

Why do some parents struggle & fight with their kids while others seem to be doing everything right?



Blissful Parenting

How to eliminate bad behavior & create respectful relationships with your kids & your partner.

Charles Murray Anderson

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Blissful Parenting™

How to eliminate bad behavior & create respectful relationships with your kids & your partner.

By Charles Murray Anderson

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Chuck Anderson

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Introduction To Blissful Parenting

You are about to embark on a transformational journey that will forever change the way that you view yourself as a parent as well as the relationships that you have with your children and your partner. You will discover a whole new awareness of your role as a parent and how this will affect the future behavior of your kids. From this new awareness, you will become responsible for influencing how your children behave and how you and your partner respond to this behavior. This does not imply that you are to blame, rather suggests that you have more power available to you than you even realize.

You've definitely come to the right place if you are a parent or care giver dealing with a child with out of control behavior and it seems like there's no way to stop it. The tantrums must stop, and the out of control behavior and the public displays of that behavior must stop. The embarrassment must come to an end and the endless arguments and conflict that arise out of this behavior are starting to have an effect on the relationship that you have with your children, the relationships you have with your partner and other adults in your children's lives, as well as the relationship that you have with yourself.

Because as the behavior continues and the self esteem and confidence of our children drop, so does the self esteem of us as parents drop as well. So if you feel like you've had that situation where you use parenting techniques that just don't leave you feeling good inside and certainly don't leave your children feeling good inside, you've definitely come to the right place because we're going to talk about how to deal with that and give everyone in your family a much need confidence boost.

Something must be done right away to make this behavior stop before it gets any worse.

Blissful Parenting is about having a positive approach. It's not



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positive thinking, that's completely different, we're talking about a positive approach. And what we mean by a positive approach is; approaches to parenting that leave children feeling good about themselves, and also leaving you as the parent feeling good about yourself.

When you feel good about yourself as a parent, what's going to happen to your self esteem and your confidence? It's going to go up, right? And what do you think is going to happen to the self esteem and the confidence of your children when your self esteem and confidence goes up? Naturally, it's going to up as well.

When the self esteem and confidence of both you and your child goes up, that's when you are really enjoying a positive experience with raising your children, and everyone gets to feel good about themselves, as opposed to using punishments and disciplines that only serve to leave people feeling bad about themselves. And who says that we have to feel bad in order to do better? That's what Blissful parenting is all about.

I am a parent of three young boys; aged eight, four and two (at the time this book was written), which gives me first-hand experience about how this behavior plays out. And, when I first became a parent eight years ago I was completely unprepared for how I was going to be tested as a human being, how my behaviors were going to be tested, and how I had an opportunity to choose how to respond to these difficult situations. I made a decision early on that I wanted to take a positive approach, I wanted my experience to be positive and I wanted my children's experience to be positive. I didn't want to use disciplines and punishments and other punitive methods that left children feeling bad about themselves. I just didn't want to do it.

When I was a child in the 70's there was a lot of punishments and negative discipline being used and that's just the way it was at those times. I'm not saying anything bad about my parents, that's just how it was at that time. And as a society, we've learned so much since then and we live in a world where positive behavior,



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making a difference and feeling good about ourselves is so important. So, I made a decision early on that that's what I wanted my experience to be.

For the past 10 years I've worked as a life skills coach with both personal and business goals, and in order to do that I've had to undergo a lot of training. I've gone through loads of personal development courses, programs, training and mentoring in order to be able to serve my clients the best way I could.

Now, what's interesting about this is, the life skills that I have used in that role as a coach have definitely been put to the test as a parent and, I get to now look at myself in the mirror and ask; how do I use those skills, how do I learn directly from my kids, and how do I put all that together? By looking at my own behavior in relation to the behavior of my children, I get to learn how to be a better parent.

It's a combination of all of this experience that has become the foundation for what I call Blissful Parenting, and that's what this book all about.

In our live Blissful Parenting workshops, we discuss 30 different essential life skills that you can use to influence good behavior. These are tools that you can put in your toolbox. If you imagine that you have a "parenting toolbox", and when difficult situations arise, you get to simply open your toolbox, look for the tool that is most appropriate for the situation, pull it out, use it and use it with confidence. It leaves you feeling good and it leaves your child feeling good.

When our "parenting toolbox" is empty or our tools are ineffective, what happens? When we're constantly trying things that don't work, what happens to our self esteem and confidence? It starts to go down, it starts to chip away at our confidence and we start to react in ways that we would prefer not to react. And what is the ripple effect on our children? They start to feel bad about themselves and their self esteem and confidence starts to go down as well because we're using



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ineffective tools. Blissful Parenting is all about filling that toolbox with tools that work and taking a positive approach that will leave both you and your child feeling good about themselves, so that they can do better and you can do better as a parent.

First of all, I believe that you deserve some acknowledgement. The very fact that you are here reading this book means that you have the courage to seek solutions to a very serious problem.

We all want to do a good job raising our children. We want them to be healthy and happy. We want to help them to become respectful, responsible adults, and guide them to learn valuable life skills so they can deal with their emotions as well as difficult situations, and do so with having the utmost respect for themselves, other people around them, their community, and also the planet. You have the courage to take action, to get some more education, get some learning, get tools that can help and that's exactly what you're going to get here by reading this book.

I also want to acknowledge you because; you're not a bad parent. Everything you've tried up until now got you this far, you've used the tools you've got, and now you're taking responsibility; you're taking action to add to your existing skill set. Your focus is on improving yourself so that you can have that positive effect on your children.

I want you to know that it's not all your fault, despite what some other books and programs will tell you. In fact, some even have that in the title of their program where they're telling you it's all your fault. And, really what they're talking about is responsibility, about taking responsibility for the results.

So, is it all your fault? It's not necessary to go there. This is not about laying blame, this is not about who's at fault. It is about who is responsible for taking leadership, for taking responsibility for change. Because when you look at yourself as a parent and you change the way you approach problems, there is a ripple effect that will make a huge difference in the lives and behavior of your children.



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Reading this book will be time-well-spent because you're going to learn some tools that are helpful for your parenting experience. I'll be sharing with you; the six principles of Blissful Parenting, the first of which using positive discipline.

Using positive discipline is all about taking a positive approach to parenting as opposed to using negative disciplines and punitive methods that leave children feeling bad about themselves. You will learn five tools that you can use for positive disciplinary effect. All of the 30 tools that we teach in the Blissful Parenting Workshops do serve this purpose of positive discipline. They are techniques that will leave you feeling good about yourself and your child feeling good about themselves.

This book will help you to feel confident about yourself as a parent because you're going to have so many tools that you can work with. These are tools that you can pull out as the appropriate response for whatever situation is happening.

I will also be talking about effective communication. And you might already be thinking, "Well, I'm already pretty good at communicating," and that's great! I'm going to share with you some of the most effective communication tools that you can use and pull out and use. Remember; your children are still learning to communicate, they are not perfect communicators yet. And sometimes, what we say is not what they hear and vice versa. I'm going to share with you some communication tools that will prevent the confusion and the misunderstandings that lead to conflict. When we take a proactive approach to the way we communicate, the behavior gets better.

Family is about relationships, we have our relationships with our children, we have relationships with our partner or spouse, we have relationships with the grandparents, we have relationships with other caregivers, teachers and we also have relationships with ourselves. How do we feel about ourselves? I'll talk about different tools that you can use that are very effective in building and maintaining these relationships. When the relationship and the connection is strong, a lot of the behavior problems, that we



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tend to experience, go away and become easier to manage.

As parents we must also get good at managing stressful situations. Realistically, all of the Blissful Parenting tools and all of the positive thinking in the world are not going to eliminate stressful situations. Let's face it, life is unpredictable and stressful situations are going to come up from time to time, both in our parenting and just in life.

How we deal with those stressful situations is important for two reasons. First, is our own well being. If we're able to keep our well being in check, keep ourselves calm, and to think rationally, we're able to solve problems quickly. Our children are watching what we do and how we handle things, and they are then learning how to deal with stress and difficult situations in their life as well. And imagine what life would be like for them if they were able to deal with stressful situations in a very calm, cool, collective and rational manner. So we're going to share with you some specific tools on how you can do that as well.

These principles of Blissful Parenting are the specific tools you can use to start applying this to your parenting. The idea here is to boost your self esteem and confidence as a parent, to take that positive approach that leaves your children feeling good and you feeling good. And when your children are feeling good and you're feeling good, the behavior gets better and everyone feels better about themselves. And that's what Blissful Parenting is all about.

Chapter 1— You Are Doing Your Best

In this lesson we're going to talk about what is happening in your family right now and have a look at what you would like to be different in your family.

- What would you like to be different?
- What is standing in your way of having that something different?
- What should you do about it?

This lesson will help you identify what needs to change and be different in order for you to have the relationships you want to have in your family.

We'll also show you 3 tools that you can use right away for becoming a Blissful Parent.

Checking in is all about having a real honest look at what is happening now. You want to be completely honest with yourself about things like how you're feeling. Are you having emotions of being happy? Are you excited about your family? Are you feeling sadness? Are you going through frustration on a daily basis or maybe having anger or resentment towards other members of your family? What are you feeling?

It's okay to have negative or positive feelings. I don't want you to have that judgment on it right now, but just be completely honest about what they are. We'll talk about what to do about them later, but be real honest about how you are feeling. How is everyone doing? How are the kids behaving? How is your behavior as a parent? How is your partner's behavior as a parent? How's the support that you have surrounding you? And, if you don't feel you have any support, be honest about that too.

Also, how are you and your partner getting along? Are you on the same page with how you're parenting? Are you even still to-



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gether? Do you want to be together? These are the questions.

Again, try to answer these questions honestly. I'll show you what to do with them in a moment and try not to put any judgment on the answers.

What's stopping you?

Most parents come to this program looking for something to be different, for something to be better; to eliminate those problems, those frustrations and those feelings that get in the way of having what they want. So once you have that honest check in, you know exactly where you're at. You can start to think about what it is that you want and start to make changes to get there.

But there's a problem. There are some things that get in our way.

The first thing that gets in our way is first of all is indecision which is the inability to make a decision and stick with it no matter what happens.

How many times have you made a plan to try something different or spend more time with the kids or spend less time working or whatever it might be only to have that decision get overturned and something else takes its place.

So we have to decide what it is that we want and we have to stick with it in order for things to change.

The second thing that gets in our way is doubt. Doubt is giving into the opinions or ridicule of others or to a feeling of inferiority. And that is where we just don't believe enough in ourselves, to believe that it's possible. "I really want to have a better relationship with my family. I really want it to be peaceful in this home, but I can't because everyone is fighting."

Be careful of that word "can't" because it will really add to the self-doubt you have inside and will cause you to accept things that are unacceptable.



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If you want change, decide to have it and believe that you can have it.

The third thing is fear which is the inability to act based on a perceived reality of pain, hurt, or personal loss. The key word here is perceived reality. Sometimes what we make up in our minds as being the thing that is so scary is just a perceived reality. It's not real and sometimes when we take just one step towards what we want, we find out it is not as hard as it seems. Or we fear the reactions we're going to get from others, from your partner perhaps, or from the kids. This is because they're used to you being a certain way and if all of a sudden you start being different, they're going to think: "Wow, what's going on here," and we fear that reaction we might get back from them.

So we have to be conscious about these three things because they get in the way of making the changes we want to make in our family in order to have that peaceful, loving household that we so much desire. Or at least to just have great relationships as our kids are growing up.

What should you do?

You want to work towards improving the relationships with your family—what should you do? This entire program is about what you should do. You will have a clearer understanding and be given some very practical tools that you can use to make those improvements.

At its very basic level though, let's understand four steps that are required in order to make any sort of change happen.

The first thing is that you have to believe that it's possible. So many people wish for something, but they don't believe it's possible and right there, it's over. Nothing is going to change. It's all going to stay the same.

You have to believe that the relationships you want to have with



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your family, the behavior, the joy, the excitement, the happiness, you have to believe that it is possible. Then you have to decide that it is what you really want. There's a decision that comes: "This is the way that I want it to be. I no longer accept the way things are and change is going to happen."

Number three is you must start taking action towards it immediately! Now, some things change very, very quickly; some things change much more slowly over time. When you move forward and you have that belief and you've made that decision, you can move forward with the faith that things will be different and things will get better and you will have the family that you're going to have.

You don't always have to know exactly how you're going to get there. All you need to do is take the first step; move towards it. Then as you take a step have a look around, decide on your next step and your next step and your next step and just keep moving forward.

Number four is to get support and most importantly is you must get support from people that believe that this is possible. Sometimes the people closest to us, our family, our friends, they're not always the best people to support us in making change because they're used to things being a certain way. They're trying to protect you from pain and hurt. They will let you off the hook and things go right back to the way they were before.

You want to get support from people who believe that you can do it and sometimes that support is best when it comes from strangers because they're not going to buy into what is happening right now. If you don't have that kind of support in your life, I want you to understand that it is very accessible. You can get support here from us at The Blissful Parent and there's many great resources within the communities as well that can support you with making the changes you want to make in your family.

I'm now going to give you three basic tools for becoming a Blissful Parent. We're going to use these tools throughout this pro-



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gram.

The “Daily” Pages

The first one is what we call the Daily Pages. The Daily Pages is basically a journal where you’re going to write about your feelings, your problems, your wish list; just anything that comes to mind.

What you do is you open up a fresh piece of paper and you just start writing whatever comes to your mind, you write and you write and you write. It’s not about writing perfect words or perfect sentences; it’s about getting your thoughts and your feelings out on paper. It’s a method of clearing your mind and clearing these things that hold us back, the indecision, the doubt and the fear. It comes out and then it stops blocking us from what we want.

So you just start writing until three or more pages are filled. The first time you do this and if it starts to feel good that you’re getting these feelings out, you might end up writing ten pages. Keep writing as long as the thoughts keep coming to you and there’s things to write about. Just keep writing.

If you’re on page one and you’re having trouble writing, and then write about that. “Hey, I’m writing about this. I supposed to write three pages, but I don’t know what to write about. Boy is this a stupid exercise.” You just keep writing and more thoughts will come to you.

This may seem like a strange exercise, but believe me you do this for 30 days, you’re going to notice a huge difference in how you feel. If you can create a habit of doing them, preferably at the same time everyday, they’re a lot easier to do. Ideally, first thing in the morning and if you have to get up a little bit earlier in the morning, maybe 30 minutes earlier in the morning to do them, that’s ideal. Maybe you do them at lunch time. Maybe you do them at night right before bed. But get yourself into a routine and don’t do them when you have time, but plan them into your



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day and just give yourself 30 minutes to write these pages. If you can trust the process here, you'll see in the coming weeks as we go through this program how these will definitely benefit you.

There's no right or wrong here, it's just whatever you're thinking, whatever you're feeling, that's what you write about. This I guarantee is better than any therapy you could ever go through. It's great for getting rid of frustrations and anxiety and for clearing your head so that you can go through your day in a much calmer and more peaceful way.

The “Mommy” Date

The second tool that we want to introduce to you is what we call the Mommy Date and that's not to exclude anyone, it could be the Daddy Date, it could be the Grandparent Date or the Parent Date; whatever you want to call it. The point of this is to set aside at least one or two hours per week to spend with yourself. So many of us rob ourselves of that quality time with ourselves. We're so busy doing tasking things for our family, taking the kids here and there to sports practice or swimming lessons or whatever it might be. We forget to take care of ourselves.

