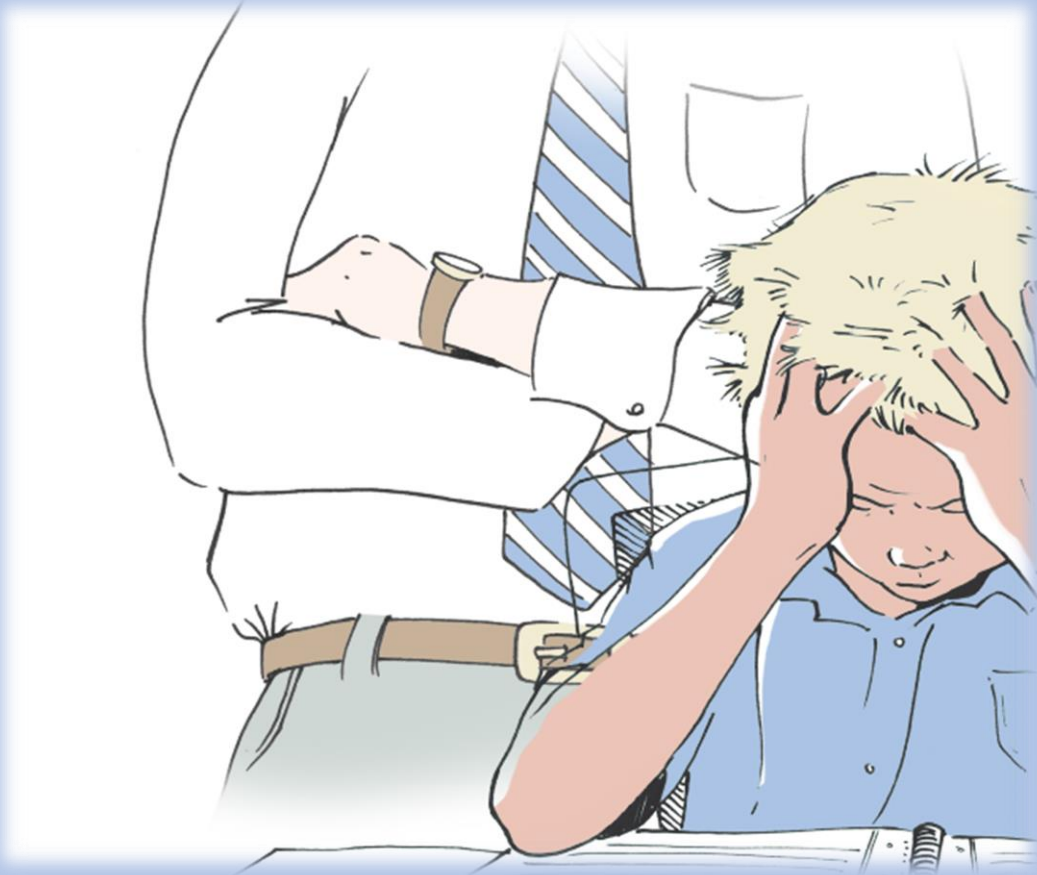


# RELATIONSHIP CENTERED PARENTING

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When Nagging, Lecturing, & Yelling Do Not Work



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# INTRODUCTION

This document is a transcript of an audio presentation on Relationship Centered Parenting (RCP). The presentation was originally published as part of a multimedia program called 1-2-3 Succeed. The 1-2-3 Succeed Program was designed as a resource for students with school difficulties and their parents. Throughout this transcript there will be references to the 1-2-3 Succeed Program and its accompanying materials. If your child is having academic or other school difficulties, you can access the 123 Succeed Program at zero cost by visiting [www.123succeed.com](http://www.123succeed.com).

