence; if grades do not improve, you will supervise the homework more closely.

In short, sometimes attention is a reward and sometimes it is a form of restriction. When children's behavior is appropriate, give them more attention if they want it, or more freedom from your attention if that is what they want. On the other hand, When their behavior is not appropriate but seems to be an attempt to win your attention, give them less attention; if the inappropriate behavior seems to be an attempt to escape supervision, that is when you need to attend to it more.

EXAMPLE: Meghan, age four, frequently disappears when her mother sends her outside to play. She goes across the street, which is against a rule. As a consequence, she has to come back inside; but that seems to be just what Meghan wants. She is misbehaving as a way of competing with her baby brother for Mother's attention. The consequence is changed so that the misbehavior gets Meghan less attention, rather than more. If she crosses the street, she has to spend time in her room alone. At the same time, Meghan's mother starts giving her more attention for positive behavior-such as

helping with the baby-instead of for negative behavior. The problem vanishes.

EXAMPLE: Barbara, a single parent, is upset about her nine- and eleven-year-old girls' frequent fighting. When Barbara is getting ready to go out, the girls create an uproar, the younger daughter starts crying, and Barbara winds up late for her date as she tries to console the younger one and rebuke the older. It soon becomes clear that the girls' fighting serves to attract her attention and that she has been unwittingly rewarding them for fighting.

Barbara does two things. She begins to set aside more time to spend with the girls, on a regular basis, except when t hey have been fighting. She makes a rule that if they right, she will refuse to intervene unless the younger one asks for help, in which case both girls will be sent to their rooms.

The girls learn that when they have a dispute, they can come to her calmly and have a family meeting about it, but screaming at each other will no longer get her attention, nor will she cancel her own plans because of it.

EXAMPLE: Fifteen-year-old Alexandra's mother and stepfather have an active social life, so they are happy that she goes out nearly every Friday and Saturday. The problem is that she does not come home at the established hour.

MISTAKE: Her parents make a rule about curfew, the consequence for each failure being that Alexandra is grounded the next Friday or Saturday night. Unfortunately, she seems to like this consequence. She is consistently late on Fridays and stays home with her parents on Saturday nights. She has elected a standoff. As long as it continues, Alexandra is earning more attention by ignoring the curfew.

BETTER: These parents have gained some important information: Alexandra has been asking for more time with them! It would be better to give her that attention as a reward for appropriate behavior than for inappropriate behavior. Even if the standoff were acceptable to her parents, they would be rewarding Alexandra for violating their own rule. If they want her to take the curfew seriously, they will have to find an effective punishment. Perhaps setting the curfew earlier by the number of minutes late would be more effective than grounding her. As long as she follows their rules they should make an effort to invite Alexandra to join them in activities that she likes (sports, making a gourmet dinner, or going to the movies, for example). They should refuse to do those things, or do them without Alexandra, when she has ignored their rules.

The following are examples of children who act as though they want little attention but show by their inappropriate behavior that they need less privacy and *more* attention:

EXAMPLE: Thirteen-year-old Dave is going through a period of antagonism toward his whole family. He has nothing to say to his parents at all, makes nothing but hostile remarks to his younger brothers. He never eats with the family, and the only time he spends in the house is in his own room with the door closed. Furthermore, he develops the habit of coming in the front door without acknowledging anyone else's presence, going straight to his room, and slamming the door. One day his mother intercepts him before he gets there. "From now on, if you don't say a friendly hello to everyone in the house when you come home, before disappearing into your room, and a friendly good-bye before you leave, we are going to take your door off its hinges so we can feel as close to you as we want to be."

"Sure, you do that," he replies, slamming his door. The next evening he comes home to find no door on his room, His family is at the dinner table. "Very funny," he says trying to muster a contemptuous tone. "If I say hello to you: will you put my door back?"

"No, but I'll help *you* put it back," his father says.

"Hello, Dad. Hello, Mother. Hello, Billy. Hello, Mike. 'I All of this is delivered in a sarcastic tone, but it is a step in the right direction. Dave has got the message that he will not be allowed to have the privacy he wants unless he acts like a normal member of the family. "Well, where's the door?"

"We're eating dinner right now," his mother says. "Would you like to join us?"

EXAMPLE: Lisa, seventeen, appears to be nurturing a drinking problem. She comes home late from parties, either silly-drunk or sick-drunk, and she wakes up the next morning with a hangover. Although she angrily denies that she has a problem, her parents are right to be worried.

After consulting a counselor, Lisa's parents make a firm curfew rule and a special rule about drunkenness. If Lisa comes home on time and solidly on her feet, how much she has had to drink will be her own business. If she is late, or if she is brought home drunk, or if she has to sleep it off the next day, she is to be grounded.

The idea is to say to Lisa, "Okay, if you don't have a problem, show us that you can drink moderately and responsibly." An alcoholic cannot do that. One drink has to lead to another, and another. The more Lisa acts like an alcoholic, the more she will be treated as an alcoholic. If she continues to get drunk despite the rule, Lisa will be required to attend open meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) with her parents. Once the diagnosis is clear, Lisa may require rehabilitation in a medical setting and continued involvement with AA.

Look for appropriate behavior and comment on it. There is one form of attention that is never an intrusion, always a form of positive reinforcement. Parents' approval—a short, sweet comment—is so important that I have to mention it here, though it is discussed at length in Part II.

One mistake that inexperienced teachers, and too many parents, make is commenting only on behavior they don't like. This has a terrible effect. In one classroom study, a good teacher was observed giving her normal proportion of comments—more approvals than disapprovals. The amount of disruptive behavior in the class was recorded. Then the teacher was asked to omit any approving comments, only mentioning the behavior she disapproved of ("Arthur, get back in your seat"). The rate of disruptive behavior more than doubled!