The idea here is to preplan something exciting to do and this is something that you're going to do alone. This is your time to be with you. This is not a time to catch up on work. You're not going to take the kids with you or anyone. Find something you always wanted to do, join a class, go skydiving, go play bingo; whatever it is, whatever you love to do but make it exciting. If it is something you would do anyway, pick something else. Do something that you really would enjoy, something that really wows your soul; something where you're going to come back feeling so refreshed, so energized and so happy that the little things at home that would normally get under your skin or bother you, just are not going to bother you anymore.

And if you can get in the habit of doing this on a regular basis, taking an hour or two per week for yourself, imagine how much happier you'll be. Imagine how much less frustration you will



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have in your life if you will just take the time to give yourself this gift.

The “Promise”

The third tool that we’re going to talk about here is what we call The Promise. The Promise is a contract or a promise that you make with yourself to become a Blissful Parent, that things are going to be different. That things are going to be the way you want them to be and that you’re committed to them being that way. You’re committed to the change.

From the time you make that promise, you’ll then consciously work everyday to improve the family relationships. And to really bring peace, love and joy into your home and to commit yourself to positive change by completing this program and surrounding yourself with support. The type of support that believes that the relationships you want to have in your family are absolutely possible and that you deserve to have them.

What we suggest that you do is to download, print out and sign a copy of The Blissful Parent Promise that says:

“I hereby decide to become a Blissful Parent so that I can eliminate my parenting frustrations and live a life of loving, peaceful relationships with my children, my partner and myself.”

Blissful Parent Promise

“I hereby decide to become a Blissful Parent so I can eliminate my parenting frustrations and live a life of loving, peaceful relationships with my children, my partner, and myself.”

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Then you sign it and you date it.



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Notice that we said “with my children, my partner and myself.” We really believe that is a package deal. Some of you might look at that and think “Well my partner and I are no longer together. Why would I create a peaceful relationship with my partner?” That’s fine if you’re no longer together, but you still have kids together, can you create a harmonious relationship at least so that you’re on the same page so that your kids are seeing and getting the same type of support from both you and your partner? Are you on the same page as to how they’re going to be raised? That doesn’t mean agreeing all the time, but it’s a commitment that you make to yourself for love and peace in your life with everybody in your life. We’ll work on that as we go, so just trust us on that one. Download The Blissful Parent Promise, sign it, date it, put it up on your wall, somewhere where it’s going to remind you of the positive changes that you are striving to make.

So as a summary of this week’s lesson, we talked about avoiding indecision, doubt and fear as being major road blocks to you getting the types of relationships you want to have. And to decide what it is that you want; make that decision. If you haven’t thought about it for awhile, now is a great time to start thinking about what you want and take action steps immediately towards achieving it. Begin to use the three tools, the Daily Pages, the Mommy Date and The Blissful Parent Promise to begin your path towards positive change in your family.

Chapter 2— Practicing Positive Discipline

Positive discipline is all about techniques that are done in a positive way that keeps self esteem and that confidence really high. The idea here is that when children feel good about themselves, they will do better or will want to do better.

What is positive discipline? This is the foundational principle of Blissful Parenting. It is the principle that correcting bad behavior is easier and long lasting when kids feel good about themselves. When kids feel good about themselves, they want to do good.

It's important to understand and to acknowledge that many of the traditional parenting methods cause children to feel bad about themselves. I know that was certainly true for me when I grew up. When I was a child in the 70's it was very common to use spanking, scolding, punishments, taking things away and time outs. All of these methods can get an immediate effect in the moment, but they can also have long lasting negative effects on the self esteem and the self confidence of the child.

The result of using those types of methods is that the child feels bad about themselves, and when they feel bad about themselves are they likely to do better or worse? When they're feeling bad, more bad things happen. When they feel good about themselves more good things will happen.

It's important to understand that a lot of the punishments and disciplines often are auto-pilot reactions to difficult situations. Think it about your childhood for a moment. How were you raised as a child? How did your parents or caregivers and the people in your family deal with difficult situations? Remember that as a child, not only were we on the receiving end of some of these punishments, discipline, and time-outs, but we were learning.

You see, our brain remembers everything that it sees, and so that



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serves to feed our auto-pilot reactions. It's important to understand that between the ages of 0-18, 95% of our behaviors are learned from our personal experiences, relationships that we've had both at home and at school, and everything else. According to a study done by Stanford University, everything that happened to you between 0-18 is locked in up there, and that represents 95% of your current behaviors.

This is important to understand on two levels. First, as a parent; knowing that our auto pilot reactions were put in place between the ages of 0-18. In fact, over half of them by the time you were four, and 80% of them by the time you were eight. So that's a tremendous amount of auto pilot life skills that were learned at a very young age, simply by doing and observing what was done to us.

So the question we get to ask ourselves as parents is; does that work? Is that being effective with our children? Is it serving to lower their self esteem and confidence or is it raising their self esteem and confidence? It's simply a question that we get to ask ourselves when we're pulling a tool out of our toolbox and choosing a response to a particular situation.

Continuing to use fear-based punishment and negative feedback as a response to our children's behavior can actually serve to lower their self esteem and their confidence. And when their confidence is low and their self esteem is low, it could actually make the behavior worse because they are feeling bad about themselves.

Positive discipline is all about connecting before correcting the behavior, because it can actually serve to raise the self confidence and self esteem of the children, which can then prevent the bad behavior from recurring in the future. Let's have a look at positive vs. negative behavior.

First of all, what is negative discipline? We define negative discipline as any method of dealing with a situation that leaves both the parent and the child feeling bad about themselves.



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You'll know right away how you felt. Did you feel bad or did you feel good about the parenting method you just used? Also look at it from your child's point of view. Did that technique leave them feeling bad or feeling good about themselves? So, we want to look for techniques that make us both feel good.

When we're using timeouts, punishments and grounding, spanking and other types of discipline, ask yourself; does that make me feel good about myself as a parent and also does that make my child feel good about themselves?

Negative disciplines, punishments, and punitive methods are based on a fear response. So, when we take something away or we ground someone, what is the response we're looking for? We're looking for compliance, we're looking for obedience. What is it that triggers that obedience and compliance? It's fear! Fear of loss, fear of pain, the fear of losing what's important to me, losing what I really want to be doing. When parents use these tools, these punitive methods, the goal is to get them to comply by making the children afraid! What happens to the self confidence and the self esteem when we use fear and obedience as our methods of getting the behaviors to stop, or to get the behavior that we want?

Any method that serves to lower self esteem or self confidence we define as a negative discipline technique. Now let's look at the positive side.

Positive Discipline is defined as methods that leave both the parents the child feeling good about themselves. Talking it out, being proactive, and some of the other tools and techniques that I'll be sharing with you throughout this book, are all designed to get that positive effect; where both the child and the parent can feel good about themselves. When our toolbox is full of these types of techniques, just imagine what happens to the behavior.

So many times when we have bad child behavior, we instantly try to correct the behavior. But when we focus on raising the self esteem and raising the confidence of our children, a lot of the



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behavior simply goes away. This happens because when they're feeling good about themselves, they want to do good.

Positive discipline is also based in learning from choices and natural consequences as opposed to using fear and obedience as the motivator. For example; if I want my child to put on their jacket before going outside, I have a couple of choices. I can either fight and argue and have conflict with my son because he doesn't want to put on his jacket, or I can let that be his choice. If he chooses to go outside without a jacket, the natural consequences of feeling cold will teach him why it's important for him to put on his jacket and bring it with us when we go outside. When that's happened enough times for the natural consequence to sink in, he will naturally start to make that choice on his own. He will not need me to remind him, argue, and plead to please put on your jacket because when we go outside it's cold and you must wear a jacket. He will learn so much more from that learning experience than from any amount of lecturing from me. So, part of practicing positive discipline is thinking about; how can we use natural consequences of our choices as learning experiences to learn good behavior.

We define positive discipline as any technique that is designed to raise their self esteem and the self confidence of both the child and yourself as the parent.

Connecting Before Correcting

The first tool in the category of positive discipline is connect before you correct. Connecting before correcting is all about showing kindness, rather than simply reacting to situations. How many times when a bad behavior occurs, we simply react in that split second before we even have a chance to think. Ask yourself; does that reaction lead to the result that I want; does the behavior stop? Or does a conflict develop or make the situation worse? Does it escalate?

If it did work and left you feeling good about yourself as a parent and it left your child feeling good about themselves,



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fantastic! Otherwise a connection needs to be made. That's the check-in that's where you get to decide if you are practicing positive discipline or negative discipline.

There's no one-size-fits-all solutions here so this just a framework that will help you to decide whether not the method you are using is working or not working. And just understand that bad behavior is simply feedback about the strength of your relationship. When they learn through natural consequences and they feel good about themselves, your children want to do good by you. When the connection is strong, a lot of the behavior simply goes away, and they choose different behavior in the future. So, it's feedback about the strength of your relationship.

We can use that feedback to our advantage. Because when kids feel (and the keyword here is feel) that they are being listened to and understood by you, they are a lot more likely to listen what you're saying or what you're asking them to do.

Acknowledge Their Feelings

Children are experiencing many feelings and emotions that they're still learning to deal with. They are still developing their skills and perhaps they have not had to deal with these emotions yet. Most of the emotions they're dealing with are brand new to them, and they're looking to us for guidance. They are also watching how we deal with our emotions and how we deal with difficult situations so that they can learn to deal with them as well and learn to solve problems for themselves.

Some bad behavior is simply a feeling that your child has not yet learned to handle. Understanding that the behavior is simply because of a feeling they don't know how to handle yet makes it easier to simply acknowledge their feelings. We get to look at; how can I guide my child, how can I help them to understand this feeling, how do they understand this feeling. How do they learn a more appropriate way of dealing with that situation? And that's what acknowledging their feelings is all about.



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By acknowledging their feelings they get to develop the capability of dealing with them on their own. They get to take that responsibility and you're not going to have to constantly remind them that that is inappropriate. You may have to do it more than once and you may have to give repeated reminders until they have had enough experience to remember on their own. Lead by example, and then also guide them. Teach them, they are still learning.

As adults, we learned 95% of how we deal with problems and emotions by time we are 18. That being said, we can still learn to better deal with our emotions and feelings so that our children will learn from our example.

So if you don't always feel like you're in control of your feelings and emotions, begin by taking a look at what is that feeling, what is that reaction. Learn as much as you can about it and then pass that learning off onto your children. When you do this, the behavior starts to change because they get a deeper understanding about themselves and how those feelings work.

One of the best things that I ever read about this is to just simply allow your children to have their feelings, allow them to experience that feeling. Don't try to suppress it, don't try to make it stop. Even though at times the behavior happens at inconvenient times or it could happen in inconvenient place and so that it's not always that easy to do. But, to simply allow your children to have that experience so that they can learn.

It is also a good idea to become conscious of any attempt to fix or rescue or even make them feel wrong for the feeling. The behavior that they're using to deal with that feeling may be inappropriate and that's where the education and the correcting can come in. But when they feel wrong they start to feel bad about themselves. So remember, the whole idea of positive discipline is to take an approach where they get to feel good about themselves and then you get to feel good about yourself as well.



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Learning From Mistakes

Children are experiencing many different feelings and emotions that they are still learning to deal with. The mistakes that they make are simply an opportunity to learn something important. So when a mistake is made, guess what? That's life! We can all learn from mistakes.

When we react to their mistakes, make them feel wrong or bad , or yell and scream at them because of the mistake, what is their response inside? Do they feel better about themselves or do they feel worse about themselves? And when they feel worse about themselves are they going to do better, or is it easier when they feel good about themselves?

If your child spills their milk, that's an opportunity to learn. If they break something in the house, or if they make some other mistake that's an opportunity to learn from the natural consequences of that mistake. Allowing children to learn from mistakes can prevent the mistake from being repeated in the future. They also learn a very valuable life skill.

When they have made enough painful mistakes, they're going to remember the lesson that they learned from those mistakes and it can actually prevent other mistakes from happening. Now their critical thinking is starting to kick in and they're starting to think about their behavior before simply reacting. And what a valuable life skill that is!

Offering Limited Choices

The skill of offering limited choices helps children take responsibility for the results by exercising their power to choose. If we tell them what to do all the time, when is that ever going to stop? When they're adults? If they never learn how to deal with it now, how are they going to do it as adults?

By offering limited choices we help them to exercise their power to choose. The choice is theirs and they get to take responsibility



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for their choices. Offering limited choices also provides an opportunity to share the power, instead of forcing everything upon them, where they have to be obedient and compliant with everything we ask them to do.

Offering limited choices allows them to feel powerful, so they get to exercise that power to choose and be part of the solution; to be part of what is happening and not just blindly follow your instructions all the time. When this happens, a lot of the conflicts and power struggles start to fade away.

The reason this reduces power struggles is because they are empowered to choose between two options. Now the key word here is two options. What you don't want to do is give them open ended choices. If you give them too many choices, what happens? Confusion sets in and they don't know which one to choose.

So, it's simply, would you like choice A, or choice B, which would you prefer? If they say "I don't know", simply repeat the question; would you like choice A or choice B?

Taking advantage of choices is a powerful life skill, and it will help them to develop the skill of making good choices for themselves in the future. And when they can make good decisions and make good choices, the behavior gets better and they're able to deal with life's situations easier and without your intervention.

Keeping Your Cool

This is one of my favorites of all of the positive discipline tools. Keeping your cool helps avoid conflict and allows you an opportunity to think of creative solutions. When we get upset, and our ability to think is greatly reduced, we start to disconnect from that part of the brain that is responsible for all of our creative solutions, our ability to relate to each other, our ability to regulate our emotions and to just generally utilize our intelligence.



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Therefore, it's important to keep your cool so that you can gain access to those solutions and to your ability to relate and your ability to regulate your responses. If you do lose your cool, it's a lot better to allow yourself that time to calm down and to get back to a realistic level before trying to solve the problem.

Think about any time a stressful situation, conflict, or an argument with a family member has happened and you try to solve the problem in that moment. How possible is it when you are upset, and the other person is upset? Usually what happens is the conflict just gets worse and worse. It continues escalate and when it's not resolved we carry that around with us all the time. When we do this with our children and with our spouse or partner, the communication completely breaks down.

We can also do this to ourselves. We beat ourselves up for having these sorts of reactions, for losing our cool, for having these sorts of conflicts and it starts to take its toll after a while.

Keeping your cool allows you to stay connected with creative solutions. It also teaches children by example, to take a cooling off break before trying to solve problems. This provides them with yet another valuable life skill.

Don't sit there and try to fight it and try to find creative solutions when you're both not in a mental capacity to do so. Teach them this life skill and exercise this life skill for yourself. Take that cooling off break or take that positive timeout. Get reconnected, and then approach the problem in a calm, cool and rational manner.

Chapter 3 — Reducing Your Stress

In this lesson we're going to talk about reducing your stress. We'll start by looking at the common sources of parental stress and then show you how to assign them to one of four different stress categories. We'll help you to identify your current stress patterns so that you learn to recognize when you have stress occurring and when it is affecting your relationships.

Then there's a very common topic which we get asked about a lot - how to deal with stress. We'll propose four ways that will help you reduce your stress and give you a self-assessment tool to add to tools that you have already been given. This will help you deal with any stress and further improve the relationships you have with your family.

What leads to stress?

First of all, let's talk about some factors that contribute to stress. Raising a family is a busy life and there are constant demands on our time. We have to take the kids here and there; we have to take them to school and to sports practice. We have to make sure all their needs are met. We have to make sure they get up in the morning and that they go to bed at night, and everything that happens in between too.