RCP will provide you with practical, concrete, and powerful strategies to create a respectful and cooperative family environment, manage your child's misbehavior, and improve their school performance. You will learn how to do this without nagging, lecturing, yelling, or resorting to other emotional tactics or punishments that are often ineffective and cause you and your family great stress. RCP was developed by Bernard Ivin, a Licensed Clinical Social Worker with over 30 years of experience working with children and parents. Bernard has been in private practice for over twenty years and has provided mental health services to over twelve hundred clients. In addition, he is a husband of 30 years and the father of three children. In researching and developing parenting strategies to help the families he was treating, and to better manage his own children at home (they were school aged at the time), he created Relationship Centered Parenting.

RCP consists of ideas, skills, and strategies that have been tested, refined, and proven effective over decades of clinical practice with the most challenging of family situations. While it is designed to benefit all children, it is essential for parenting children that are difficult or oppositional by nature. This includes children diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD), or other mental health conditions.

With RCP you will learn:

- Why nagging, lecturing, yelling, & other emotional or punitive tactics do not work with many children, particularly those that are difficult by nature or have ADHD, ODD, or other mental health conditions
- The most common emotional tactics used by parents
- The most common emotional tactics used by children
- The three alternatives to emotional tactics
- The three fundamentals of Effective Parenting
- Why a strong parent-child relationship is necessary for effective parenting in today's world
- Strategies for improving your parent-child relationship
- Strategies for effective discipline
- Contingency based consequences (as an alternative to punishment) that teach your child essential life skills
- How to choose your battles wisely
- A step-by-step guide for helping your child do better in school
- Identifying, understanding, and helping your child overcome roadblocks to school and life success
- How to keep a positive attitude and faith in your child despite whatever life challenges they are experiencing

The RCP presentation that follows is meant for educational purposes only. The concepts, skills, and strategies it provides may not be suitable for all children and families. It is not meant to be used to diagnose, treat, or cure any physical, emotional, behavioral, or mental health disease or condition. The

creator (Bernard Ivin, LCSW), producers, participants, and distributors of this presentation assume no responsibility or liability in the application of its content.

If your child is having emotional, behavioral, or academic difficulties, you are strongly encouraged to seek the services of a mental health professional who can accurately assess your child's difficulties and provide you with an individualized treatment plan specific to your child's needs.

To get the most out of this presentation, you are encouraged to listen to it multiple times over the course of a year, and then periodically for as long as you have children at home. There are two reasons for this recommendation:

- First, this presentation contains a lot of information. You may need to hear it several times before fully absorbing it. In addition, as you apply the skills and strategies over time, you will gain a deeper and more meaningful understanding of the material each time you review it.
- Second, changing emotional and behavioral reactions, and implementing new strategies is hard. Despite our best efforts, especially when we are highly stressed, we revert to our natural parenting tendencies regardless of how ineffective or counterproductive they may be. By reviewing this presentation regularly, you will be more likely to catch yourself carrying out such responses and take corrective action when necessary.

Relationship Centered Parenting is a practical and powerful approach to parenting, designed for today's modern family. What distinguishes Relationship Centered Parenting from other parenting programs is the following:

- RCP is very practical in its implementation. It does not expect or require you to have the listening, communication, or behavior modification skills of an expert.
- RCP accounts for the complexity and volatility of human nature and family dynamics, and can be individualized to the personalities, values, and needs of both parents and children.
- RCP provides you with a disciplinary approach that helps your child develop healthy behaviors instead of just fulfilling a punishment.
- RCP provides you with a step-by-step plan for helping your child improve in school.
- RCP offers a message of encouragement and hope, without making any unrealistic claims of a total cure or transformation of the child.

If you are ready to raise your level of parenting effectiveness, continue reading.

## SECTION 1 – WHY NAGGING, LECTURING, & YELLING ARE THE NORM

What do you do when your child misbehaves? If you are like many of the parents that I have counseled, met at workshops, or observed at supermarkets, malls, and other public places, you probably respond with Coercive Communication.

Coercive Communication is the natural and instinctual use of emotion as leverage to persuade others to do what you want them to do. It is the emotional equivalent of twisting someone's arm. While it sounds harsh, it is the most common form of communication used by everyone to some degree.