Parents, therefore, as well as teachers, have to do two things. We have to pay as little attention as possible to inappropriate behavior. But since we cannot always ignore such behavior, we have to make up for our disapproving comments by giving plenty of praise

for appropriate actions ("I like the way Arthur is working quietly in his seat!").

Other reasons for disobedience

The criticism "She's only doing that to get attention" is applied more often than it is true. There are many other reasons for misbehavior. Generally, when children persistently disobey their parents' rules, they are trying to solve a problem. One of their needs is not being met, and they don't know an appropriate way of getting their parents to meet it.

In addition to setting up consequences that will change the unacceptable behavior, you have to discover what those unmet needs are. Then you can teach your child how to meet his needs without violating your rules.

How do you find out what the child's real need is, what he is feeling insecure about, or what he fears might happen if he were to follow your rules? A good place to start is asking yourself what effect the disobedience has been having. If it usually wins extra attention, that may be the reason the child has been persisting in this behavior. As illustrated above, you need to find a way of paying attention as a reward for more appropriate behavior.

The same principle applies to other effects of disobedience. Perhaps a child's nagging usually results in distracting you and your spouse from fighting. If so, it is a good bet that the child will persist. In order to stop the nagging, you need to do two things: Enforce a consistent rule about it, and do your fighting on your own time, away from the child.

Some children misbehave in order to get a relatively uninvolved parent more involved in the family. They secretly—perhaps unconsciously—fear that the parents may be drifting apart. Other children's fears have more to do with playmates or activities they feel pressured to do.

EXAMPLE: Bruce, eight, is supposed to ask permission before going more than one block from his house. He keeps violating this rule, which results in his being grounded. As a result, he is unable to play football with the children down the street. When his parents realize that Bruce has been deliberately getting himself grounded, they make grounding less

attractive (no TV while grounded), and they stop pressuring him to be part of the football game. Bruce learns that he can avoid football without disobeying any rules. His parents help him find a different group of playmates (see chapter 13).

As I pointed out earlier, there is no point in escalating the consequences until you are sure you have given your child ways of meeting his needs-for attention, security, friends, competence, or growing independence-within your rules. Children generally do not persist in disobeying their parents' rules without a reason. Once you have made your rules clear, you can stop the disobedience most effectively by eliminating that reason-in other words, by showing them appropriate ways of getting what they need. Attention is one of those needs, but only one.

What do you do if you cannot discover your child's motive for continuing to defy your rules? That is a good time to seek professional advice (see chapter 21).

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Science of Grounding

Grounding seems to be the punishment chosen most often by American parents. But grounding is less likely to be effective if your child believes it is the only recourse you have. He has to know that more severe consequences would be applied if he were to defy the grounding. So parents who can never think of any other consequence than grounding are in trouble. They are only one step away from the "Nothing works" syndrome I discussed in chapter 5.

On the other hand, there is one good reason for the popularity of grounding: It is often the perfect logical consequence. Children's growing up means growing out of their parents' homes; so the logical thing to do when they do not demonstrate maturity is to keep them at home. The parents' job is to relinquish control only when the children show themselves mature enough to handle it.

Grounding means restricting a child's freedom of movement, for a specific period of time or until certain conditions are satisfied. Sending children to their rooms is one way of grounding them. So is making them do their homework after school before they are allowed to play. This type of punishment is much harder to enforce than, for example, withholding allowance or refusing a teenager the keys to your car. These latter consequences involve only your own actions, whereas grounding involves controlling and monitoring the child's whereabouts.

A further difficulty is that one type of grounding will not do for all situations. How you go about grounding the child depends upon the problem you are trying to solve. Grounding is an art.

Difficulties with grounding

Let's take care of three difficulties that you may have already had with grounding. "What if our child doesn't mind being grounded?" "What happens if our child goes out in defiance of our grounding?" "What if we don't want to stay home to monitor the grounding?"

What if the child doesn't mind being grounded? The child might *like* to stay home or to be alone in his room. In that case, grounding is no punishment. You have to find something else. Try taking away whatever privileges the child enjoys while grounded: use of telephone, television, or stereo, for instance. Or try the opposite of grounding: Make the child go outside for a time.

EXAMPLE: Kelly, age seven, has developed a habit of screaming when she does not get her way. Usually her younger sister or her mother is on the receiving end of Kelly's tantrums. Her parents try sending her to her room, but it is her sister's room, too, and Kelly is happy to have it to herself for a while. They change the consequence: When Kelly screams, she gets one warning; if it happens again, she has to go outside in the backyard for fifteen minutes. Her sister then enjoys sole possession of their room, the rest of the house, and Mother's attention.

What should you do if a child violates the grounding? If that has never occurred in your family, don't worry about it. Children can usually be trusted even while they are "on punishment," especially if they have not been dishonest or defiant in the past. On the other hand, the honor system will not work with a teenager who is grounded for a substantial period of time as a consequence of serious misbehavior; a parent will have to stay home to enforce the grounding. (The following suggestions do not apply to teenagers who have a history of violence or who are capable of physically abusing their parents. I do not recommend using grounding, at all with such children; in this case, see chapter 20.)

If your child does defy a grounding, the consequence must be a longer grounding. However, it is not in your interest to escalate the grounding too much, because that might provoke further defiance. The secret, as with any consequence, is to start small. Grounding should be in units of minutes, hours, or days, not weeks or months. If you increase the grounding, you only need to do so in small steps, not by doubling it.

EXAMPLE: Compare three possible schedules for escalating a teenager's grounding:

	Doubling	**Adding original unit**	**Adding small unit**
Normal consequence	1 week	1 week	1 week
First escalation	2 weeks	2 weeks	8 days
Second escalation	4 weeks	3 weeks	9 days
Third escalation	8 weeks	4 weeks	10 days

Since you are likely to need three or four escalations in order to get your message across, the third column is the only feasible choice.