We also have to do things for ourselves. Today most families have parents that work. Very seldom are there parents that are able to just be full time parents. So we have this job of raising a family, which is a full-time job all in itself, and then we're juggling with all the other activities in our life. So there are a lot of demands on our time and attention. Being pulled in all these different directions is a huge contributor to your the stress level.

Lack of sleep is another contributor. It's probably a byproduct of all of those demands on our time, energy and attention. There are days where it just seems like there's not enough hours

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in a day and so we end up going to bed late. We have to get up early the next day to again meet the constant demands of that day, getting the kids up, getting them ready, getting them off to school, getting ourselves ready, and going off to work. So sleep is something that becomes sacrificed.

Now, different people have different needs. Some people can work very well on just five or six hours of sleep. Others claim that they need at least eight hours of sleep to function properly, or they just go through the next day with that feeling of tiredness. I personally have adopted a routine where I routinely get between six and seven hours of sleep. That seems to work well for me. My wife, on the other hand, really needs more like eight hours of sleep. The difference is something you have to learn to recognize. What works for you? What do you need? If you get behind in your sleep, how you can you catch up? Lack of sleep definitely contributes to stress levels.

An inadequate amount of exercise can contribute to stress.

Again, with all these busy demands of your children and of your job, lack of exercise can definitely become a factor. Physical activity is a great way to relieve stress, even if it's just going for a walk for 10 or 15 minutes.

But the reality is that we get busy. I know with my job I do a lot of my work on the phone, talking to clients, and in front of the computer answering emails. Exercise for me needs to be a conscious choice; I have to plan it in. However, it doesn't always happen that way. I find that when I am not taking regular exercise, the levels of stress and the frustration do tend to pile on.

Disagreements are a big contributor and I get a lot of letters from parents who are experiencing this one - disagreement with their partner or their kids or both. Any time you have a disagreement with another person it's a stressful event, particularly other family members. It places stress on our emotions, feelings, thoughts, even our physical well-being.

Not eating properly and maintaining a proper diet: If you're

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someone who drinks a lot of coffee or anything else that depletes your body of water, you could be increasing your stress levels. Being in a state of dehydration will definitely be stressful in a physical way which will also lead to things being stressful in an emotional way – just something to be aware of..

Running your family without a plan. If you are currently going through each day with no plan, you may not be on the same page as your spouse. Are you winging it through the day, just letting each one go by and dealing with, and reacting to whatever happens, rather than having a plan, a routine and a predetermined way of handling exceptions?

So, all of these things are contributors to the stress level that you may or may not be experiencing in your life right now.

Types of parental stress

Not everybody experiences stress in the same way. So it is important to learn to recognize your own stress patterns. What does stress look like for you? How do you know if stress is a factor in how you're feeling? Let's talk about these symptoms and assign each of them to one of the following four categories.

1. Behavioral stress

This is stress related to the things that you do or the actions that you take. Examples include; a drop in work performance where you become less effective, or you start having more little accidents and hurting yourself.

Are you drinking and smoking more than you usually do? Alcohol consumption can be used as a stress reliever by some people. If you notice yourself consuming more drink or smoking more than normal, it could be a sign that you're experiencing stress.

Overeating - or on the flip side, loss of appetite where you don't feel like eating at all. How are these being affected?

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Change in your sleep patterns? You may be having trouble getting to sleep, having nightmares or waking frequently with your brain buzzing.

Time management: Are you finding that you're having trouble fitting tasks in or getting them finished? Does it feel like there are not enough hours in a day? This is certainly a sign of stress.

Too busy to relax? You feel like there's just so much to be done, so many things that are on your task list to do or demands on your time that you don't have time to relax and take a breather and to take care of your needs. So if you feel you're too busy to relax or to take a break, it could be a sign that you're experiencing stress.

Withdrawing from your family and friends? If you're avoiding them, if you don't really feel like having conversations or don't feel like doing anything with them, it's a sure sign of potential stress.

Another one is loss of interest in sex or intimacy with your partner. In a stressful situation, the interest level may well be affected.

Is your decision making affected? Let's say you're making decisions and you find that a lot of the time it seems like you're making the wrong decision or you're exercising poor judgment in the decisions that you make, it could be down to stress.

The inability to express feelings: if you feel like it's really hard to explain to people how you're feeling and what's going on for you - stress could be getting in the way.

You could find yourself overreacting to things that are going on. You may take a look back and say okay, we'll that is not as major as I thought it was, but if you're in a pattern of overreacting, it could be a sign of stress as well.

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2. Physical stress

Symptoms of physical stress might be tightness in the chest, maybe even chest pain or palpitations in the heart area. It could include any one of indigestion, breathlessness, nausea, muscle twitches, aches and pains throughout your body, headaches (that may last for more than a day) skin conditions, recurrence of previous illnesses or allergies, constipation, diarrhea, weight loss or weight gain. For women, it could be changes in the menstrual cycle. Sleep problems and tiredness which we did talk about it in behavioral symptoms, could be physical symptoms too.

3. Emotional symptoms

This include things like mood swings, anxiety, feeling tense, feelings of anger, feeling guilty, feelings of shame, or having no enthusiasm for projects that you're working on or things that need doing. You may become more and more cynical about everyday things. You feel out of control and in total chaos. It can all lead to a feeling of helplessness manifested as a decrease in confidence or self-esteem and poor concentration levels.

4. Psychological symptoms

This refers to your personal way of thinking - your thoughts now. You might have thoughts like, "I am a failure" or "I should be able to cope" (keyword there being "should"). If you're "should-ing" all over yourself, it could be a sign of stress.

"Why is everyone getting at me?", "Why is everyone complaining?", "Why is everyone talking to me at once". If you have thoughts like these or if you have the feeling that you're misunderstood or negative thoughts like "I don't know what to do", "I can't cope", "What's the point", "I don't seem to be able to get on top of things", "I just keep forgetting where I put things" or "I just don't seem to be able to exercise good judgment", you are showing signs of psychological stress.



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Thoughts are actually a big part of this topic. Whether we are stressed out or relaxed and calm, it all starts with our thoughts. What are we thinking? Whether we're thinking about all the stressful and overwhelming things that are going on in our lives, or whether we're thinking about how good things are going, how well the kids are behaving, how well everyone is getting along then that's probably a true reflection on what's real for us at that moment.

How Does Stress Happen?

Nobody's perfect! At times, we definitely go from one extreme to the other. There are times when things are going great and we're calm, we're cool, we're collected, things are getting done, the thoughts are positive. Then there are times when things are not going so well and the thoughts are more negative. This is not a judgment on whether or not you are a positive or a negative thinker, but rather an attempt at giving you the ability to check in with your thoughts, to notice if you are focusing on negative, stressful things, or more on those positive, exciting and fruitful things.

Now, whatever your thoughts are at this moment, they lead to some kind of feeling. This could be a feeling of joy, excitement and bliss, or this could be a feeling of stress, frustration, of being overwhelmed. Whatever we're thinking about has a direct impact on how we feel. Then when we start to feel a certain way, it has an impact on our actions. We decide to act this way or that way based on how we feel.

If you're having positive thoughts which are leading you to more positive feelings, they're going to lead you to actions that in turn, are going towards where you want to go. If you're having negative thoughts that contribute to negative feelings, then your actions are going to be in alignment with that, which again are going to dictate your results.

Why is this important? Well, if you're going through a stressful



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moment, if things are not going the way you expect them to in your family, if people are not getting along, if the kids are arguing, if you have disrespectful behavior, if you feel stressed out, be aware that these are outcomes, they're results. You got these results because of the actions which were motivated by the feelings which in turn were derived by the thoughts. So, whenever you have a certain result in your life or in your family, you can trace it back to the action that created that result. So too for the feeling that led you to act in that way and to the thoughts that led you to feel the way that triggered this whole chain reaction.

It's a formula...

Thoughts + Feelings + Actions = Results.

If you could learn to use this as a way of having a check-in, having a look back, seeing if there was a contributing factor to the stress level that's occurring and then to see if there's anything you can do about it, you have a chance of greater control. In other words, when you run them through this formula, good thoughts will lead to good results and bad thoughts will lead to bad results.

The good news here is that with this formula you can change your results by focusing on, and changing, your thinking, the thinking that led to the feelings and actions that produced the result that you want to change.

There are warning signs that occur in life to let us know how we're doing? As I said before, there are times where things are going great, there are times when life sends us a warning signal and there are times where things are just in total chaos and we're one step away from breakdown. That's life's way of telling us that we need to stop, we need to relax and then we need to have a look at things and make some changes.

What are your stress patterns?

By thinking about and checking in with the patterns that occur in



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your life, you can recall times when things were great. You can recall times when life was sending you a warning signal or when things needed to stop and immediate action was required. It's important that we start to recognize these as a way of checking in on how we're doing. So the GREEN light is when things are going well, things are great, we're calm, we're relaxed, and we're cool and collected.

So you must think about your thoughts, your feelings and your actions when all is going well and things are great. Maybe make a note of the top three to five things or symptoms, that things are going well - no action is required.

Then there's your YELLOW light, which is the caution. This is life giving you a nudge. When you're in this situation of increasing stress, what are your thoughts, feelings and actions? Maybe you start to get that tightness in your chest. Maybe you start to get that feeling of being overwhelmed, or you start to get that feeling that there are just too many demands on your time or you're too busy to relax.

Finally, there's the RED. And the red light, this is the serious warning. This is when you have the thoughts, feelings and actions that are going to lead to breakdown. Or it's when life is going to force you to take a break in some way. It can manifest itself into sickness or accidents or something that's going to force you to take a break, force you to get the relaxation that your body so desperately needs.

We've been there before. Each of us has been in stressful situations. So what are your thoughts, feelings and actions when you're in this mode? Maybe you completely shut off. Perhaps, you stop talking to your friends and family. You feel like they don't understand you. You can get forgetful about things that need to be done. You start having poor performance at work. You're late for work and appointments.

If you check back at the website, we have a worksheet that you can download which is basically a picture of a traffic light. So



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download that, print it out and just write down those things that will help you check in and determining your current stress patterns.

What can you do about stress?

What can you do to eliminate or relieve stress in your life? Well, this is where you want to use the tools of the Blissful Parent. We've introduced you to some already. Firstly, the Daily Pages - hopefully you've started writing them? We introduced this as a strategy last week to write two or three pages about your thoughts, feelings and actions. Use this as a way of clearing out all those limiting thoughts that are roaming around in your mind and leading to negative results. By clearing those thoughts out and getting more organized, it makes room for a clearer sense of direction and purpose; suddenly life starts to make sense. When difficult situations arise, we start to deal with them more easily rather than being stressed out and overwhelmed.

1. So if you haven't started your Daily Pages yet, this would be a great time to do it. If you have a spare 30 minutes or even just 20 right now, pull out a journal and just start writing, or at least schedule yourself in some time to do it, sometime before the day is done.
2. We introduced you to the tool of using the Mommy Date or Daddy Date or whatever you're calling it for yourself. Take that time out for yourself so you can just have an hour or two to yourself. Do something that's fun - that would be great. But if all you did was sit and relax in a quiet atmosphere and maybe meditate for an hour or so, or go for a walk by yourself, do something for yourself this week for relaxation and recharging yourself.
3. Just check in once or twice a day. Now, I don't mean be the thought police. So I don't you want you to monitor your thoughts on a minute-by-minute basis because that in itself will lead to more stress. But just once or twice a day, maybe at lunch-time and maybe at dinnertime, check in and just notice "How

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have I been doing today?”, “Have my thoughts been more on the positive side or have my thoughts been more on the negative side?”, “How’s the stressful situation going and how am I coping?”. It just needs to be a quick check-in to see how things are going. And if you’re able to shift towards a more positive result, that’s great. If the situation is still very stressful, well, that’s something to check into as well and just have a look at what can you do differently to get a different result.

4. Just to be aware of the stress patterns that occur in your life, and to identify those areas that cause you the stress. Once you’ve identified them, you can start to take a more proactive approach towards them and start eliminating some of these stress factors from your life.

So use these tools. They’re there to help you. They will definitely lead you towards a more blissful experience with your parenting if you choose to use them. So we’ll check back in with you on this next week.

The summary of this week is first of all the symptoms of stress and really how those come to be as a result of our thoughts, feelings and actions. We really are in control even though there are times where it seems like we’re not in control, but if you allow yourself to feel like you can control your outcome by changing your thinking, you can affect the results and you can change the results that you’re having in your life.

Chapter 4 — Effective Communication

This week we're going to look at effective communication and how you can use it to stop arguments and frustration when relating to one another and how to communicate in a fair, respectful and peaceful way.

We will also look at the symptoms and stages of poor communication and how you can identify things that may be going wrong in your family? Then we'll consider three ways that you can listen to your kids or your partner. Two of these don't work (we'll show you which ones!) and we'll leave you with the one that does work every single time.

Finally we'll consider how to be understood when you speak. We get a lot of emails here at The Blissful Parent from parents who just want to be understood by their families. We're going to talk about ten rules for communicating with your children and partner without arguing.

Poor Communication

Let's start with some of the common symptoms of poor communication. What happens when communication is not at its best and could potentially lead to problems? It's may not be in breakdown at this point, but there could be some things going on that are preventing you from communicating effectively.

Some of the symptoms could include things like excessive family conflict. Some of you might say, wow, don't all families have conflict? Well, probably from time to time, everyone goes through this. Probably nobody is perfect when it comes to conflict. But when it does happen, it's definitely a symptom of poor communication. The conflict happens because one person is saying one thing, another person is saying another thing. It could be in the form of a disagreement, when someone feels challenged or they feel like someone is being righteous or they're being told that

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they're wrong. If you are arguing amongst each other and not getting along and if attitudes are negative towards one another, you could be experiencing excessive family conflict.

Another symptom would be ineffective problem solving. This means that attempts to solve issues that are going on in your family are not able to be resolved through communication. Problems actually go unsolved or unchecked because you're unable to communicate with one another.

Lack of intimacy or a lack of feeling of closeness with your children or partner may be a symptom of poor communication. We do get a lot of parents who come to us wanting to know how they can create a relationship where they feel closer to their family members, where they feel that love connection with each one of their family. If you find that everyone is keeping each other at arm's length, avoiding each other in the hallways or there's just a general lack of intimacy when it comes to having personal and deep conversations, it could be a sign of poor communication.

Weak emotional bonding is also a symptom. This takes the previous point a step further and occurs when you just don't feel an emotional bond with one another. It feels more like cohabitation. You're living under the same roof, with your own experiences, but there's not a whole lot of sharing going on. This could also show up in the form of apathy. In a family with strong emotional bonds, if a family member had a problem, all the family members would come to that person's aid and help solve the problem. In the case of weak emotional bonding, apathy shows up and they really don't care or get involved. Weak emotional bonding is definitely a symptom of poor communications.

Another symptom is increased risk of divorce and marital separation. You can even look at this one as being a symptom of lack of intimacy, lack of emotional bonding, ineffective problem solving and excessive family conflict. Those four things together can certainly be contributors to or increase the risk of divorce and marital separation; a point when you feel like you just can't communicate anymore.



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It can also play out in the behavioral problems in children. You might find excessive talking back, cheekiness or lack of control in children's behavior. Communication breaks down when they want to get their own way but they don't know how to communicate it and when you don't know how to communicate to them in a way that they understand. Their behavior gets worse and the situation escalates.