Here is how Coercive Communication works; when someone upsets or frustrates you, you act out your feelings towards them. Acting out your feelings means that you express yourself not only through your words, but also (even more strongly) through your tone of voice, body language, and actions. By doing so, you cause the other person to feel uncomfortable or upset in some way. Subconsciously, the goal of your Coercive Communication is to motivate the other person into giving you what you want so the bad feelings between the two of you are relieved. Because Coercive Communication is natural and instinctual, it happens automatically, and you are not aware of your coercive intent. From your perspective, all you are doing is expressing your thoughts, feelings, and needs with the hope that the other person will understand and want to cooperate with you. In this way, Coercive Communication typically happens innocently without any negative intentions.

Most people are triggered into Coercive Communication when they are denied what they want, or when their safety, security, or authority is being threatened. They are also triggered into Coercive Communication when someone else is using Coercive Communication against *them*. In this way, Coercive Communication begets Coercive Communication, a “fight fire with fire” response. Unfortunately, this response often intensifies the emotions between people and can lead to harsh, aggressive, or even violent behavior. To see examples of this, all you must do is watch one of today's reality television shows. Whether real or scripted, these shows often depict individuals engaged in extreme levels of Coercive Communication that result in yelling, cursing, threatening, and physical altercations. Apparently, the dramatic nature of Coercive Communication makes for good television.

Here are two examples of Coercive Communication in action. We are starting with these general examples, as opposed to parent-child examples, to emphasize the pervasive nature of Coercive Communication. As already mentioned, everyone uses Coercive Communication (to some degree), and it can be found in all forms of human interaction.

Example #1- This example is based on a real-life event I witnessed at my local convenience store. It is a role-play of people waiting in line. The line is moving slowly, and they become impatient. As their frustration grows, they turn to each other and start badmouthing the cashier. While I do not believe they intentionally wanted the cashier to hear them, they speak loudly enough so that she does.

MAN: Ah come on!

OTHER PATRON (FEMALE): I know, this is ridiculous!



MAN: What the hell is she doing up there? Why is it taking so long? Nobody has more than a couple of items!

OTHER PATRON: I have no idea! Obviously, she doesn't know what she is doing.

MAN: Ahhhhh come on! She's been with the same person for five minutes! How hard can this be! I'm never shopping here again!!!

Example #2 - This example is based on a personal experience from early in my marriage. It is a role-play of a husband and wife at odds with each other. The husband is in the bad habit of leaving his dirty socks on the side of the bed when changing out of his work clothes. At first, his wife asks him nicely to pick up after himself. When he fails to do so, after several such requests, she changes her tone.

1st Offense:

WIFE: Honey can you please pick up your socks and put them in the laundry basket for me?

HUSBAND: Yeah Babe, sorry, just give me a second, okay?

WIFE: Okay! Thanks!



Multiple Offenses:

WIFE: Honey! Can you please pick up your socks! I keep asking you, but it doesn't seem to sink in! I really don't think I'm asking too much!

HUSBAND: Alright! I just got home! Just give me two minutes to unwind!

WIFE: I know you're tired, but how many times do I have to ask you? If you did it the first time, I wouldn't have to nag!

Final Straw Offense:

WIFE: You know, I don't believe it! Really, how many times do I have to ask you to pick up your damn socks!?! You're such an inconsiderate slob! Pick up your socks, **PUT THEM IN THE LAUNDRY BASKET!** I think you're purposefully trying to drive me insane! Put your socks away! I'm tired of repeating myself!

HUSBAND: Oh... alright already! My God, why do you have to be such a nag all the time?! I'll pick them up, okay? Happy now?

Can you relate to these examples? Have you ever heard someone communicating in this manner? Have you ever communicated in this manner? There are three reasons why the answer is probably yes, and why coercive communication is the norm.

1. Coercive Communication works, at least most of the time. As human beings, we are social and emotional creatures programmed to be aware of and influenced by each other's feelings. When someone (especially a loved one) is upset with us, we feel stressed and unsettled by it. Regardless

of our outward response, our natural tendency is to want to relieve the bad feelings between us.