EXAMPLE: Thirteen-year-old Jennifer comes home late for dinner and is grounded for the evening. Later that week she is late again and gets grounded for two evenings. On the second evening, Jennifer says she does not feel well and is going to bed early, whereupon she slips out her bedroom window. She is immediately collared by her father, who was not born yesterday.

MISTAKE: Jennifer's father decides this is a power struggle that he has to *win*. He grounds her for a month, nails her window shut, and suspends her allowance.

BETTER: If the original punishment was two consecutive evenings' grounding, then Jennifer still has to stay home for two consecutive evenings. She violated the grounding on the first evening, so essentially she has to start all over again the following evening. I would not add any extra grounding for sneaking out the window. Having to start over on a punish-

ment she had already partly taken might be extra punishment enough. (Remember: Intense punishments work against you. Simply make it clear to the disobedient child that she is digging a deeper and deeper hole for herself the more she resists.) If the pattern were repeated, however, the parents would have to add another day to the punishment each time, or switch to Probation mode.

Now suppose Jennifer manages to take her full punishment, lets a week go by without incident, and then once again comes home late. Her parents feel a sense of despair. They imagine themselves saying a few weeks hence, "Jennifer, you're now grounded for three months." But that need not happen. They can just as well go back to the minimal punishment again, thereby rewarding the week of obedience. The message is: "You took your punishment for what happened in the past, and you were fully restored to our normal rules. However, don't forget that the rules still apply. If you want to get into another round of escalating punishments, you can. But you also have the power to cut off the cycle right here by getting home on time as a matter of routine."

Even with small increments, a grounding can soon become unenforceable. So it is important to get it over with. Don't allow the child, by failing to take the grounding, to build it up to so many consecutive days that he knows you won't enforce it. If necessary, force the child to stay home. (Physically taking hold of a child and carrying or pulling him into the house is not child abuse.) Add an extra consequence for forcing you to use force. This means that a child who goes out when grounded one night will wind up being forced to stay home two nights; but at least after those two nights the incident is over.

EXAMPLE: Your fifteen-year-old daughter is supposed to be grounded on Friday evening. Arriving home from work at 6:00, you find this note: "Dear Mom, I know you're angry at me but I can't be grounded tonight, this party was planned for a long time, it's for a girl whose parents were burned to death in a …" (you skip ahead) "... I love you, Kathy."

One way of looking at Kathy's machinations is that the party is simply more important to her than your rules, let alone your feelings. Another way of looking at it is that she has decided to pay the price for tonight's defiance by staying home on subsequent nights, when no party is planned. Both these perspectives may be valid, but what matters more is that you see Kathy's action as a crucial test of your resolve.

With a few phone calls to parents of Kathy's friends, you can find out where the party is. Go get her. (She and you will be embarrassed, but this is not an unfair "humiliation." You are not revealing anything that Kathy's friends do not already know.) Take her home, enforce the grounding, and ground her on Saturday night as well, her consequence for not staying home as she was supposed to on Friday.

What if grounding inconveniences the rest of the family? There will be times when your own plans will have to be canceled in order to enforce a grounding. You might have been looking forward to doing something with the whole family--a barbecue at your sister's, for example-and you hate to leave one child home.

As soon as parents think seriously about all the extra time and trouble grounding is going to cost them, they begin to have doubts about it. They say things like "Our Friday bowling night is the only regular time we have for being with our friends. Besides, it is a commitment to the other couples in the club. We can't let our children's misbehavior ruin our lives."

My response to that would be to ask these parents which is more important, their children or their friends. It is a matter of needing to make some short-term sacrifices for the sake of putting an end to a potentially long-term problem. If your son were ill with a violent intestinal flu, you would stay home and nurse him back to health. Psychological ills deserve the same concern. Your family is temporarily unwell. It can get better with the right kind of treatment, but not without some extra care on your part.

When you need to use grounding, then, think of it as a temporary set of emergency measures. Be prepared to alter your own routine, not just the child's, and remind yourself and your spouse that the changes you are going to achieve will more than compensate for whatever social or recreational opportunities you pass up in the meantime. However, those sacrifices are only worth making if the child finds them even more undesirable than you do. If your son wants you to stay home with him, or your daughter would rather

stay home than go to her aunt's barbecue, then to ground them in that way would be to reward, rather than punish, their misbehavior.

These obstacles can be avoided. Schedule the grounding for a day when you have no plans. Don't take the child's plans into account one way or the other. Don't skip a day when you know his friends are having a party, but don't deliberately choose such a day, either. Take the next day when (1) he could have gone out (i.e., not a school night), (2) you have no plans, and (3) the child has no plans that you would want to support, such as choir rehearsal or a track meet.

Once you have scheduled the grounding, at least one parent should be committed to staying home to monitor it. Treat it as an iron-clad date. Only a real emergency should cause you to change it.

EXAMPLE: Richard, thirteen, is grounded for the weekend. His best friend calls with a last-minute invitation: They have two extra tickets for the football game. Can Richard and his father go?

MISTAKE: Richard's parents say yes, hoping that if Richard sees how nice they are, he'll be grateful and decide to shape up. Maybe they can buy his future cooperation by giving him a break on his penalties for what happened in the past.

But that is poor psychology. If ignoring family rules leads to a free ticket to the football game, Richard will continue to ignore them.

BETTER: A fast and firm, though sympathetic, "No! This is an opportunity for Richard's parents to show their resolve. "It's a shame that you grounded yourself. But grounded you are."

Grounding for what purpose?

If grounding is to be a logical consequence, it has to be adapted to the particular behavior that has been a problem with your child.