If you're experiencing any of these things, it could be that there are some issues of communication that could be improved or worked on in your family. I don't want you to feel that because you're experiencing any of these things all is lost. You can do something about it. It doesn't matter what stage it has reached. You can absolutely do something about it and that's what this week's lesson is all about.

Stages of Breakdown

When poor communication is ongoing, leading to conflict, there are three stages of communication breakdown that occur. The first one is called resistance. When you start to have poor communication with a family member, it can show up in the form of resistance which is defined as the action of opposing something that you disagree with. In other words, it's an argument. "I don't think that what you're saying is correct, so I'm going to resist it. I'm going to disagree with it. I'm going to argue with you". We're resisting each other's point of view. That's usually where communication breakdown starts.

If, when you're having a conversation, you get resistance from the person you're speaking to, it's a sign that you're not communicating successfully. Your not getting your point across or its not being received as you intended. There can be many different reasons for this. Either what you were saying was not clear and you need to restate it, or maybe the other person is not in the right "place" today to receive what you're saying. There can be many different reasons for the resistance. But understand this is the first sign.

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If you can catch poor communication at the resistance stage, it's much, much easier to deal with. It's just a disagreement and through some calm and rational conversation you can resolve the disagreement and get to a place where everyone is okay with one another.

Now, if that resistance is left unchecked, it can evolve to the next stage which is resentment. We define resentment as being a feeling of deep and bitter anger or ill will. This has reached a point where you've had enough of this person or this conversation and you just don't want to hear it anymore. You're starting to view the other person in a negative way. Your thoughts start to become consumed by feelings of anger and bitterness towards that person. They could say "hello" to you and you would take it the wrong way because you just can't stand the sight of them.

Resentment is a very negative emotion and it's a very consuming emotion to harbor. That deep feeling of bitterness and anger can absolutely consume you to the point where all rational conversation is impossible. Again, left unchecked, this can escalate even further. There are lots of things you can do about resentment, which will be considered further in this Lesson.

For now, one of them, is just to come to terms with how you're feeling and why you might be feeling it. Hopefully, you're using your Daily Pages or your journal because that can be a great outlet for venting anger and bitterness. Just getting it out and talking to somebody can be a way of dealing with resentment. When you start to feel better, you're on the path of reconnecting with the person and establishing good communication with them again.

But again, left unchecked it can escalate and will show up in the form of revenge. We define revenge as being a harmful action in response to a perceived wrongdoing. The keyword here is "perceived". It doesn't always mean that the person actually did something to spite you, but it was perceived that way. An example might be when you're meeting a family member at a restau-

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rant and they're 15 minutes late. You perceive that to be just a blatant disrespectful gesture, so you revenge them by being 30 minutes late the next time you meet. Revenge can take many different forms. There's emotional revenge and there's physical revenge. It can really lead to abusive relationships which is a real nasty place to be. If you are here, again, there are things you can do. One is to stop revenging right away and deal with the feelings that are provoking you to lash out in this way.

Being on the receiving end of revenge is also a tricky situation. One thing that you want to do right away is observe what triggers it. If a family member is treating you in a revengeful way, try to carefully observe and understand the triggers within the situation.

The first key to dealing with all of these things is to understand the other person's point of view. What most people try to do is to get their own point of view across. They place the greatest importance on being understood, instead of understanding the other person. So much of communication breakdown occurs because of a very simple misunderstanding. Something was said in one way, it was heard differently by the receiving party and a reaction occurs.

3 Ways To Listen

Some of that has to do with how we listen. There are three ways that we typically can listen to another person. The first way is to agree with them. When we agree with another person, we're really prejudging what is being said as something that you've heard before and that you believe to be true. In other words, you agree with their point of view; it matches your beliefs and you agree with it.

The next way to listen to somebody is to disagree with them. Again, this is a prejudgment of what is being said as something that you've heard before and that you believe to be false. So, when you're listening to somebody, are you agreeing with them or disagreeing with them? Do you find yourself constantly com-



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paring what they're saying to your own beliefs to determine whether or not you agree or disagree? If that's true, then these are the primary ways in which you are listening to other people. By the way, this is how most people listen to one another.

There is a third way to listen to a person and that is “to be with”, that is, listening without judgment. It's also being open to what is being said and accepting it as being true for the person who is saying it. It doesn't matter if you believe it to be true or not or if you agree or disagree. There is no judgment on what is being said.

When people feel judged or they feel like what they are saying is being judged, they have the tendency to shut down. They may stop sharing with you enough detail for effective communication. Also it can lead to feelings of being wrong. If a person feels wrong, again, this can affect what they are saying and how it's being heard.

Again, understand that there are these three ways to listen. The true way to effectively listen to another person without the judgment is just simply “to be with,” and to be open that what is being said is true for them and to listen without judgment. If you can learn to do that, you'll start to see the resistance and resentment melt away. Revenge won't even happen because it's not being triggered. You'll start to see those symptoms of poor communication become fewer and fewer as you practice this. I say practice because it does take practice to do this. We are so used to going through 24 hours in a day agreeing or disagreeing with people. Not just our family members, but the people we work with, what we see on the news or what we're listening to on the radio.

There are constant judgments on whether we agree or disagree with things all day long. It takes a conscious effort to learn “to be with” and to just be open.

Our challenge for you this week is to observe how you are listening this week and to practice “being with”.

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Being Understood

A huge value for people is the need to be understood. I mentioned before that it's more important to understand the other person first than it is to be understood. But, generally there is this need to be understood. There are two sides to it. If you find yourself feeling like your family members are just not understanding you and not understanding what you're saying, then there could be some very specific reasons for this. If you want to be understood, you need to observe what is actually happening.

The first thing you want to consider is that what you are saying is not always what they are hearing. It reminds me of a conflict that I had with my son sometime ago where he was playing his video game and it was time for dinner. We asked him to stop playing his video game and put it away. He flared up and he got all upset and started yelling. What we were saying was turn off the game, it's time for dinner. What he heard was turn off the video game; you can't ever play it again. Obviously that's not what we meant, but it was interpreted or it was perceived as meaning something much different for him. So understand that there's what you are saying and then there is what they are hearing. If the two messages are not the same, then you're going to get communication breakdown in the form of resistance, resentment or revenge.

We often assume that people know what we're talking about. So when we say something, we have lots of knowledge in our head and we may not bother to spell things out in great detail. Assumptions get made in verbal communication all the time. It happens in written communication as well. Have you ever read an email and had a reaction to it like "how dare they say that to me!" But then when you talk to the person, that's not really what they meant. They were actually smiling the whole time or it wasn't meant as an attack on you, but it was just a comment or a response and it didn't really mean anything. Some people read an email or hear somebody talk, have a reaction to it and then never talk to them again. They never have the opportunity to resolve the situation. How tragic would it be if it was purely due to a misunderstanding of communication?

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It's even worse when the other person feels that you are saying they are wrong and that it's you who is right. We call this "righteousness," where I'm right and you're wrong. Even though that's really not what you're saying, it could be perceived in that way, provoking a response of resistance, resentment or revenge. Again, those are your warning signs that what you are saying is not clear enough and maybe you need to take a step back and communicate it in another way.

Our challenge for you this week is to notice and keep track of how emotional states affect communication. As an example, let's suppose you say something and the person you're saying it to ends up yelling back at you. Take a look at what your response was to that. If you yelled back, what was their response? Was it to yell louder? What happened then? Or did you stay calm? Did you say to yourself, wait a minute this is getting too emotional, I'm going to calm this situation down - "Sorry, that's not what I meant to say. Let me clear this up with you."

How does an emotional state play into communication? This week, just experience it and take some notes in your journal. There's also a worksheet that you can download this week to help you to keep track of your communications. You can keep track of what you are saying and then what you think was being heard. Better still if you can get them to tell you what they heard. That will help you to check-in with the effectiveness of your own communication and the reactions you are getting back. Are you getting a nice calm, peaceful reaction? Are you getting compliance? Are you getting loving and peaceful relationships back? Or are you getting resistance, resentment or revenge?

Then as you keep track of that, I also want you to consider whose job it is to make sure that they understand. Is it their job to hear what you're saying and to understand it perfectly? Or is it your job to communicate it in a way that will be understood as you want it to be? Can you change the way you said it or communicated it, so that you do get the required response? Your check-in for this week is to answer these questions and to observe your communications.



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As you communicate and identify things that could be done differently, you want to be aware of ten rules for communication that can help you to avoid the symptoms of family conflict — breakdown in problem solving, lack of intimacy, weak emotional bonding, increased risk of divorce and marital separation, and behavioral problems in children.

10 Rules For Communication

So here are ten rules that you can use for more effective and calm communication with your family members.

1. **Make sure that the other person is listening** and that you have their attention. If they're watching TV, don't just start talking to them and expect to get an answer back. Stop and make sure you have their attention first before you start to convey your message.
2. **Begin with something positive.** If we feel misunderstood because there's resistance, resentment or revenge it's so easy to go straight to something negative – “I don't like it when you do this” or “I don't like it when you do that”. It instantly puts the other person on guard. Instead, practice beginning with something positive and it will help to keep their reactions a lot more calm and peaceful.
3. **Do not attack.** You don't want to constantly pound on people about all the things that they do wrong. Instead, come to some agreement, have a conversation about how it makes you feel when that thing happens and try to come to some peaceful understanding.
4. **Avoid exaggerations.** When you exaggerate a point, the reaction you get back from a person is likely to be defensive. An example might be, “You know what, you never listen to me when I talk”. Well, is that really true? Do they never listen? You might feel like they haven't been listening to you a lot recently, but to say that they never listen to you is an exaggeration.

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5. **Don't mind read.** And don't expect mind reading in return.
6. **Drop the judgment.** Can you listen in the third way that we talked about – “being with”, being open to the view that what is being said by the other person is true for them at that moment.
7. **Explain how you feel.** Rather than accusing the other person of something, it's a matter of explaining your feelings and it's also not expecting them to completely understand your feelings. Again, don't expect people to be mind readers. By explaining how you feel, they will be able to take you at your word and they will be able to respond accordingly.
8. **Clarify your needs.** What do you need from the other person? What do you need from your family member? Again, don't expect them to be perfect, to know everything that you're going to need in that moment. Can you calmly and rationally explain what it is that you need?
9. When you're having a conversation with a family member, **limit the number of topics** around which you are trying to problem solve. You don't want this to become a laundry list of problems which will become overwhelming and cause the other person to start to shut down. They're not going to feel like talking about all of these problems at once. Again you can start to get resistance, resentment and revenge and some of the other symptoms of communication breakdown. Try to limit your conversations to one or two topics. Take the next step in those topics or resolve them and then choose another appropriate time to speak about the other issues.
10. **Let them speak—just listen.** Can you give them an equal opportunity to speak rather than trying to respond to everything they say and defending everything that you've said? Understand that the other person is going to have a point of view and that this is an important part of resolving the problem. If you can learn to listen to another person, they will give you the



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clues and the answers needed to resolve the problem. When we get defensive, don't allow others to speak and don't understand their point of view, we can only come from our side and it's as if we're trying to force our way of thinking onto them rather than taking two points of view and meeting in the middle.

Hopefully these ten rules will help you to have more effective communication as you go through your week and beyond.

Now, in summary what we have looked at in this Lesson is how to avoid communication breakdown; how to avoid the symptoms of poor communication such as excessive family conflict, ineffective problem solving and weak emotional bonding. Also, we have discussed how to listen to the other person without judgment. We talked about three ways of listening - to agree with, to disagree with and "to be with". The suggestion is to practice "being with" this week, to see how that can make a difference in your communication. Also practice how to use the ten rules for effective communication. The more that you take the time to understand another person's point of view, the easier it will be for you to alter the way you are communicating your information so that it is received in the way that you intended.

Chapter 5 — Controlling Your Emotions

The topic for this lesson is controlling your emotions. We're going to consider the different types of emotional responses that we experience, so that there is more understanding on how they play a role in your life. We'll also look at understanding and avoiding emotional abuse. Some of the things we'll cover here may surprise you. The traps are subtle and so easy to fall into, and sometimes could be considered as a form of emotional abuse.

We're going to look at three primary causes of emotional responses; what is it that causes those emotional responses to come out? I'm going to share a concept with you called the "Three As" of dealing with emotions. As well as being a way of dealing with the emotions, it is also a way of calming your emotional responses down. We're going to give you five tools and techniques for calming your emotions.

Types of Emotional Responses

Firstly, let's consider the types of emotional responses that can occur. The first one is subjective feelings. When we talk about subjective feelings, we're really talking about how we interpret what we are feeling at a given time. These could be feelings of joy or happiness. Or they could be feelings of stress, frustration or anger.

All emotional responses really start with a feeling. These feelings can then lead us into more expressive behaviors. This is where we start to show outward signs of how we are feeling. If we're happy we might laugh or have a smile on our face; these are expressive behaviors. If we are stressed or frustrated we might be frowning or our eyebrows might be pointing downwards, or our forehead might be wrinkling a bit. If we're angry we might be glaring or having that look of anger and frustration on our face.

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Has anybody ever come up to you and said “Hey, are you okay. You look like something might be bothering you.” If somebody says that to you, it could be that you’re starting to express a certain feeling whether you intend to or not. Some feelings are very hard to hold in and when we’re feeling them we do start to express them in certain ways, particularly in our face.

Those expressive behaviors can lead to physical reactions. Physical reactions are the body changes that occur when we experience an emotion and we start to express the behavior. Happiness or joy could be physically expressed by laughter or by throwing your hands up in the air. It shows that you have found something to be funny. You’re happy, everything is wonderful.

Another example of a physical reaction is when you’re stressed out or frustrated and you might grab your head or run your fingers through your hair, or clench your fists or grind your teeth. Beyond that you might even display a physical reaction to being angry such as screaming, running around or leaving the scene. Some people actually take it to the level of hitting out. Some kids who haven’t learned to deal with these emotional responses are very prone to using physical reactions as a way of expressing their behaviors and their feelings.

These three types of response really play into one another. You’ve got feelings, behaviors and physical reactions as a way of responding to emotions; either positive or negative. Either way, there’s going to be some sort of resulting behavior, reaction or feeling.

It’s important to understand this when we’re trying to raise a family and dealing with situations which could be stressful and when some family members are experiencing negative and frustrating things, which they really want to change. People become emotional. These feelings, behaviors and physical reactions are manifested throughout the family.

When you’re dealing with a difficult parenting situation and you feel your emotional state rising, whether it’s stress, frustration or

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even anger, there's a feeling that goes along with it. There are expressive behaviors and then there are physical reactions too.

When you couple this with potential problems in communication which we addressed in Lesson 4, then arguments followed by conflict occur and our emotional state rises even more. But as we allow our emotional state to rise more and more, our ability to think things through rationally and to come up with an appropriate solution or response is greatly reduced.

The more emotional the reactions or behaviors are, the less intelligence we start to show in our ability to solve problems. The key to solving certain problems is to identify the emotional response and what triggers it and be able to calm yourself down and to come back into an emotional state that will allow you to think things through and to choose an appropriate response.

Emotional responses left unchecked can, either knowingly or unknowingly, develop into what could be considered to be emotional abuse. Some of the things that are on this list might surprise you; I know they surprised me when we were researching this topic. When you have emotional responses, feelings and behaviors to things, they can lead to certain responses that could be abusive or damaging to your children, to your relationship with your partner and to yourself, if left unchecked.