Coercive Communication taps into this natural tendency and motivates us to cooperate with each other. When applied to the example of the husband and wife at odds over his dirty socks, the wife's nagging would have motivated the husband to pick up after himself to avoid future conflicts.

2. Coercive Communication is expedient. In other words, it is one of the fastest and easiest ways to convey our thoughts and feelings. The reason being, Coercive Communication is primarily non-verbal; just as a picture is worth a thousand words, the same is true with non-verbal communication. For example, crying is faster and easier than telling someone you feel hurt or in pain. Giving a mean look or cold shoulder is faster and easier than telling someone you are angry. Being short and curt is faster and easier than telling someone you are frustrated and disappointed with them.

Here is another example, if we were hiking through the woods and I spotted a grizzly bear charging at us, the look of terror on my face would immediately alert you that something is wrong and compel you to look around for danger, run away (as I might be doing), or pick up a stick for self-defense.



3. Coercive Communication is the safest form of communication. Acting out your thoughts, feelings, and needs feels safer than directly communicating them.



When applied to the example of the husband and wife at odds over his dirty socks, it was emotionally safer for the wife to nag and reprimand her husband than to directly tell him, "I feel angry and hurt when you leave your dirty socks on the floor. It makes me think that you do not care about how busy I am. Please put your dirty socks in the hamper, it will save me time with the housework and make me feel appreciated." It was safer because if her husband continued to leave his dirty socks on the floor after she directly expressed her feelings, it would have hurt a lot more than if he did so after she nagged and reprimanded him.

Do you agree that coercive communication is the norm? Do you acknowledge your use of it? If so, then it is time to examine the coercive communication that occurs between you and your child.



## **The Most Common Coercive Communication Tactics Used by Parents Are:**

Nagging -- Reprimanding -- Lecturing -- Criticizing -- Yelling -- Intimidating -- Threatening -- Inducing Guilt or Shame -- Emotional Rejection (which includes holding a grudge or giving a child the cold shoulder).

When parents use these tactics, they are operating in Coercive Parenting Mode. RARELY do they intend to hurt their child. Instead, they are trying to motivate their child to do the right thing; for example: homework, chores, responsibilities, and/or respectful behavior towards others (particularly siblings).

Here are three examples of Coercive Parenting Mode in action. These examples are role-plays of real-life parent-child interactions that were videotaped and posted online. The internet is full of such videotaped recordings. It appears that instead of taking their parents' Coercive Parenting Mode seriously, some children find it funny and put it online for laughs, while others find it upsetting and put it online for revenge.

All the role-plays in this program are drawn from real life events that were either videotaped and posted online or told to me by clients. Many of the role-plays include the use of profanity as it occurred between the individuals involved. While the profanity may upset some listeners, I felt it was important to keep the role-plays true to life. If such language offends you, please skip the role-play portions of this program.

Example #1 - This example is based on a real-life event that was videotaped and posted online. It is a role-play of a father and daughter. The father is angry at his daughter because she did not clean the kitchen as asked.

DAD: Give me your phone. Give it to me right now!

DAUGHTER: Why? What did I do?

DAD: Nothing! You did nothing that I asked! That's the problem.

DAUGHTER: Can I explain?

DAD: How can you possibly explain why you haven't cleaned the kitchen yet? You've been sitting on your ass since you've gotten home from school. And I told you, if you can't do it before school, then do it after school. Of course, you've done neither. The kitchen is a mess, the table's got all kinds of shit all over it, and the counters got all kinds of shit all over it! It's not from me! It's from you and your friends. You said you would clean up after yourself and you did nothing!!! Absolutely nothing!!! Give me your phone?! Now!

DAUGHTER: I will, I just need to shut it down...