Often the reason for grounding a child is to convey the message "You are not using your freedom responsibly, so we must restrict your freedom somewhat." In this case, your goal is to apply just enough restriction so that the child feels punished but to restore the freedom after a short time so that the child has an opportunity to demonstrate an improvement.

EXAMPLE: Don comes home fifteen minutes late for dinner. He is grounded that evening. The next day after school, he has his freedom back-to see whether he can manage it responsibly.

Sometimes your reason for grounding is to provide extra supervision. In this case, you have to specify what is to be done during the grounding.

EXAMPLE: Sharon is grounded on school nights until her grades show a significant improvement. She is not only to stay home but also to do her homework at the kitchen table and to have it checked by one of her parents before she is allowed to watch TV or talk on the telephone.

Sometimes your reason is to ostracize the child, to make him realize that certain actions are incompatible with being a member of the family. In this case, being grounded means being alone.

EXAMPLE: Tory has been warned that if he punches his younger brother or sister, he will be grounded for the rest of the day. The important part of this punishment is that Tory get no attention from the family, so he is grounded in his own room, meals included.

Sometimes your purpose is to separate the child from particular friends whose behavior you disapprove of, or from a particular event. There is nothing wrong with doing this if you warn the child about the consequence in advance.

EXAMPLE: Sue has bought a ticket to a rock concert that will be held next month. There have been some incidents of marijuana smoking, and Sue's parents now make a rule: If Sue or any of her friends are found with any drugs between now and the date of the concert, Sue will be grounded on that night.

Summary

Grounding is not always the best punishment. If you use it only because you can't think of anything else, you're just a step

away from the "Nothing works" syndrome. When you do choose grounding as a consequence, choose it for a reason. Then use the time when the child is grounded, either to provide extra supervision (if the problem is the child's irresponsibility) or to block the child from getting attention through misbehavior.

CHAPTER NINE

Probation

There is a limit to how long you can go on escalating the consequences. If you feel that Liberty is not working, you may need to shift the child to a different mode of life. I call that temporary mode Probation, which comes from the same root as the word *prove*. The children now have to prove themselves reliable enough to be trusted with Liberty.

The concept of Probation is readily understood by children. Teenagers, in fact, already know what the word means. They know that athletes with failing grades are put on Probation—suspended from the team until they bring their grades up. Parents do the same thing when they put a child on Probation: They set forth one or more special conditions that have to be met for a particular period of time, after which the child can return to the ordinary rules of Liberty.

Probation versus Liberty

The rules of Liberty provide a structure for everyday life in your family. They specify clearly what freedoms your children have and do not have. They protect the children from being nagged at, yelled at, or criticized. When your rules are tested, the Liberty mode allows you to insist upon them. You can increase the consequences just enough to accomplish their purpose. You can add or cancel rules or change their wording as needed. Liberty is a flexible mode of life.

In Liberty, you do not expect *perfect* performance. So long as the child follows the rule most of the time, you will not be too concerned about occasional slips. You will merely follow through with the prescribed consequence. In Probation, however, there is a stand-

ing restriction that will not be lifted until your rule has been respected perfectly for a prescribed period of time.

The difference between Liberty and Probation is that the consequences in Liberty don't necessarily require children to *prove* themselves. In fact, the consequences often take away, for a time, their chance to show that they are capable of following the rule. A Probation is specifically designed to get proof of responsibility *before* the child's freedom is restored.

> LIBERTY: Your daughter is grounded for staying out past her curfew. This punishment takes away her opportunities to observe the curfew. Not until the grounding is over, and she has her freedom back, can she prove herself capable of coming home on time.
>
> PROBATION: Instead of grounding your daughter, you set the curfew earlier and will only restore it if she observes this new curfew perfectly for two weeks. This gives her an opportunity to prove herself.

When should you take a child out of the Liberty mode and into Probation? That depends on the child, the problem, how long you have been trying to deal with it, and your own patience. Don't hesitate to use Probation *whenever Liberty is not working and you don't consider it practical to increase your consequences further.* Use Probation also whenever you find that you no longer trust the child; the burden of proof is now on the child to win back your trust.

A relatively short Probation is better than a long one. The duration has to be long enough, though, so that you can be sure you are really seeing a change. To correct a problem that occurs once or twice a month, the Probation would have to be a couple of months. If the problem has to do with grades, the Probation would have to be at least one grading period. If you are dealing with a problem that recurs daily—a bedtime problem, for example—a week might be a long enough Probation.

The time it actually takes the child to serve out the Probation will often be longer than the period you prescribe. This is because the calendar restarts if the rule is violated.

LIBERTY: After sneaking out of the house at midnight, Paula is grounded for three consecutive weekends. This consequence gives her no opportunity to prove herself.

BETTER (PROBATION): Paula is grounded every Saturday until she has observed the curfew on three consecutive Fridays. This means the Probation will last at least fifteen days: If she is on time Friday the 1st, Friday the 8th, and Friday the 15th, she can go out Saturday the 16th. But it could conceivably last for months, because it starts over if Paula ignores the rule on any of those Fridays.

EXAMPLE: Patrick gets a ticket for going through a stop sign. The judge lets him off with a warning; however, his parents had made a rule that he would "lose driving privileges for a suitable period of time" if he was ever cited for a moving violation.

MISTAKE: Patrick's parents prohibit him from driving the car for a month. This is a fairly severe punishment, but it is not a Probation, because it does not give Patrick a chance to prove himself a safe driver.

BETTER: During the period of Probation, Patrick is only allowed to drive with his mother or father in the car. In fact, he is *required* to drive whenever they go anywhere together, until he has logged one hundred consecutive miles without a driving error. (A Probation can be measured in units other than days.)