Avoiding Emotional Abuse

The first emotional response to avoid, and which could be considered as a form of emotional abuse is rejecting or rejection of people. Rejection is shown by constant disapproval, possibly even belittling the needs of your children or your spouse or even yourself. It could be exhibited by excessive criticism. We may find ourselves criticizing our children for not doing the things they're supposed to do; not picking up their toys; not doing their homework; playing too many video games; criticizing our spouse for coming home late, not putting their jacket or shoes away when they came in and not helping out with the dishes and the kids; and finally excessive criticism of ourselves.

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The next emotional response to avoid is ignoring. Ignoring is when we show no interest in the needs of the person who we are dealing with. Since we're considering kids here, it could be ignoring their needs, showing no interest. It can go as far as being completely emotionally unavailable or even showing apathy which means that we're showing no emotional response or even that we don't care.

What results is that certain arguments or conflict can wear a person down to the point where their response to dealing with that unresolved problem which is not going away, is to shut off emotionally. At least then the conflict is stopped for the time being.

The next form of emotional abuse is terrorizing. That sounds like a very strong word, and it is, yet some of the things that constitute terrorizing are a little bit more subtle than you might think and are worth noting here. Terrorizing in this context involves the use of intimidation and fear. It can include extreme verbal threats, yelling, cursing, or trying to scare the child or the other person; sometimes people do this to their partners. Internally they can do it to themselves. Berating other family members or ridiculing a child in public are forms of fear-based emotional response or terrorizing. In other words, where it invokes a fear response in the other party it could be called terrorizing.

Don't think for a moment that at any given time any of us are immune to having these happen. Don't think it might not happen to you, because we get letters all the time from people who are dealing with very intense behavioral issues or family conflicts where it does become very emotional and it's easy to fall into these areas.

The next form to avoid is isolating. Isolating is leaving the child alone or unattended; isolating them from others; not allowing them to have any friends; restricting them from any type of appropriate activity; forcing a child to stay in their room. Some partners have also done this with one another in the extreme, dividing the house down the middle and saying okay you stay on

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that side, I'm going to stay on this side and we're never going to meet in the middle. That can be a very isolating emotional response.

Corrupting is another emotional response where it takes the form of just being completely permissive to the point of corrupting the other person. It could include things like allowing the child to use drugs or alcohol, allowing them to participate in criminal activity either by encouraging it or by turning a blind eye to it. It could also include rewarding a child for bullying or harassing others, teaching racism or encouraging violence in sporting activities.

Finally, there is exploitation, which is defined as forced activity, forcing a child into responsibility beyond their ability or what a child of that age can handle. Another example might be strongly encouraging infants or young children to do things and expecting them not to cry. You may become angry when your child does not meet your expectation of a certain developmental stage. In the extreme, it can also become sexual abuse or pornography.

There are some examples here that are really extreme cases of emotional abuse; others are much more subtle. It could be easy to fall into some of them from time to time especially when an intense conflict or ongoing family conflict or argument is occurring. The emotional responses increase and the intelligence decreases - our brain shuts off and the physical reactions come out. You may not even be aware that you're doing some of these things that we've presented.

If you have noticed things like this going on in your family, be aware that there may be a safety issue with yourself, your children or your partner that needs to be addressed.

The reason we present this list is to identify any of these areas that could be an issue. By identifying and becoming aware of them, you can choose to do something different. You can start to learn to deal with the emotions differently so that it never comes to this. Awareness is important.

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Why Do We Get Emotional?

Fear is probably the number one factor when it comes to emotional responses. Fear is defined as the inability to act based on a perceived reality of hurt, pain or loss. The keyword here is “perceived” because it’s not always a reality that there’s going to be this pain, hurt or loss. But it is a perceived reality. We perceive a certain situation to be scary and fear comes out; it increases our feelings, our emotions and then the behaviors come out.

The next factor to getting emotional is arousal. Arousal is when the emotions inside you wake up and cause you to take an action; that’s when it challenges your beliefs or your comfort zone. These emotions or feelings can be aroused which lead to the emotional responses and the physical reactions.

Motivation, an internal condition that activates your behavior and gives it direction; it’s your belief system, your values, your intentions. Consider that you’re trying to get a certain result. You’re motivated to get that result so your behaviors and your actions take a certain form to try to cause that to happen.

Fear, arousal and motivation are the main contributors to emotional behavior.

What Can You Do About It?

Now that we understand more about emotional behavior, what can we do about it? The first thing to do is to become aware of the emotional responses that are occurring in your life. So get to know your emotions and recognize your typical responses and their triggers. What situations occur that cause you to act out or feel a certain way?

The next stage is called acceptance. Acceptance is where you are now aware of the emotional responses, you become aware of what triggers them and you can now start to let go of the resistance and accept how you feel as being true for you in that moment. When you get to a place of acceptance and you’re no



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longer fighting against it, you're saying this is how I respond when this happens; this is just how it is. You may have heard the saying "What you resist persists". The more you try to resist something, the more you're going to get stuck in that sort of emotional behavior. But if you can accept it for what it is, that this is what happens when a certain event triggers your emotions, then you're a lot further towards making changes to your future behavior.

The third stage is to ask yourself questions. You're aware of your emotional responses and their triggers and you've accepted that for being true and you let go of the resistance, you can now ask yourself the question, is there a better way to react to this situation? Now you're open to ideas and solutions that can cause you to act in a certain way.

So it's very important to have a look at this. We have a self-assessment worksheet for you to use this week that will help you to journal and log and record your emotional responses so you can become aware of them and ask yourself some very specific questions to help you to deal with emotional responses in the future.

Tools For Controlling Emotions

Once you know what your emotional responses are and you decide that you want them to change, there are some tools that you can use to control your emotional states; when you want to calm yourself down, when you want to get back to an intelligent state where you can think about rational solutions to the conflicts or arguments that are occurring in your family.

The first suggestion here is journaling or writing. We've been suggesting journaling and writing throughout this course since Day One with the Daily Pages. Journaling two or three pages a day of your thoughts, your feelings or whatever is going on in your life, as a way of venting and getting those things out. Hopefully you've embraced that and by now if you have been doing it regularly, you have noticed a difference in how you feel. I know

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myself, when I'm ever feeling tense or anxious about anything, that if I sit down and write two or three pages, I walk away feeling empowered and clear and I know exactly what my sense of direction is and how I'm going to respond. Writing down your thoughts and feelings is a very powerful medium for controlling your emotions. Get a pen and paper and that kinetic action of moving your wrist and the pen and writing it down, allows you to clear your head. It allows you to calm your emotions and enables you to vent and release the emotions that are getting in your way.

Another great tool for controlling emotions is meditation, or breathing exercises; deep breathing - breathing in, holding it in for a few seconds and then breathing out. When I went through a breathing exercise workshop, they taught us to breathe in through the nose, hold it in for a few seconds and then breathe out through the mouth. Actually if you're feeling tense, you can breathe out through your mouth and then do a sigh as you breathe out. That can help to release any tension or emotions that you have and will help you to relax.

There are many good guided meditations that you can find online. We'll post links to some of these on the website so that you can find yourself one that works for you as a way of controlling your emotional responses.

Exercise and physical movement is another great way to control your emotions. Playing sports helps me to get the exercise that I need; I play hockey twice a week. Your body needs physical movement and the less we move, the more stress and tension we tend to hold in. Regular exercise and physical movement, even if it's just going for a walk around the block, can go a long way to clear your feelings and to clear any physical reactions you might be having.

Don't forget about just having half an hour to yourself, by yourself, with no talking, no stimulation. We've talked about that in terms of the personal date. The Mommy Date is a very powerful stress relieving tool which allows you to feel better about yourself.

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Another tool to use is to just remove yourself from a situation and go do something else. Go do something more positive, something that's going to make you feel good, something that's fun; just get away from the situation. Don't let the intensity of the situation control your reactions and possibly result in you saying or doing something that you really didn't intend to say or do and that you would regret in the future. So get away, remove yourself from the situation; go do something positive. Get yourself to a state where you can start to feel better again, start to get to that intelligent level where you can think things through and find good solutions.

Also, find someone to talk to, someone objective who's not going to be judgmental on the situations or judgmental of yourself or your family. Probably the worst thing you could do is talk to someone who's going to buy into your side of the story and then start to judge your family members as well. An example of someone objective might be one of the coaches from our coaching program. Or if you're talking to a therapist or a psychologist, some neutral third party who is there to listen, they may give some helpful suggestions. Really though it's just a way for you to get over what it is that you're feeling so that you get back to an emotional state that'll allow you to find solutions.

In summary of what we've talked about this week: emotional reactions are motivated by fear and can lead to potentially abusive behavior if left unchecked. Not only that, but they affect the results that you're getting in your relationships. Most parents come to TheBlissfulParent.com because they want to have more loving, peaceful relationships; they want the conflict to end. They don't want to have these ongoing arguments. Dealing with and releasing these emotional reactions is an important thing to do.

When you get emotional, choose to do something different than you do now and you will get a different result. It's also important not to beat yourself up or hold yourself in contempt if you are experiencing any of these emotions or emotional responses; it's not an unusual thing. But now you have some tools that you can



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use to deal with those emotions and start to choose something different. When you are less emotional, your family will be less emotional too and the arguments will stop; the conflict will stop. Things will return to a more loving and peaceful state.

Chapter 6 — Accepting Responsibility

In this lesson we're going to look at the topic of accepting personal responsibility by considering the following points:
Accepting personal responsibility – what does it mean? It can have different meanings for different people. We're going to help you understand this in a positive and empowering way; a way that's going to help you get the results that you want out of your relationships and not in a way that's going to make you feel bad about yourself.

Possible negative consequences that can occur when we fail to take personal responsibility for the things that are happening in our lives.

Common beliefs and behaviors that are typical of somebody who is not accepting personal responsibility. Helping to identify areas that could be improved. What needs to change in order to start taking more personal responsibility in certain areas of your life? How to use personal responsibility to improve the relationships with your kids, your partner and yourself.

What is Personal Responsibility?

What does it mean to accept personal responsibility? Well, first of all we define personal responsibility as acknowledging that you are solely responsible for the choices that you make in your life. This may or may not be an easy concept to accept, but I'm going to encourage you to just be with whatever feelings this may stir up in you at the moment and trust that we'll go somewhere with them.

Really what we're considering here is that the results that you get from your life are directly related to the choices that you make. That may seem very uncomfortable, but the empowering and positive part of this is that if we can learn to recognize that it was choices that we made that led us to a certain result – such as

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fighting with our family over something – then by making different choices we can get the results that we would rather have instead?

The empowering thing about this is the more we learn to recognize and acknowledge those choices, the easier it's going to become to make change. What this suggests is that if we want something different, then we can choose to do something differently and it will produce different results.

Again, what we choose to feel or think, is something that we are responsible for. If you feel angry, sad, happy or joyful, it's as a result of choices that we make. We can choose how we feel. We choose how we react and interpret what is happening in our life. If we think good things are going to happen, they usually do. If we think bad things are going to happen, that also tends to become true. On a daily basis, are you thinking about good things, are you thinking good thoughts, thoughts towards what type of relationships you want to have and the things you want to have in your life? Or, are you thinking about the problems? Are you focused on what's wrong?

When you accept personal responsibility, you can choose the direction that you're headed in your life. So are you headed towards peaceful, loving, happy relationships with your family? Or are you headed towards excessive and extended family conflict and ongoing problems? Again, think about the choices available to you in this moment and how they are serving you? Are they leading you to what you want to have?

Personal responsibility also defines how we interpret the actions of others and the circumstances that are happening in our lives. Accepting personal responsibility suggests that we cannot blame others for the choices that we've made. We also cannot blame circumstances for the results that come our way. For example, you're late for work because traffic was heavy or there was a car accident. Are you late because of the car accident or are you late because of the time you chose to leave?

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There are certainly unforeseen things that can occur, but the distinction lies in whether or not we use the actions of others or the circumstances that are happening to us, as an excuse not to have the results or the relationships that we want to have. We can make choices to respond or react to these things in a different way to get a better result.

Personal responsibility also dictates whether or not we feel sorry for ourselves or for the bum deal that we've been handed. "I'd just love to have that relationship with my son, but he's just so argumentative all the time and he never does what I tell him to do, so we're never going to have that relationship. If he would just straighten up, everything would be wonderful. We would be happy."

Again, what choices could steer that relationship in another direction? How could we let go of blame, anger and resentment towards others? When we feel sorry for ourselves and we blame others for the results that we have in our lives, for the things that we don't have, it builds into anger and resentment that will just further deteriorate the relationship and the continuing family conflict. But if we can choose to let go of that blame, anger and resentment, then relationships improve and we can experience love and peace in those relationships.

Possible Negative Consequences

Now, when a person chooses not to accept personal responsibility for the choices and results that are occurring in their life, there are some certain negative consequences that can occur. Firstly, there is the feeling of being chronically hostile, angry or depressed. This may or may not describe you, but I can tell you honestly that I receive a lot of letters from parents asking us for our help when there are definitely some feelings of hostility, anger, depression, sadness or resentment towards some of the things that are going on in their family relationships.

You need to have a good honest look at this and identify areas in which this occurring. I don't want you to do it with a view to

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beating yourself up or saying “I’m a bad person because I feel this way”. It’s simply a matter of acknowledging what is true at this moment because once you acknowledge it as being true, you can manage it and change it. You can’t change what you don’t acknowledge. This is just about checking in to how you feel and acknowledging that these are typical feelings that people have when they are looking at the actions of others or the circumstances in their lives that are producing the present results in their life and their relationships.

Another negative consequence is the feeling of being dependent on others for recognition, approval, and acceptance and surrendering to the concept that happiness is something bestowed upon you by somebody else. “I will be happy when my husband tells me that he loves me”; “I’ll be happy when my daughter finally picks up her toys and puts them away”; “I’ll be happy when my son makes his bed, brushes his teeth and is ready for school on time”. This is really setting yourself up to lose because you’re setting the bar high; happiness is dictated by the actions of others or the circumstances that are occurring, rather choosing to feel happiness despite the things that are happening.

You can also become fearful of taking risks or making a decision; being held back by that perceived reality of pain and hurt. People, who are not taking personal responsibility for the things in their lives, find themselves being unsuccessful in personal relationships. They find themselves blaming others for how they feel or what they’re thinking, and it has a direct impact on relationships. People can only withstand this for so long before it eats away at the relationship and at the emotional bonds.

That person can also go on to feel emotionally or physically unhappy. It can even lead to sickness or health challenges, until something comes along to make them happy. They blame something else for making them happy or unhappy rather than taking control and choosing to feel happy regardless of the things that are happening in our lives.

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Common Beliefs and Behaviors

When somebody is in a pattern of not accepting personal responsibility for the things that are going on in their life, they might find themselves thinking a certain way, believing certain things, or behaving in particular ways. Here are some examples:

It's not my fault things are the way they are.

Life is unfair.

Why does this always happen to me?

My parents made me what I am today.

Why bother trying; nothing ever changes.

I'm tired of all these problems; when will they go away?

All of these statements suggest that the person is powerless against these things and that change is just not possible. When you just surrender to these thoughts or behaviors, if there's always a plausible excuse, you take away your power to choose something different and to have better relationships in your life. To get stuck in this pattern of thinking is to get stuck in the way things are today, or even worse, allow them to deteriorate further.

What Needs To Change?

We've talked a lot about what it means to accept personal responsibility and some of the negative consequences that can occur in your life when you are not accepting personal responsibility.