DAD: You know, I don't ask you for the world. If you just spent 30 minutes after school in that kitchen you would be done, and you would have the rest of the night to yourself... Instead, you don't give a shit about anyone but yourself. Now you will stay in your room, without your phone for the rest of the night.

DAUGHTER: Dad! Dad! I will clean it now... what's the big deal? You're overreacting...

DAD: I'm overreacting? Is this my fault? (Said incredulously) You are unbelievable!



Example #2 - This example is based on a real-life event that was videotaped and posted online. It is a role-play of a boy and his parents. The parents enter the boy's room as he is whining and fake crying during an online interaction. It is unclear whether he is directly talking with someone or staging a scene for an online video he is creating.

BOY: (crying noises, sobs) This was you at lunch yesterday! You were being such a baby... (more crying noises and curse words, hard to understand).

DAD: What in the world are you doing... shut that computer off... get offline right now!

BOY: WHAT?

DAD: Get offline! I said get offline!

MOM: What's going on in here? What is he doing?

BOY: I'm not doing anything, Dad just barged into my room!

DAD: He is online with someone pretending to cry and acting like a baby... God damn it... get offline now!

MOM: What are you doing? That's just stupid, turn your computer off!

DAD: You're being so stupid! Putting yourself online, putting yourself out there for everyone to laugh at. Where are your brains boy? Having a meltdown online? Where are your Goddamn brains?!

MOM: He was doing this online?

DAD: Yes. He was online, whining and crying and acting like a three-year-old for the entire world to see! Where are your Goddamn brains?! Don't you understand that once you put yourself out there, you're out there forever!

BOY: You don't understand! It's no BIG deal!

DAD: No. You don't understand! It is a big deal. You're making a fool of yourself for all eternity! Someday you're going to want a job, and that nonsense is going to cause you problems!

Example #3 – This example is based on a real-life event that was videotaped and posted online. It is a role-play of a boy and his mother. The boy informs his mother that he is an Atheist. The mother has strong religious beliefs and responds very emotionally to this information. While this is not the most typical parent-child conflict, the coercive nature of the mother's response is.

SON: Mom, I'm sorry, but I don't believe in God.

MOM: You're an atheist? Give me a break! You don't believe in God? Alright you know what? From this point forward we will go to church every week and we will find out if you believe in God or not.

SON: I don't believe in God.

MOM: You got Confirmed and you told the bishop you did.

SON: Well, a lot can happen. I have a right to change my mind!

MOM: Well, a lot can happen, all of a sudden you think you can just quit believing in God?!?

SON: Yes!

MOM: All of a sudden, there is no God?!!!!

SON: Yes!

MOM: Well, let me tell you, you want to say there's no God? Then you're going to get absolutely nothing for Christmas!!! NOTHING!!! Because if there is no God, there is no Christmas!!! And if there is no Christmas, there are no presents!!! How do you like that!?!

SON: Okay!!!

MOM: No! It's not okay! It is not okay! In this family we believe in God! You need to stop this now! And you will go to church every week until you do!!!

Can you relate to the parents in these examples? I know I can. Despite my many years of professional training and experience as a therapist, and my commitment to Relationship Centered Parenting, I am still vulnerable to the use of strong, loud, and at times, harsh Coercive Parenting tactics. In some instances, my level of Coercive Parenting has been so intense that, if videotaped and posted online, I would feel embarrassed and ashamed of myself.

Just as parents use Coercive Communication with their children, children use Coercive Communication with their parents. When this occurs, it can lead to a fight fire with fire response resulting in the most harsh and aggressive forms of Coercive Communication.

### **The Most Common Coercive Communication Tactics Used by Children Are:**

Whining -- Pouting -- Complaining -- Sulking -- Withdrawing -- Crying -- Arguing -- Yelling -- Uncooperative or Defiant Behavior -- and Relentless Requests.

When children use these tactics, they are operating in Coercive Resistance Mode. Through Coercive Resistance Mode, children wear parents down to the point of giving in. Children have great stamina in Coercive Resistance Mode and can stay in it for as long as it takes to get what they want. Children often respond in this mode when they are told "NO", asked to do something, or being disciplined.