EXAMPLE: Cheryl gets a D in math, and the teacher reports that her homework was frequently incomplete. Despite a rule that requires "homework before phone," Cheryl has been talking to her friends for at least an hour every night, having told her parents that her homework was done.

MISTAKE: Angry about having been lied to, the parents feel like punishing her by taking away telephone privileges entirely. But that would not be a Probation.

BETTER: Cheryl's parents put her on Probation with respect to homework. They demand to see Cheryl's completed homework assignments each evening before she uses the telephone. In addition, she has to bring home a card signed by the teacher every Friday, reporting on the work she has handed in, or she loses phone privileges until the following Friday. The

Probation continues at least until the next report card. If the homework record is good and her grade is C or better, she will return to the honor system. If the homework record is good but the grade is still a D, she will get special tutoring in math. If her homework completion has been sporadic so that she has lost phone privileges for two or more weeks during this period, the Probation will continue through the following term as well.

Probation with a capital P

Any of the consequences in the foregoing examples could be applied without explicitly using the special term *Probation*. It is the *principle* of probation—an extra restriction until the child gives evidence of observing your rules—that matters, more than the word *Probation* with a capital *P*.

There are some advantages, however, to making a big deal out of Probation. You can say, "We've tried to deal with this problem within our normal rules. We've seen no progress. You're on Probation until you prove to us that you respect our rules." Take the attitude that Probation is unusual and regrettable, a whole different mode of life. You don't enjoy it a bit; you are surprised and chagrined that it has become necessary. Here are some ways to help emphasize its significance:

- The time period specified should always be consecutive, not cumulative. Any violation restarts the penalty. Paula, in the example above, has to observe the curfew three consecutive Fridays, not a total of any three Fridays.
- During Probation, life should be less flexible for the child than was the case in Liberty. Avoid making exceptions, especially to the rule whose violation put the child on Probation in the first place. Whether you want to say that *all* rules have to be followed perfectly during a Probation is up to you. In any case, make it clear what the terms are.
- If the reason for the Probation has anything to do with rude or inconsiderate behavior, or with things that the child has been refusing to do for you, it is logical to stop doing favors for the child. Continue to be friendly and supportive, of course, but don't go out of your way during a Probation to drive the child places, invite his friends to dinner, or take him to the movies. Make the child prove himself considerate first. (This advice does not apply if the child is on Probation for other reasons, such as school grades.)
- Consider that the child who is on Probation has lost credibility. He has to earn back your trust. In the meantime, his word isn't good enough. The kind of promises you might accept in Liberty ("Let me watch this one program and I'll immediately do my homework, I promise") should not be accepted. In Probation, systematically *confirm* everything important that the child tells you. Do *not* give him the benefit of the doubt. When in doubt, call to check that he is where he is supposed to be. Make him show you his homework; check that every item has been completed. Teachers are usually happy to cooperate by sending home signed and dated assignment sheets.

MISTAKE: As a consequence of frequent truancy, Robert's parents have put him on Probation, taking away various privileges. Robert is told that there must be four consecutive weeks without a truancy before he can go off Probation. The school social worker has agreed to telephone on Fridays to report any unexcused absences for the week. Thus a whole week can go by without his parents' knowing how he is doing.

BETTER: Call the social worker and the principal. Explain that you take the problem very seriously, mention this book, and say that Robert is on Probation. Ask if they would mind your calling the school office every day at some convenient time, for a couple of weeks or until the problem has been corrected. They will not mind. They will admire your resolution and be glad to cooperate.

EVEN BETTER: A friend of mine, a former social worker, knew where the high-school kids usually went when they "ditched" school. She made an arrangement with the teacher whose class her son was most often skipping. I tie teacher promised to send an immediate message to the school office the next time the boy was absent. When the office secretary phoned her, my friend went out and rounded up her son, drove him back to school (leaving his friends standing there open-mouthed), and personally escorted him to the classroom

before the end of the period.* Don't underestimate the power of amazement in bringing about changes in children's behavior.

The child won't like not being trusted. You do not want him to like it. Emphasize over and over, "You are on Probation. You have to prove to us that you can respect our rules, and then we'll go back to normal. Right now we don't trust you. We want to trust you again."

Remember to act as though you assume that the child is only temporarily untrustworthy. Children need to be put on Probation just as, at other times, they need to be kept home in bed; it is not a part of their permanent character.

The art of the standoff

A standoff occurs if a child chooses to stay on Probation indefinitely, not fulfilling the terms and therefore not being restored to liberty. A well-constructed Probation offers a choice; whenever you offer your child a choice, you should be sure that you will be satisfied either way.

EXAMPLE: Nicholas, fifteen, is on Probation for repeated curfew violations. His weekend curfew is to be 11:00 until he has observed it perfectly for a month. Then it will return to midnight. In the meantime, whenever he is late by a number of minutes, he suffers an equal number of minutes off the next night's curfew—and the one-month Probation starts over. To his parents' surprise, this results in a standoff for nearly a year. Nicholas seems to prefer an 11:00 curfew with occasional violations to the extra freedom and responsibility of a midnight curfew.

EXAMPLE: Shortly before his sixteenth birthday, Barry began seeing me in family therapy, along with his mother and two younger brothers. Hurt and confused by a divorce that had occurred more than five years ago, Barry was taking a "tough guy" stance toward his mother and brothers. Along with rudeness, constant arguments, and picking on the youngest brother, a big issue was chores. When it was his turn to do the dishes, Barry would let them pile up in the sink and let his mother's nagging build up to the screaming point.

The therapy was not just a matter of changing Barry. His mother had to be put in charge of her family, a role she had never felt comfortable about. When it came time to take Barry for his driver's license exam, I helped her make a rule: She would not do that or any other favor for him until he had taken his turns with the dishes, without being nagged, for a month. Instead of nagging at him, she would simply do the dishes when he failed to.