What needs to change? What do you need to develop in order to ensure that you are accepting personal responsibility most of the time? I say most of the time because I don't think it's realistic to expect perfection in this area. I think there's a certain amount of human nature that suggests that on occasions, there are times where we're going to blame others. There are times when we're going to blame circumstances and when we're going to feel anger, resentment or depression. They are basic human emotions, which we can go in and out of. To learn to acknowledge what is going on in those moments and to use personal responsibility as

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a way to lift yourself out of those situations, is a very empowering thing.

So what you need to develop so that this becomes a tool for improving relationships in your life? The first thing is to seek out and ask for help. I'm not necessarily suggesting help from direct family members. In fact, often I've witnessed the best help and support coming from a neutral third party, someone in your life who does not have the emotional charge on what is happening. They're not emotionally tied up in what is happening and they're going to be able to give you some objective advice or ask you some very objective questions. In fact, you don't really need to be told what to do, you just need the support to asking yourself the right questions, to check in with what's happening, to discover the right course of action for yourself.

You'll also need to develop the ability to be open to new ideas and concepts and to continue to learn and explore and discover new ways of doing things and new tools that you can use to get better results from your relationships.

It's also very empowering to develop the ability to choose new responses to people, actions and events that are occurring in our lives. Ask yourself, "What can I do differently in the future to get a different result?"

Also, make a start on the journey (I say a journey because it's not always instant) to let go of anger, fear, resentment, mistrust, insecurity and any other negative emotion that is holding you back from really surrendering yourself to the loving, peaceful relationships that you want to have. When you look at the other person that you want to have this relationship with, what do you see? Can you get to a place where you no longer feel this anger, resentment and fear that's stopping you? Can you just learn to be open? Can you just surrender yourself to being with that person, whether or not they also have anger, fear and resentment towards you?

At first it may feel strange, but the more you learn to practice



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this, the more you're going to get something different in return. If you are open and trusting to the other person, sooner or later that person will be open and trusting to you. It may not happen right away but because you're changing how you do things, they are going to start responding differently to you. It's a choice; if we choose the response first, then we can get a different response in return.

We also want to develop the ability to become vulnerable to change and to take risks. We want to be willing to try something different and take a chance on trying something new on the chance that it might get us closer to the result we want to have—those loving, peaceful relationships that we seek to have with our family members.

Making This Change Happen

When do you want to make these changes towards how you use personal responsibility in your life and use it to improve the relationships you have with your family members? What are the steps? What do you need to do first, second, third.....etc, to start making the changes happen?

Firstly, start by becoming aware of your current level of personal responsibility. I'm sure that there are areas where you do accept personal responsibility for what's happening. There may also be other areas, if you're open to looking for them, where blame of others or blame of circumstances could be taking place. You just need to ask yourself the question, "What is stopping me from taking personal responsibility in those areas?" Write the answers in your journal and start to identify areas where you don't take personal responsibility, so that you can start to choose something different.

Once you've done that, you can start to come up with new replacement beliefs that can help you to accept personal responsibility. So have a look at what you do believe now and then also what do you need to believe in the future so that you can accept personal responsibility in that area.

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You need to decide what tools to work with and to also write a plan in your journal that will help you to make different choices and decide what it is that you are going to do differently in the future.

This week's self-assessment worksheet will list out a number of questions that can help you to identify these areas. Questions such as:

- How frequently do you claim that others have determined what you are today?
- How easy is it to accept that you are responsible for your choices in life?
- How easy is it to believe that you determine the direction your life takes?
- How easy is it to blame others for where you are today?
- What masks do you hide behind to avoid accepting personal responsibility?
- How rational are you in dealing with the part you played in being who you are today?
- How easy is it to accept blame or admit mistakes?
- How easy is it to accept that you determine your feelings when negative events occur?
- How easy is it to depend solely on yourself for acceptance, affirmation and approval?
- How willing are you to be the sole determinant of the health of your self-esteem?
- How frequently do you feel sorry for yourself, if at all?
- How easy is it to let go of guilt if you stop rescuing those in your life?
- How willingly do you take preventative steps to ensure your physical and emotional health?
- How successfully have you practiced self-affirmation in your life?
- How successfully have you practiced anger work and letting go of that anger in order to get on with your life?

The final step here is to seek out and find a coach or a professional advisor, whichever you feel would be the most appropriate to help facilitate these changes. Doing this alone will only get you



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so far and if you've been working on this alone up until this point, the question you want to ask yourself and maybe even journal about, is how has that been working for you so far? Is it getting you the results that you want to have? If the answer is no, then definitely take this step seriously and seek out and find a coach or a professional advisor. It could be a coach or therapist, or it could be counseling. Whatever it is that you feel you need, go out and get involved in it. Get a neutral third party to support you in making the changes in your relationships that you want.

In summary then, we have discussed how not taking personal responsibility takes away our power to choose something different and how it slows down those improvements that we so desperately seek in our family relationships. We have seen that by accepting and acknowledging our part in what happens to us in our lives, we give ourselves the power to choose something different. When we can choose something different, then we can choose the relationships that we really want to have.

Chapter 7 — Using Words That Work

In this lesson we'll look at the topic of using words that work. Firstly, we'll consider why words matter, why we should think about and choose our words wisely when communicating with our family members and in relationships with other people?

We'll look at finding the right words for the right situations and how they can greatly affect the response that you get back from other people. We'll consider avoiding any non-helpful communication; communication that will lead to further arguments or conflict in relationships, rather than communication that will produce to more loving and peaceful responses in return.

Then we'll look at five steps in choosing more effective words in your communication. Words that stop arguments and conflict in their tracks so that you can start getting on to a more loving, peaceful way of communicating with your family members.

Have You Ever Wondered WHY...?

First of all, let's discuss why words matter and why we should think about this? Well, you may have asked yourself "why..." at certain times. Things like "Why isn't what I say, always what people hear?" This means you're saying one thing, but the other person is hearing something completely different.

Why don't people always hear what we're saying in the way that we intend? It could mean that we don't completely understand their situation and that we need to communicate with them in a different way in order to be understood. We spoke about this in a previous lesson; the famous quote from Stephen Covey of Seven Habits of Highly Effective People that says "Seek first to understand before being understood." Taking the time to understand the other person is key to helping you choose words that are going to be understood by the other person.



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So understand that your words are not going to always be perceived by the other person the way you intended. What you say isn't always what they hear. That's just something to check in with as you go.

Some people are sensitive to certain words. Have you ever said “hello” to somebody only to have them turn and say, “What do you mean by that?” All you meant was hello, and yet they were really sensitive to it. It just means there was something going on for them at that moment and your words were a trigger for some feelings that they have inside. So understand that some people are sensitive to certain words. Rather than saying, well that person shouldn't be so sensitive to those words, consider saying, okay, I recognize that this word is causing a sensitive reaction, so maybe I should choose a different word to use when I'm around them. It's just something to consider asking yourself.

You may have noticed or asked yourself why your words are not being heard by your children. You may ask them to go and do their homework or go clean up their room or go set the table for dinner—only to notice that either they didn't understand the instructions or it was just completely unheard and the response was... “What did you say?” These are the kinds of communications that happen all the time in families; our words are just not being heard by our children. This can mean so many things.

One thing to understand is that certain words can have one meaning to us as parents and a completely different meaning to our kids. I have come across this with my son many, many times. One example is asking him to go upstairs to his room and get his pajamas. He hears me saying that he has to go to bed right now. What I said and what was received by my son was not the same thing. This is an opportunity to check in with what we are saying and how we are saying it to ensure that we are getting the right response back from the other person and that it is being heard as intended. More examples of this are provided later.

You may have noticed or asked yourself why your spouse gets angry over things you say; especially if the intention behind what



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you were saying was positive. However, it was received as an accusation of something or it triggered some other underlying feeling that they had. Their response was to get angry or to argue back.

So the words that we use can have a big effect on the response that we get back from our spouse and our partners. How can we choose different words in order to get a different response from them in the future?

You may have also noticed or asked yourself why it seems that you're frequently getting arguments and conflict in different areas of your life. If you seem to be getting argument and conflict from your kids, your spouse, your parents and argument and conflict at work, in fact everywhere you turn, that might be a huge signal to stop and just check in with the words you are using. Ask yourself why it's happening and identify some different words to use in your communication so that what you get back is less argument and conflict and more cooperative and peaceful communication.

If it's happening with just one particular person and you think your communication with everyone else is fine, you may want to check in with that and make sure it really is fine because sometimes we lie to ourselves and convince ourselves that all is okay when actually it isn't. Also, maybe there is something going on for that person, some sort of problem or painful emotional thing that's happening to them that needs to be investigated in more depth in a sensitive and non-judgmental way. Understanding this could help you to lower their resistance, allowing you to dig a bit deeper and find out why you're getting argument and conflict from them; resolve that and then to move on. We'll give you some examples of that later.

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It's worth understanding that on a daily basis you speak over 20,000 words. Now that's a lot of words. I would say that 99% of those words are being chosen by your autopilot, your subcon-



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scious mind, because they are words that you have been using for your entire life. It's just the way you talk and the words you use. If your relationships are great and you're getting great reactions back from other people in your life, then there's no problem.

But, again, if you're getting a lot of excessive argument and conflict in your family, then maybe its time to stop letting your autopilot (your subconscious) choose all of your words for you and to take just a few seconds and consciously choose different words. Find the words that do work in each relationship. Each relationship may require you to use different words.

It's important to understand that your words will either be accepted or rejected by the other person. It doesn't necessarily matter what those words mean to you. Remember that they may not mean the same thing to the other person, so they're either going to be accepted or rejected by that person. Your kids also choose their reactions based on your words. As in the example I gave you with my son and asking him to go get his pajamas and get ready for bed. I wasn't telling him to go to bed, but his understanding of what I was saying was to go to bed right now. That's not what I was saying. Now we work on communicating in a different way so that he fully understands what we're saying and we find that we get a lot more compliance and a lot less argument and conflict.

Words can also mean success or failure in a marriage. You may or may not have already noticed this. You may be experiencing some arguments in your marriage right now; maybe your marriage has already failed and now you're a single parent or co-parenting, or this is something you would like to avoid in the future. Understanding that words can mean success or failure in a marriage is huge thing. The words that you use and their meaning to you may not be the same as to the other person. Rather than trying to force them to understand us in a certain way, wouldn't it be easier for us to use different words to communicate in a different way so that it is understood by the other party better resulting in less argument, less conflict and a lot more peaceful and cooperative communication with the other party?



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Understanding that conflicts and arguments can be ended, in a lot of cases instantly, simply by choosing different words, is extremely empowering and it puts you in the driver's seat. It puts you in control of the reactions that you are getting from the people in your life.

Non-Helpful Communication

Here are some examples of some non-helpful communication, some examples of communication, that if used regularly, will only lead to continued conflict and argument in your family relationships. The first one is blaming or accusing the other person. This goes for relationships with your children; it also goes for relationships with your partner or spouse. If your words are perceived by the other person as laying blame on them or an accusation for something that they did that you don't approve of, it will build up the resistance and you're going to get a reaction back from them.

Examples might be "Why are you always acting that way? Or, how come you never clean up when I ask you to?" Two key words that you really want to be conscious of are the words "always" and "never." Those are two words that if you are using them in your communication, will almost certainly lead to more and continued conflict and argument. The word "always" implies that you always do it this way. The word "never" means that you never do it.

That's going to trigger a reaction in the other person. So is there a way that you can communicate differently in the future so that you are not blaming or accusing the other person?

Another example is name-calling. Things like "You eat like a pig." Or, "You're acting like a monkey." Some of them may even seem affectionate and I've had this in group conversations and workshops where people laugh and they go "oh, well those are just innocent names." Well are they really? If they seem innocent to you, but they are being perceived differently by the other

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person, then what is really true? Just be aware that name-calling can have an effect on how your words are perceived by the other person and will affect the reactions you're going to get back.

The use of threats is another example. Threats are used in discipline and punishment all the time and there are a lot of programs out there that use threats. But they don't always use the word "threat." They may use things like emotional currency etc, but they're really a threat. Communicating that if you don't stop that right now, you're going to get it. Or, if you don't stop arguing, we're not going to go to the movie tonight. Threatening a certain thing if they don't change their behavior or if they don't do a certain thing is a manipulative form of communication. It's a fear-based form of communication that will only work for so long and then people become immune to it. Then you have to become more and more threatening if you're going to continue using it to get the response that you want. It's not a very positive way to get the reaction that you want and it usually leads to more arguments. I get letters from people all the time who are arguing with their teenagers. They have been arguing and threatening them with this action or that action since their kids were very young, not even realizing the long-term impact of it. Now they are going through some very intense relationship repair to be able to overcome it. Threats are very damaging and very unhelpful in communication.

Bribes is another example – if you do this...I'll do that". "You can have dessert once you've cleaned up your room." Or "I will play with you once you've cleaned up your room or once you've done your homework." It communicates is conditional love. I had a lady about a year ago who was having this challenge with her 14-year old son where the only way she could have a relationship with him was to buy him things. They were innocent bribes in the beginning, but both parties become conditioned in that relationship; bribes are expected. Where does it end? It's just something that will keep escalating and escalating and understand that it is also a manipulative form of communication. It may work in the short term, but in the long-term can have some very damaging effects to the relationship.

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Comparison—“why don’t you act more like your sister?” Or, “why can’t you be more like your friend Tommy over there?” This is a type of communication that I’m sure really eats at a person’s self-esteem and their confidence. Nobody really wants to be compared to another person. Be conscious of whether or not, in your communication to your child or to your spouse, you are comparing them to another person. They can’t be another person. They can only be themselves. How can you communicate to them in a way that is not comparing them to someone else or trying to get them to live up to somebody else’s standards?

Sarcasm— is one that flies under the radar all the time. I hear it in workshops and groups. Again, this is an autopilot response where we say the opposite of the truth. “Oh, I sure love it when you yell and scream all day long.” It’s a manipulative form of communication and it does not communicate your true feelings and does not lead to any sort of peaceful resolution. In fact sarcasm usually gets met with more sarcasm back. Each person just escalates the sarcasm until a full-out argument or conflict occurs. This is extremely damaging to a child’s self-esteem. It’s even more damaging to a marriage if your form of communication with one another is sarcasm.

These are just some types of communication. Again, just simply check in and hopefully choose words that don’t fall into any of these categories.

Choosing New Words

When it comes to choosing different words to use in your communication, what are the kinds of words that work? We’ve divided the words available to you into two categories. The first category is what we call dominant words. Dominant words imply criticism, compliance, control or judgment of behavior – good or bad or right or wrong. They’re words that don’t consider the needs and the feelings of the other person. They are used to manipulate and force a certain reaction or result from the other person, or they indicate that love is in some way conditional on their

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compliance.

Alternatively, on the other side we have conscious words. We use the phrase “conscious words” because you use your conscious mind to choose them. You’re not allowing your subconscious or your autopilot to just automatically choose words on your behalf. You consciously choose words that provide empathy, curiosity and guidance instead of indicating criticism, compliance or control. Empathy means, “I understand what you’re going through right now.” Curiosity suggests that you would like to learn more about what’s going on, so you ask some questions. And, guidance—how can I support you? Instead of judgment - good or bad, or right or wrong - how about being open to the suggestion that what is being said by the other person is true for them in that moment and simply observe without judgment. Take the feelings and the needs of that other person into consideration when responding and when choosing your words. Rather than trying to get them to understand your communication, try to understand what that person needs to hear from you? What words do you need to use so that your message is clearly understood and received by the other person. Rather than manipulate and force a certain behavior, try to engage, connect and support the other person.