This led to a standoff for six months. When the other boys complained that Barry was getting away without doing the dishes, their mother and I pointed out all the things she did for them that she was no longer doing for Barry—not driving him anywhere, not doing his laundry, and so forth.

His mother was amazed that Barry let this happen, even though he complained vociferously about not having his license. But then his reasons became clear; having a driver's license would subject him to certain norms in his peer group, with respect to dating, that he was not yet ready for. He was actually *choosing* to stay on Probation as a way of not gaining too much freedom too fast.

In both examples, the standoff was mutually accepted by the children and their parents. You never have to accept a standoff—you can change your family rules whenever they are not achieving the results you want to insist upon—but there is nothing necessarily wrong in acquiescing to a standoff. Remember that your rule is not broken unless you fail to follow through with the consequence. If you have said, "You can't have *Y* until you do *X*, " and your daughter considers the price too high, there is no honor lost on either side. She does not do *X*, and you do not give her *Y*.

If you don't want to accept a standoff. Like grounding, Probation is likely to require some sacrifice on the part of the parents. It can be an inconvenience to you, for example, to supervise your teen-

* This was not humiliation, because the mother did not reveal anything her son's friends did not already know about him—except that he had a mother who cared.

ager's driving for a month, or to check your fifth-grader's homework every night.

Obviously, if such a Probation becomes a standoff, it becomes even more inconvenient. The ways to minimize that inconvenience are:

- If possible, design the Probation so that you wouldn't 't mind if it turned into a standoff (if Barry's mother had needed him to get his driver's license, that standoff would not have been acceptable).
- If a Probation does turn into a standoff and you aren't willing to accept it, escalate the Probation.
- If a Probation is satisfied but the problem returns, escalate the next Probation.

You can escalate Probations like any other consequence. if you start with a short Probation and the child fulfills its terms but then returns to old habits, the next Probation should be more restrictive, or longer, or both.

Back to Liberty

When a child fulfills the terms of Probation and returns to Liberty, you may want to reassess your rules. If it looks as though some of the rules were not working as intended, you should change them. In doing so, there are a couple of strategic points to think about.

Tightening rules: If you decide that the old rule was too liberal, you can make it stricter. Then the child will return from Probation to a Liberty that offers somewhat less freedom than he previously enjoyed. It would be better to tell the child that this is going to be the case when you impose the Probation, rather than after it is over. Otherwise, while he is meeting the terms of the Probation, he will be looking forward to returning to the old rules. He is likely to feel betrayed if he learns at that point that Liberty is not what it used to be.

EXAMPLE: Curfew time is midnight. You change it to 10:00 as a Probation, but at the same time you realize that midnight is too late a curfew for this child at this age. At the *beginning* of the Probation, you tell him that after the terms of the Probation are fulfilled, his curfew will be changed to 11:00.

Loosening rules: When returning from Probation to Liberty, the Liberty rules should be no looser than they were before Probation or they might have the effect of rewarding the child for the misbehavior that earned the Probation. ("I ignored the rule," the child thinks, "and I had to put up with Probation for a while, but it was worth it because now they have relaxed the rule.") If you do feel the old rule was too strict, return first from Probation to the old rule, and then tell the child that you are planning to liberalize that rule after it has been observed for a certain period of time.

EXAMPLE: Curfew time is 10:00. You change it to 9:00 as a Probation, but at the same time you realize that most of the child's friends have a curfew of 10:30. At the end of the Probation, therefore, you tell the child that his curfew is back to 10:00, and that after a month, if there are no problems, it will be changed to 10:30.

EXAMPLE: After repeated curfew violations, Cindy has been on Probation for three weeks. She fulfills the terms of the Probation. The next time she is about to go out, she comes to her parents and says sweetly, "I took my punishment, so I'm back in your good graces, right?"

"You were never out of our good graces," her father replies. "But if you mean that you're back on your normal curfew, that's correct."

"I was wondering if you would consider changing it to midnight, because then it would be the same as most of my friends, and I wouldn't have any trouble keeping to it."

MISTAKE: Having Cindy approach them reasonably is such a rare pleasure that her parents cannot resist saying yes. They think they are rewarding her for the way she asked them, but what is really happening? They are being manipulated by their daughter.

The problem is that in Cindy's mind, consciously or unconsciously, violating the original curfew was part of what persuaded her parents to change it. Despite the Probation, she has learned that it may be worth defying rules if you want to get them changed.

BETTER: The parents can say, "That sounds possible, but you picked the wrong time to ask. We'll think about it and talk about it with each other, and we'll be seeing how responsible you are about following our rules for the next month. Then you can ask us again."

Summary

Probation consists of one or more temporary restrictions that a child must adhere to before his or her regular rules are reinstated. The special restrictions should be designed so that the child can *prove* himself capable of meeting the parents' expectations. For example, if there was a problem of unsafe driving, the Probation should involve driving under supervision, rather than a suspension of driving privileges.

Although the principle is a good one to apply with all consequences whenever possible, there can be advantages in reserving use of the word Probation for an advanced phase of dealing with behavior problems, emphasizing that the situation is serious, unusual, and regrettable. Part of the goal is to make the child appreciate Liberty.

CHAPTER TEN

You Have the Power

Our society seems to be suffering from an illusion of helplessness, particularly among parents, in the face of increasingly out-of-control behavior by children.

It is ironic that parents so often feel powerless, when in truth we parents have virtually *all the power*! Of course, if you feel powerless, you tend to become powerless. If you expect to be a victim of chaotic, inconsiderate, irresponsible, or even abusive behavior, you will become a victim.

On the other hand, parents who are too afraid of losing power over their children's lives may err in the other direction. They are in danger of exercising that power too heavily—inflexibly, insensitively, antagonistically. When parents are authoritarian, their children have only two alternatives: Either they must capitulate and fail to become mature, independent adults; or they must oppose the parents in a power struggle that both sides will lose.

The danger that parents will overreact and use their power destructively is just as great as the danger that they won't be powerful enough. Therefore, after the preceding chapters on methods of parental control, I aim to do two things in this chapter: to assure you that you do have the power to implement a system of rules for your family, and to help you avoid over exercising that Power.

We're OK, you're OK— But we're parents and you're not

Parents have to give their children three equally important messages:

1. We re in charge; you re still a kid.
2. We like you.
3. We're happy you're growing up.

These messages meet the three basic needs I mentioned in Chapter 1: limits, attention, and autonomy, respectively. Giving all three messages requires a subtle balance, because they seem to contradict each other.

The first message makes it clear that the parents are responsible for the family until the children grow up. It emphasizes the necessary hierarchy and makes it clear that with respect to certain decisions children do not have equal rights.

Since that unfortunately can be experienced as a put-down the second message reassures children that it is okay to be a child. "You are all right; we like you the way you are." This has to be *unconditional*: not "We like you but…" or "We would like you if …." Our children need to know that we continue to like them even when we are also mad at them, tired of them, worried about them, and even when we don't like some of their actions.

That message, too, has a possibly upsetting implication. If we like them as they are, does that mean we don't want them to grow up and gain their independence? The third message reassures them on that score: "It gives us joy to see you developing into a more mature, competent person."

Finally, the third message has to be tempered with the first message. Although the child is growing up, growing up takes time, and in the meantime the parents remain in charge. Even when children are physically larger than their parents, even when they think they are wiser or saner, as long as they are living in their parents' home, they are subject to the parents' rules.

The true basis of your power is the child's dependence. In criticizing corporal punishment, I made a point that bears repeating here. Your control over your children is not based on their physical or mental inferiority. It is based on the fact that they depend on you for nurturance, protection, love, and, more materially, time and money.

You would probably meet your children's basic needs regardless of their behavior. No matter how angry or frustrated you may become, you plan to go on providing food, shelter, medical care, and other basic needs. Children should never be made to doubt that. (Even in Crisis mode, if you are forced to put the child out of your house, you will make every effort to find someplace he can stay.) But above and beyond those basic needs, they depend on you for all kinds of things that are not essential to life or growth. I mentioned some examples of those things in connection with the "Nothing works" syndrome in chapter 5: transportation, space in which to entertain friends, laundry and other household services, new clothes, coins for the arcade, sports equipment, help in fixing things. In order to go on receiving those things, the child depends on your good graces and on his own appropriate behavior.

When you withhold nonessentials, you will not undermine any of the three crucial messages. You will show that you are in charge of the family's resources. You will continue to provide life's essentials, including affection and praise whenever you can do so with sincerity. And you will encourage the child to grow toward maturity and independence.

On the other hand, it is also true that you are bigger than they are. Even when your children grow taller or broader than you, they still have memories of being two feet tall, looking way up at you. When it comes to a showdown, there are a couple of ways you can use your body and your voice to carry more weight.

It doesn't really help to raise your voice, because children can scream as loud as you can—perhaps louder. Deepening your voice will impress them more than sheer volume. The lower the pitch, the more ominous the message. Whether you are a baritone or a soprano, you can sound intimidating when you reach down to the bottom of your range.

Another good way to make a strong impression is to move closer to the child. It is psychologically easier to defy you from across the room than when you are just a foot or two away. If you send your son to his room or tell your daughter to pick up her clothes, and they ignore you, move closer to them before repeating the order. When you cut the distance between you and the child in half, you appear four times as big. The area of your image on the

child's retina increases with the inverse square of the distance separating you. For example, when you move from four yards to only one yard away (one-quarter the distance), you fill sixteen times as much space in the child's visual field.

This is true regardless of the child's size. However, it is also true that the child's size on your retina becomes sixteen times as large at one yard as at four yards. So if your teenager is taller than you, you may have to remind yourself not to be intimidated when you move closer!

I like these techniques because they are effective without being abusive. Compare them with a derogatory remark about the child, no matter how softly spoken. Perhaps the child overhears one parent using the word "stupid" in describing him to the other parent. That is a form of child abuse. Walking up to the child and firmly giving a straight order in as persuasive a tone as you can muster is a way of clarifying the family hierarchy without attacking the child's self-esteem. It says, "I am in charge," without saying "I don't like you" or "Don't grow up."

Warning: These techniques only work if you feel truly decisive about what you are saying. If the child senses that you lack the conviction to follow through, it makes no difference how large you appear.

Pleas for exemptions and revisions

You may have wondered why I have left the children out of the rule-making process. In this system, it is the parents who draw up the set of rules. You might have family meetings for other reasons—for example, to allocate chores or to deal with conflicts—but not to make the major decisions about what rules are needed and what the consequences should be for disobeying them.

The reason I insist *you* make up the rules is that a family is not a democracy. In a family meeting, the children may feel that some sort of injustice has been done if they do not get an equal vote. They begin to think of rule-making as a negotiation: "We won't accept *this* unless you give way on *that*." They may even try to insist that the rules have to apply to the parents as well: "if we don't get to watch TV after dinner, neither do you."

Who makes rules for adults? Society does: a great many rules, even in a relatively free society. If you violate them, you may have to pay a fine; or go to jail; or suffer public humiliation; or lose your license, your house, even your children. In other words, the rules we are bound by as adults work very much like the rules that we should impose upon our children. But it is not up to the children to make rules for us. A family cannot work democratically.*

However, it is fine to be liberal *after* you have established a set of family rules. When one or more children come to you requesting temporary exemptions or permanent revisions of particular rules or consequences, it is a *very good idea* to discuss such requests and grant them whenever they are reasonable. If you follow certain principles, you and your children both have a lot to gain by giving them a large role in the process of revising the family rules.