Work on solutions to other people’s problems. Don’t necessarily solve the problem for them; don’t tell them what to do. Instead, cooperate and ask questions and use all of these things—empathy, curiosity, observing without judgment and consideration for their feelings—to support them in working out the solution themselves. If you do that, the amount of trust and respect you’ll get back from the other person is huge. The amount of conflict and argument won’t go away completely, because human nature is that it happens from time to time. However, through the use of the right words, you can help diffuse arguments and conflict situations and get back to a pattern of positive communication with more positive outcomes.



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5 Factors for Choosing Better Words

So here are five factors that you can use for choosing better words in your communication. The first factor is to connect. What we mean by this is to acknowledge the other person and give them a choice. Rather than demanding a certain type of behavior, connect with them, give them a choice. “You can choose this or you can choose that; either is okay, but here are the consequences of those actions.” versus “If you don’t do this right now, here’s what’s going to happen.” It’s just simply a different way of communicating. So connect with the other person. Understand their needs and what’s going on for them.

The next factor is patience. It can take time to recreate communication patterns that are more effective and positive. If you are in a pattern of argument or conflict right now with a family member or multiple family members, arguments with your kids or your spouse, you can choose different words and you’ll start to get different reactions back from them. But be patient, don’t try to choose new words one time and expect miraculous results instantly. It is the ongoing practice of choosing better words that will have the long term effect of having and recreating an effective and loving and peaceful relationship with your kids and your spouse.

The third one is understanding. We talk about understanding as seeking first to understand the other person and putting that before your need to be understood. It is far easier to communicate in a way that they will understand than it is to completely expect them to understand you in the way you currently communicate. The control that you have is not over their understanding, but rather the way you communicate and the words that you choose to use in your communication.

The fourth factor is will power and using that will power to take that extra second to choose your responses wisely. You don’t have to analyze them for hours and hours, but choose your responses wisely rather than reacting instantly and relying on that subconscious autopilot to react to arguments and conflict and

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other situations. The will power to choose the words is important. You do have that power. If you choose to use that power, some amazing results can happen.

The fifth factor is attract and the understanding that what you put out there comes back to you. Sometimes it comes back to you in greater quantities than the way you put it out. So if what you're putting out there is accusation, blame, argument, conflict, judgment, then what you're going to get back is those same things but in a magnified way. However, if what you put out there is love, peace, calm, then you're going to get loving, peaceful, calm communication back in return.

How To Stop Nagging

So how can you use this to stop your communication from being perceived as nagging? Well, here is a five part formula. The first part is to evaluate. Take a moment and choose your words wisely before simply reacting to a conversation. The second one is to be positive. If you say positive things, then you're going to get positive things in return. Give praise—this is a highly overlooked and probably a very difficult thing to do in a situation where you're involved in an argument or a conflict. But if you could notice and acknowledge things that are right about them as opposed to pointing out all the things that are wrong, you're going to find that you're going to get a lot less resistance in return from the other person.

The fourth factor here is timing. Timing is everything. If you choose a moment such as when the person first walks in the door or when they're busy doing something else, to have a very heated or in-depth conversation about something, or if you try to resolve an issue during the argument, it actually can be very difficult. When both parties are in resistance it is very difficult to have an open communication. So try to find a calm and peaceful moment when you and the other party can sit down, have a conversation, the emotional responses are low so your chances for open communication are much better. Do this with your children. Don't pick a moment when you're fighting to try to resolve



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it. Pick a calm moment. Also, do this with your spouse, whether or not you're still together. If you're co-parenting and you want to discuss something with the other parent, choose a calm moment in a neutral place where you can have calm, cool, collected communication and choose different words to get a different response.

Know that you do have a choice over the words that you are using. Avoid using words like “never” and “always.” They are key words that will just continue the arguments and the conflict.

So in summary of this lesson, what has been discussed? Well, we looked at how choosing the wrong words can create conflict and continued argument with family members. And that learning to choose different words will help to improve the communication and how you're communication is either accepted or rejected by the other person. Work on choosing words that are going to be accepted and that are going to keep the conflict and arguments to a minimum.

Conflict and arguments can be handled without damaging the relationships. They can be handled in such a way so that the emotional response comes down and more loving, peaceful relationships take its place.

Chapter 8 — Giving & Keeping Your Word

In this lesson we'll look at the topic of "giving your word." In this lesson, we'll consider how "giving your word" affects your relationships with your children, your spouse or partner; and your relationship with yourself. We'll consider what it means to be impeccable with your word. We'll also discuss how to give your word without breaking it. We'll look at how to keep your word when others break theirs and how to deal with the feelings that arise when others break their word to you.

We'll give you some self-assessment tools to help you take a look at how your word is affecting your life right now; how your word is being played out in your relationships; how others are using their word with you; and we'll identify areas for improvement.

What is... Giving Your Word?

Let's begin by looking at what it means to give your word? When we took a look at this, we discovered that the easiest way to get started was to look at some very simple definitions of words that describe what it means to give your word.

When we look up those definitions, here's what we find. The first word that relates to giving your word is the word "promise". A promise is a verbal commitment by one person to another, agreeing to do, or not to do, something in the future. To give your word as a promise is to give a verbal commitment to another person that you intend to do something, or not do something, and you intend to follow through with that promise.

The next word that relates to giving your word is the word "commitment". In the dictionary, the word commitment means the act of binding yourself intellectually or emotionally to a course of action. This very simply means that when you give your word or you give a promise to another person, you are committed to that promise and you intend to follow through on that

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promise. You bind yourself to that course of action.

The third word that relates to giving your word is the word “agreement”. An agreement is the statement of an exchange of promises. It can be either written or oral. Agreements are used all the time in business contracts and many other aspects of life. Agreements in relationships are usually given orally such as when we’re talking to somebody and we agree to do something. It’s a discussion about doing something and an exchange of promises to do it. It’s not as strong as a commitment where you agree to bind yourself to a course of action, but an agreement is nevertheless a statement of the promise.

The fourth word that relates to giving your word is the word “integrity”. Integrity is consistency of action, values, methods, measures, principles, expectations and outcome. What does this really mean? To have integrity means doing what you say you’re going to do, when you’re going to do it, and doing things in a consistent way. It’s being able to count on you for the way that you are, for what you bring to the relationships and the support and love that you’re going to bring into those relationships. Integrity means that you are acting in a certain way each time and that people can count on it.

Why Keep Your Word?

Why is it so important to be committed to the promises and agreements that we make in our family relationships? When we put our word out there, we get reactions back in return. Those reactions can be either negative or positive. Let’s have a look at some of the things that can happen when our word is involved.

When we keep our word and our promises, we gain credibility with the people that we are giving our word to or that we are making agreements with. When you have credibility there is a belief amongst others that what you say is true. There’s also a great sense of accountability. People will know that they will be able to count on you when they need your support. They know that when you say you’ll do something, you intend to do it and that it



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is something that they can count on.

Within your family, it creates a safe culture of interdependence where your family members are free to explore themselves, but they know that they will also have that support—that safe place to fall or to come to when they need help with something. Knowing that they have someone like you in their corner will create a lot of self-confidence. They have someone who they can count on, knowing that when you give your word it means something.

When you constantly break your word, it creates feelings and reactions, resulting in a breakdown of trust. Consequently, when you say you'll do something but you are in a pattern of not following through with it, then the other person doesn't trust what you say and doesn't believe that it's going to happen. That can lead to feelings of disappointment or even resentment towards you or whoever is not keeping their word.

It can also lead to insecurity and unnecessary pain. It can lead to a perception of dishonesty and a feeling that the person giving their word is not telling the truth. Gone unchecked or if this becomes a pattern, it can have an effect on a child or another person's self-esteem. They just don't feel worthy of people giving them their word with an intention to follow through with it.

When Others Break Promises

A great way to check in with how giving your word affects your relationships and affects your life, is to think about how it feels when somebody breaks a promise to you? How do you feel when they give their word to you and it's not followed up.

Here are some common feelings that we have collected from some of our other students about being betrayed in this way:

When somebody says they're going to do something and they don't do it, there is this feeling of being betrayed, the bond of trust is broken.



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It's really hard to believe someone who constantly breaks their promises; who constantly gives their word and does not follow up on it. That trust is a big, big thing.

You might take a look in your own relationships and assess the level of trust? Can people count on you to follow through with what you say you're going to do? Also, can you count of them? Checking-in with how you feel about this can be a great barometer of how things are progressing around you.

Other feedback that we received was that people have low expectations of the other person when they don't follow through on their word. That again is a perception of not being able to count on that person. It could also lead to feelings of being insignificant, unimportant or unworthy. This again relates to the self-esteem that we mentioned previously; a situation where someone is constantly breaking their word to you, which starts to feel as if everyone is breaking their word to you. It has an effect on a person's confidence and self-esteem, how much they value themselves.

This can result in significant emotional distress. If a person feels as if there's nobody they can talk to, nobody that they can count on and that nobody's really telling the truth, it can really have a significant and profound emotional effect on another person. Think of a time in your life when somebody gave you their word and didn't follow through with it. How did you feel about that? What did you do?

Once you understand how your word impacts on your life, you can consider how it affects those around you. We will talk more about this when we get to the self-assessment. You will get a chance to check in with different areas of your life; big promises, little promises and even passing comments and how they affect the relationships you have with your kids, your spouse and yourself.

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Become Impeccable With Your Word

When you want to make improvement in this area, or if you're coaching your kids on how to be better with their word and we consider using the word *impeccable*, I would urge you to be careful. When I've asked people about this, the perception is that the word "*impeccable*" means being perfect. To be *impeccable* with your word means that when you say something, it is absolutely true; it implies perfection.

Now, as human beings, we're not always perfect. Remember that this is a journey. You're not always going to be perfect. The recommendation here is to become aware of how your word is used. There are situations where you may not even be aware that promises are being broken. These could be affecting your relationships. Strive to make improvements in these areas.

In the book *The Four Agreements*, which is a great book, they talk about the first agreement in having a happy life is to become *impeccable* with your word; to become somebody that others can count on. When you say something is true then it's true. This doesn't just relate to happy things that you're promising, such as taking your child out for ice cream etc, it also relates to discipline and following through on what you say you're going to do. We do have a lot of people who come to *The Blissful Parent* because of behavior problems that they're experiencing, disrespect they're having in their family. How your word plays into this is quite significant. That communication breakdown and that breakdown of respect could very likely have been created because of the little things, the little areas on a regular basis where the word was given and you didn't follow through on it. Things built up over time, the other person perceives that you don't really mean what you say and therefore the respect breaks down.

Some tips on how to strive to become more *impeccable* with your word:

Speak with integrity and say only what you mean. Remember that the definition of integrity is consistency of action. If you have



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an opinion one time and you say something else the next time, then the other person is not going to know what you really mean. When you speak with integrity and consistency of action, then they will absolutely know what you stand for and they will know that you mean it. Their response will then be in accordance with that perception.

Take some time to reflect on the promise before you state it. It's okay to pause for a few seconds. We live in a world where everybody wants answers instantly. We have all this technology that has all the answers at our fingertips. When it comes to relationships, sometimes it makes sense to take a moment and think about a response before we give it. Don't let the autopilot take over. Our autopilot will usually get us in trouble, especially when we're going through frustrating times or we're dealing with an intense event. Our autopilot can often lead us to say things that we wish we had not said. Take a little time before responding to make sure that what you're saying you're going to do, you can actually through on so the person you're saying it to can trust that it and that it will be done.

There are times where you might want to not speak at all and avoid making a promise you can't keep. It's better not to say anything at all than to open your mouth and let something come out that you just know you can't follow through on. This relates to the positive things; it also relates to the negative things.

We've talked about this in previous lessons. You need to be very careful of the two words "always" and "never." When you use the word "always" that implies that it's always going to be that way. When you use the word "never," you're saying it's never going to be that way. But, then if it is, your word has been broken. Sometimes it's better not to say anything at all in those moments and take some time to think about it before you respond.

Avoid speaking badly about others or yourself and speak with good purpose. This creates a perception in other people that you're likely to speak well of them when they're not there to hear it. The flip side of that is if you're constantly speaking badly



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about other people in front of your children, your spouse, or other people, then that is your pattern of integrity. What they are then going to believe is that when they are not in the room, you're going to be talking about them in the same way. When you speak with good purpose, the perception will be that you'll be speaking well about them as well when they are not there. That goes a long way to creating trust and respect in your relationships.

Holding others accountable to their word, of being capable of keeping their word. Be worthy of others keeping their word to you. The previous four points here are all about us and our word and being an example to follow. But holding our children, our partners and everyone else in our lives for that matter, accountable to their word is also important. When somebody says they're going to do something or somebody makes a promise, then hold them accountable to following through on that promise.

If you're at a point where there have been broken promises again and again and you're in a pattern of it happening, don't expect perfection right away. Strive in your communication to let the other person know how that feels and how it is affecting your relationship and strive to improve it. By raising the issue and talking about it with the other person, you are in a sense saying that they are capable of keeping their word and you're keeping them accountable to it.

Tips For Keeping Promises

Here are five things you can do to improve your word:

1. Don't make promises if you know you can't keep them. Don't throw your word out there just to get the other person off your back because that can really come back to you and create problems. It's better to be honest and say "I don't think I can do that right now." The other person might not like that, but at least you're being truthful and honest with them and it's something that they can count on.



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2. When you give your word, work hard to fulfill it. Take it seriously. Don't say you're going to do something and then decide that it's okay not to do it. We've talked about the ripple effect that this can have in your relationships. Keep track of what you agree to do with others, or what you commit to do with others. Work hard to fulfill those words.

3. Have faith that you're capable of keeping your word. We've dealt with clients who, in expressing their own feelings of unworthiness in their lives, really didn't feel capable of keeping their word. The words "I can't" came up a lot in those conversations.

4. Respect every promise you make and show commitment to making it come true. Remember the word "commitment" in the definitions that we gave at the beginning of this lesson. Commitment is the act of binding yourself to that course of action. It absolutely will be true because you're committed to it.

5. Don't beat yourself up for failure or expect perfection. If something happens and you break your promise or you go back on your word, just reset, debrief with the other person, clear off the feelings and then try again. It's not good enough to say "I'm not capable of keeping my word, so therefore I'm never going to do it." That is giving up. Think about what the response is going to be back in return. How will other people respond to that?

The Blissful Parent is all about making improvements to our relationships. That includes relationships with ourselves. Beating yourself up will only make you feel bad. That's understandable when you give your word and you take it seriously; yes, you will feel bad. Then, learn to let it go, just reset and try again.

Self-assessment

Here's a way that you can have a look at different areas of your relationships with your family as a way of assessing how your word is playing out in those relationships. This includes your word to them, to your children and your partner, and to yourself.

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Then, we need to consider, how their word is playing out? Remember we talked about holding other people capable of keeping their word. As a way of checking-in, here are some basic questions to ask yourself.