In general, children have a greater stake in observing rules if you accommodate their reasonable requests for modifications. They know that if the new rule doesn't work, you will change back to the rule they didn't like. If you make an exception to a rule and it is abused, you won't make such exceptions in the future. Your children get the message that Liberty can become tougher or easier as a result of their actions.

When should you yield to a child's request? Assuming that the child's request is "reasonable"—by which I mean that it is just as likely as the original rule to accomplish your purpose—which of the following situations is an appropriate time to make a rule less strict or a consequence less severe, or to make a temporary exception to a rule?

1. When the rule has not been working, because the child has been resisting or defying it. You hope to win his or her cooperation by being softer.
2. When the child has been following all your rules pretty well, though complaining about them.

The correct answer, obviously, is 2. You want to reward children for following the family rules, by responding favorably to all reasonable requests. The message is, "You have shown us that you are responsible, so we think you can handle more freedom."

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* I think the best political structure for a family is a benevolent constitu tional monarchy with certain sacred rights, including the child's freedom to express opposing views, the right to a fair and speedy hearing, and the right to make personal decisions about matters not specified in the "constitution," which is the list of family rules.

If the child ignores or defies a rule, and soon afterward you liberalize *any* rule, even a different one than was disobeyed, you are rewarding the disobedience. The reward could easily outweigh the negative consequence for the disobedience.

EXAMPLE: Seven-year-old John has been sent to his room for teasing his sister. As his mother passes his door, he call out amiably, "Mom, can I be allowed to ride my bike to school?"

His mother replies, "This is the wrong time to ask. You need to show more respect for our family rules."

Here are some other principles to follow when you respond to pleas for changes and exceptions:

- The child must make the request in advance, not after already having violated the rule. (For example, he may not ask permission to stay. up late after his bedtime has already passed.) If a rule is violated, you should respond as you said you would; then you'll consider changes for the future.
- When you make a change or an exception, be explicit. Which child or children does this apply to? When? What part of the rule still holds? If it is a temporary exemption for a special occasion, you do not need to change the written rule. But whenever you do want to make a lasting change in a rule, cross out the old rule and write down the new one.
- The child should be allowed to make his best case and should be made to feel that you have heard all his arguments. He will not feel that way unless you really listen. You may need to use active listening techniques, repeating what you heard him say and checking your understanding: "You feel that 10:00 is too early on school nights because several of your friends are allowed to stay out later and it embarrasses you to have to come home earlier than they do. Is that right?" Then you make your decision. Case closed. If you have been convinced, then try to live with the new rule, just as if you yourself had thought of the change. (Don't act like a martyr about it; after all, you have the power to change back to the earlier curfew if necessary.) If you have not been convinced, say, "We know how you feel, but we're not convinced. Try us again in two months."

What happens when the child keeps badgering you about the rules? Use the system. If badgering gets to be a problem, make a rule against it. Write it down. Enforce it.

The fact that you have the power to make and enforce rules means that you have no need to complain, and no right to complain, if your children ignore those rules. Simply apply the consequences. (The energy that you waste complaining only perpetuates the problem, instead of being used to solve it.) However, because your children do not have the power to make rules, they ought to be allowed to express frustration about specific responsibilities or prohibitions that they find particularly onerous. And you have to allow them to plead for changes. But you can make rules about what form their complaints should take.

EXAMPLE: "We will listen to your complaints about any rule, provided that you have something new to say and you're not merely harping on the subject. Once we have heard you make your case, if we make a decision to keep the rule in effect for a certain period of time, we may stop you when you start to harangue us. If you are asked to stop, further complaining that day will receive the same consequences as if you had violated the rule you are complaining about."

It will help if you realize that your children's complaints are really questions: "What do these rules mean? What do these punishments mean? Do they mean you don't like us? Do they mean you don't see that we're growing up, or you see it and you don't like it?" You can listen to their complaints and reassure your children about the answers to those implied questions while remaining steadfastly at the helm.

Your greatest power: The power to shape the child's self-esteem

Although teenagers sometimes pretend otherwise, children at all ages are extremely sensitive to what their parents think of them.

They form their sense of identity (who they are) and their self-esteem (how *satisfied* with themselves they are) from only three sources of information:

1. What they are told about themselves directly.
2. What they are told indirectly by the way people act toward them.
3. The models they see in the people they identify with and care most about.

Although peers may be the biggest influence on some kinds of behavior, parents are more powerful than anyone else in all three processes of building a child's identity and self-esteem. Your direct statements carry far more weight than other people's. Your indirectly conveyed attitudes about the child also carry more weight, start at an earlier age, and build up over a much greater number of interactions with the child than those of anyone else. And the parents are the child's most salient adult models.

You have learned to use some of your power in helping your children become rule-abiding citizens, respect others' rights and contribute toward the smooth functioning of the household. However, just as those traits are only a small part of the competent, self-confident, happy, mature, adaptable persons you hope your children will become, so, too, the restrictive use of your power is only a small part of your task. We are now ready to take up the *constructive* side of the job.

This is the end of Part I. Part II, "How to Construct a Person," and Part III, "Special Topics," are separate .pdf files. An index is at the end of Part III.—K.K.

SUGGESTED BOOKS on Clear Rules and Consequences[*]

Balter, Lawrence and Shreve, Anita. *Who's in Control? Dr. Balter's Guide to Discipline without Combat.* New York: Poseidon, 1989.

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[*] Reading list not updated since 1990