1. Do you make threats of disciplinary action that are not acted upon? If you repeatedly asking your child to stop a certain behavior with a promise of consequences if the behavior is not stopped, but then you never follow through with the consequences, after a while the child is going to learn that you don't really mean what you say. They're going to continue to do it.
2. Do you have difficulty saying "no"? Do you say yes to everything that is requested of you whether you are able to do it in that moment or not? Or, do you only say yes to things you absolutely can follow through on and renegotiate the other things. It's not necessary to say "yes" to everything. Are there areas where you have said "yes," when the answer should have been "no"?
3. Are you making too high of demands on the people in your life? Are you expecting too much from them? Are you expecting too much from yourself? If so, this suggests that you're setting yourself up to fail. The expectation of having to say yes to everything and to be perfect for everything is a very difficult expectation to live up to. Forgive yourself for times when you intended to do something but which didn't work out. And forgiving others too, whilst also ensuring that they are being serious about what it is that you are saying.
4. Do you let others off too easily for breaking their word? How often do you make promises you don't keep? You might instantly think you always keep your promises.

Are you willing to take the time to reflect in your Daily Pages in your journal and by downloading the self-assessment in the course website and going through a checklist of questions that will allow you to take a good, honest look at how things are going? It's not a judgment, it's you assessing your own life and ask-



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ing yourself these questions to see if there are any areas for improvement.

Here's what we have looked at in this lesson. We have considered how it affects our life when we don't keep our word. If we don't keep our word to our children we suggest that they could be losing respect for us. Working towards creating that trust and respect with our children is to not make promises we know we can't keep; to say no sometimes rather than saying yes to everything. Becoming impeccable with your word has a lasting and positive effect on your family relationships. If you can embrace the concept of checking in with your word, seeing how that's playing out in your relationships and identifying areas to improve, and strive to be better at it, it can have a huge positive and lasting effect on your family relationships.

Chapter 9 — Setting Relationship Goals

In this lesson we're going to discuss setting relationship goals. We're going to look at how three primary relationships have an impact and an effect on family life and how to decide what it is that you really want from those relationships. We'll then look at how to use different types of goals in different situations to develop those relationships and move them forward in a direction of your choice.

We will show you how to use a system called “SMART Goals” and we'll set smart relationship goals, ones that set you up to win, that are achievable and that are going to move you in the right direction. We will also introduce you to a self-assessment tool specifically designed for relationship goal setting.

Primary Relationships

This topic of setting relationship goals is a very important one. One distinction I want to make right up front is that setting a relationship goal is much different than setting a goal for a material item, such as buying a new house or car. These are objects with no emotions or feelings that don't talk back. It's merely an exercise in acquiring something.

When we're talking about relationship goals, we're talking about developing a relationship with another human being, one with emotions. Humans have hopes and fears. They react to the world around them and, if they are children, they react to how they are spoken to by their parents.

There are different types of relationships within the family setting, something we must consider very carefully when talking about developing those relationships further and setting goals relating to them. We're going to give you some understanding about setting relationship goals and we'll provide some useful tools.

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1. It's extremely important to understand that there are three primary relationships that occur in the household. The first one is the relationship with your children, or rather, with each of your children. If you have three children then you're going to have a different and unique relationship with each one of them.

By now, you probably know that each one of them has a distinct personality, with their own hopes, fears, dreams, aspirations, talents and things that they care about. There are many different aspects that make up their unique personality.

It is important to understand the individuality of each child. How you relate to them has a direct impact on how they are. So when we're talking about relationships with children, understand we're not just talking about all of your children as sort of a package deal. You want to start thinking about your individual relationship with each child.

You're not necessarily going to be able to do the same thing with each one of them. Because of those distinct and unique personality traits that they possess, they're going to require a slightly different response from you as the parent in different situations.

2. The second relationship that you want to consider here is the relationship with your partner or your spouse. This can mean different things to different people. You may be living together and raising your children together. But many partners or spouses don't live together anymore. You might be a single parent, because of separation and divorce, but the other partner can still be involved in some way so there is still a relationship to consider.

If you are single parenting because your spouse or partner is deceased, you may still have relationships with other partners. Many people might partner with the child's grandparents, where there can definitely be a different type of relationship. You're going to have relationships with many adults that have an influence on your children.

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We're talking about relationships that can take many forms. We're not limiting this to just married couples. There are many different partnership arrangements or co-parenting situations that can exist.

3. The third relationship, obviously, is with yourself. You're going to bring yourself to every situation. How you act or react to certain situations is going to have a direct impact on your children and your partner or spouse. How you get along in each one of these areas is going to have a ripple effect and an impact on the other relationships.

You've probably heard us talk about these three relationships being a package deal. What we mean by that is that there is a direct correlation between how each one of these parties gets along. The one constant that you have in all of these relationships is yourself and what you bring. There's a whole myriad of different emotions and reactions that you can bring. You can bring happiness or sadness, anger, resentment, joy, enthusiasm, stress or frustration. But understand that that is the part that we control. We'll talk more about that later, but really understand that there are three primary relationships that have a direct impact on the functioning of your family relationships; between you and your children, your partner and finally yourself.

Starting With The End In Mind

The key to getting the types of relationships that you want within your family is to first decide what it is that you actually want. I have spoken to many parents in workshops who are looking for solutions. There are a number of different problems or issues that parents might come up against in a parenting situation, all of them leading to what we've been talking about in the previous couple of lessons about stress and frustration. Usually parents come to a program like this because they've ended up being stressed or frustrated in some way whilst looking for solutions. If you ask them what the problem is, they can talk to you for hours and hours about the problem, describing it in great detail.



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On the other though, consider what sort of outcome you want? What would you rather these relationships look like? What do you want to have happening here? In a lot of situations, parents just haven't taken the time to sit back and take a look at what it is that they want to get out of these relationships. They've just been playing this game one day at a time or hour-to-hour, just reacting and dealing with situations as they occur and not really having a specific outcome or goal in mind.

The key to getting what you want is first deciding what you want. So you need to start thinking about what you want your family relationships to look like? What would you like to do together? How much time will you spend together? How much time do you want to spend working or playing?

Try to leave the present out of it for the moment because we've already had a good look at that in Lessons 1 and 2. We know what the problems are. Hopefully, you have had a chance to identify some of those problem areas. We're going to start to address those. But first of all you want to start with the end in mind. What is it that you really, really want out of these relationships? When you are spending time together and you're arguing and not getting along that well, what would you rather be doing? What do you want those relationships to look like?

How are you getting along? Are you laughing and having a good time? Are you sitting down and having heart-to-heart talks and being honest or working together on a project. There can be a lot of different ways for the relationships to exist and we don't want to predefine any one way because every family is going to be unique.

It's going to start with what you want. I remember parents asking the question in our workshop, "How many people does it take to make a relationship work?" And there were all sorts of answers shouted out. People were adamant that it takes at least two people to make a relationship work. We had a discussion around that and in the end the entire audience agreed that actually it does not



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take two people to make a relationship work. It actually only takes one to decide that they want things to be different because relationships are really just relating to one another; we're reacting to one another's way of being.

For example, if your way of being is to yell and demand what you want, and their reaction is to yell and scream back. The situation escalates and gets louder, louder and louder. Well that's a relationship.

Similarly, a relationship may have humor or it could be calm and solution-oriented, whatever that looks like. Understand that we can choose our own reactions. The only thing that we really do have control over here is ourselves. It's very important that when we're starting with the end in mind that we first decide what we want. Once you've decided that then you can start to involve the other members of your family to see what it is that they want, find the common ground and then start to work towards it?

Self-assessment Tool

There are 30 key areas that you can look at for improvement in the relationships. We have a self-assessment tool for you to use that we recommend you download from the website on the Lesson 3 page. There are 30 questions here that will help you to understand more about what you want from these relationships.

Questions such as: How can we best nurture or support one another? How will we communicate with one another on a daily basis? How dependent will we be towards one another and is it healthy? How will we ensure that we respect each other's rights in this relationship? How will we help one another grow in this relationship? How can we keep the fun in our relationship?

There are 30 different questions like this that you want to start to think about. They're really just triggers to help draw out what it is that you want in the relationship. If you can't communicate it to yourself, then it's going to be really difficult to communicate it to your children and to your partner. It's that miscommunication or

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inability to communicate in a rational way that usually leads to conflict, which can lead to other more serious things like resentment or even revenge.

So, you want to take this time out, use the self-assessment and go through and ask yourself these 30 questions. Write down what you think you would like life to be in each one of these areas. The best way to do that is to pull out your Daily Pages or your Journal and to write about these answers. You can identify areas where you are already strong or where you would like to see improvement or changes. Then with that, I encourage you to take a very responsible look at this. What I mean by that is to understand that really the only thing you can control in a relationship is yourself; you can choose your own actions and reactions.

You may even want to spend some time recording some of your common actions and reactions. You can take that a step further and make note of when you do those things and what happens. If you can make changes to your actions or reactions, then the actions or reactions that you start to get back from your family members will be different. If you make a change to yourself, what you get back in return will also be different.

Please understand that you cannot choose something for someone else, even for a one or two year old. Children that age don't really make a lot of choices for themselves; we do things for them, but ultimately their reactions to things are still going to come from within themselves. Again, keep this in context with what you can control. Keep it to what you bring to the relationship that could change things, or at least what you could discuss with your other family members.

This tool can be great. If your family members are open to sitting down and reading through these questions and journaling about themselves than even better, because you can then have a discussion about that and really get on the same page.



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Setting Relationship Goals

This section is about setting goals for you. I want to introduce you to a method of setting goals known as the “SMART method.” It’s a method that’s applied to a lot of different areas. It’s one that will help you set responsible, achievable goals.

People often create problems when goal setting by setting unrealistic goals which are not going to be attainable within a specific period of time or which are based on an aspect that they can’t control. For example, “I want my kids to love me more”. Only your kids can choose to do that. This method is all about setting goals in areas that are going to set you up to win, something that is achievable and which will get you the outcome that you want.

The first part of the Smart Method is to be specific. This is where you want to write down or define a specific outcome. What do you want? This is what we were talking about earlier. You have already taken a look at what your family relationships are like right now. There might be stress, frustration or arguing, but what would you like it to be? Could it be more calm and peaceful, with everybody getting along and working together? So define what you want that outcome to be.

The second part is measurable. Now, measurable can be a difficult thing when considering a relationship goal. If my goal is to buy a car, it’s something that’s very measurable. I will know when I have achieved it because I’ll be looking at my driveway and there will be the car. I’ve either achieved the goal or I haven’t.

But in the case of a relationship goal, there are a lot more intangibles. Take the example of “I want my kids to love me more.” That would be a measure, but I can’t make them love me more. They have to choose to do that. I can only choose something for myself.

The solution to this is to choose a practice style goal. We’ll consider that a bit further on, but we did discuss in Lesson 1 the creation of a habit or something that you can do. Let’s say you



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want to spend an hour a week on one-on-one time with each member of your family. That's something measurable. You can look back and you can see whether or not you did it. The goal might be to spend 30 minutes a day playing something with the kids. That is measurable. It's putting all the other distractions aside and just being with your family.

This is a measurable goal about YOU. But be careful not to put a measure on their reactions back. E.g. "Johnny will go scream-free for a week". You can't choose something for somebody else. Make it measurable and at the same time make it attainable. You want to make sure that when you're setting a goal, you're setting realistic expectations of what you want. Try not to climb the mountain all in one day, but take it in steps. Break things down into what you would like things to look like 90 days from now and six months from now and 12 months from now.

A great example is the goal to spend an hour a week of one-on-one time with each member of your family. That may seem difficult with your schedule right now, but if you could make it happen, how would your relationships change? Would it make a difference? Would you have more fun? Would the stress start to melt away? Would there be less resentment and frustration?

So make sure you're setting an attainable goal, something that you know you can do. Don't try to cure all your problems in one blow. Identify something you want to work on. Come up with a step-by-step action plan that you can do on a weekly basis.

The "R" in the method is risk. Risk comes down to a willingness to act in spite of fear. We're not talking about danger. We're talking about when you want to do something, when you want to have a conversation with somebody but there's fear holding you back. When you really want to spend thirty minutes playing a game with the kids, but you have a work report that's due or an executive board meeting to prepare for, the risk is to put the work aside or delay it for an hour or two so you can actually spend the time with your family.



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The “T” then stands for timeline. You need to check-in at a certain timeline to see how you’re doing and to see whether or not your goal has been achieved. Again, in the case of a goal to buy a car, it could be, “I want to buy that car by the end of the month”. That’s a very specific timeline. But in the case of a relationship goal there are intangibles that involve relationships with other people. You really want to set these as timelines to check in to see how you’re doing. Are you making forward progress? Ninety days from now, have another check-in and look at how things are different. Are you getting along more? Are you getting more enjoyment from one another? Maybe identify some other key areas that are causing stress or frustration for you or other family members to work on for the next 90 days and so on. Set a timeline.

I suggest that you set yourself a 90-day timeline. What would you like life to look like three months from now? It may be just a small step, some small change or move in the right direction. Then, again, six months from now and then finally a year from now. You could even go further; five years from now. What do you want your family to look like? What do you want those relationships to be?

Types of Relationship Goals

You may remember from Chapter 1 that there are two types of goals. There are project goals where the outcome is predetermined and there’s a practice goal where you set up a regular action step that leads to that outcome. So the project might be to improve the communication with your partner. For example, you don’t necessarily agree on everything to do with parenting your children and the outcome you’d like to have in 90 days is to come some agreement on how you’re going to raise your family. There will be some sacrifices made on both sides. Sometimes you move forward by agreeing to disagree, but at least you’re on the same page, saying, “Okay, this is how we’re going to move forward.” That could be your goal.

Now the practice for that goal might be to spend 30 minutes or



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an hour a week, one-on-one, discussing things in a calm and rational way, when you're not having to react to a problem that's happening at that moment, when it can be much calmer.

Here's another example of a project goal. You're frequently arguing with your daughter and you would like that level of arguing to reduce or come to an end. So the practice might be to spend some one-on-one time doing something that your daughter loves. You start to redefine that relationship to a point where the two of you don't need to argue to be able to communicate with one another.

A relationship is not a destination. We want to make it a project and a priority in our lives. But you must understand that it's the regular practice of relating to our family, of practicing having a relationship with each member of our family that's going to make the difference.

You need to have a look at and set a practice goal and a project goal for each of your relationship areas. This is going to include your kids, so a project and a practice goal will be needed. Remember that you have a relationship with each child. Some of it you can do together, but if you have three children, there are three relationships to consider. Do spend some time looking at the individual aspects of those relationships. Also have a look at a project and practice that's going to help you to relate better with your spouse or your partner and then finally, with yourself.

It's that last one that is the most regularly neglected by parents. We put our own needs aside to deal with the needs of our spouse or our partner or our kids. And families can be very demanding. If you put your own needs aside indefinitely and you never come back to them, it can lead to some issues and to an unhealthy feeling of resentment. You want to make sure that you're getting what you need from the relationship. That's one of the purposes for the tool that we introduced back in Lesson 1; the Mommy Date or the Parent Date, where you have that one-on-one for yourself, to do something fun for yourself. Do something and explore your own self expression. Understand that the



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more you take care of yourself, the easier its going to be to take care of your family.

In summary, we've looked at how to identify areas that you want to change and set some specific goals that you can start to work towards. We've put in place some weekly or daily practices that are going to help you to achieve those goals and understood that you really cannot change another person or make choices for them, you can only change yourself. When you want to make changes, you must first identify those controllable things in the relationship that will help you move things in your desired direction. Spend some time thinking about it so that you're not just doing things on routinely basis, winging it and reacting to situations. Consciously make a choice to move in a certain direction.

Then, once you know what you want, start to talk to your family members about what they want. And if you have to alter what you want a little bit, find the common ground so that you are all moving in a similar direction and you're enjoying each other's company.