Here are three examples of Coercive Resistance Mode in action.

Example #1 – This example is based on a real-life event described to me by a client. It is a role-play of a family driving home after a wonderful day at the beach. Although the mom and dad enjoyed their day, they are stressed out over how expensive it was, tired from all the activities, and eager to get home and go to sleep. As they drive along, their daughter spots an ice cream parlor and wants to stop. When the daughter is politely told, "No", she responds in Coercive Resistance Mode. As the emotions intensify, the family's wonderful day does not have such a wonderful ending.

WIFE: Today was such an enjoyable day! I really had a wonderful time!

HUSBAND: Me too honey!

WIFE: Did you have a fun time sweetie?

DAUGHTER: Yeah Mommy! Oh my God! Look, ice cream! Can we stop and get some ice cream Daddy? I want some ice cream Daddy! Can we please? Please?

DAD: No, no, sweetie. We had a wonderful day and now it's time to go home. We'll get some ice cream tomorrow.

DAUGHTER: But I want some ice cream now. Please?

MOM: I'm sorry sweetie. I am really tired, and we did so many things today. It's time to go home.

DAUGHTER: But I want ice cream, humph, no fair. This isn't fair!

DAD: Sara, come on now, we just had a wonderful day, let's not ruin it! Think about what we did today! We went to the beach, we had a great dinner, and we played mini golf. It's been a long and fun day, okay? It's time to go home!

DAUGHTER: No, no, no! I just want some ice cream! Please Mommy? Can we please get some ice cream?

MOM: No Sara... That's enough! Enough already!

DAUGHTER: But I want some ice cream Daddy!

DAD: Sara! The answer is 'No!' You're ruining this day!

DAUGHTER: But I want some ice cream...

MOM: You know what Sara? Now you're punished. When we get home, you need to go straight to your room. There will be no TV or computer, you need to go straight to your room and straight to bed!



DAD: This is a shame; we had the best day and it's ending like this.

MOM: I can't believe you would end the day like this after all your father and I did for you! Now stop it! You're being a brat.

DAUGHTER: This is the worst day of my life.

MOM: You're being very ungrateful, Sara.

Example #2 – This example is based on a real-life event described to me by a client. It is a role-play of a mother and daughter. The mother expects her daughter to clean her room before she goes to a friend's house. Once the mother makes her expectation clear, the daughter responds in Coercive Resistance Mode.

DAUGHTER: Bye Mom! I'm going to Katie's!

MOM: Hold on young lady. Your room is still a mess. I told you it had to be cleaned before you went anywhere.

DAUGHTER: I'll clean it when I get back! I told Katie I'd be there by seven!

MOM: Then Katie's going to have to wait. You're not going anywhere until that room is clean.

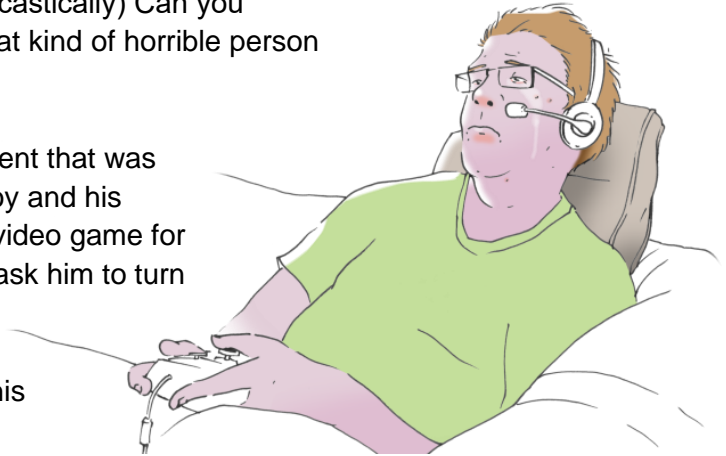
DAUGHTER: Come on Mom! I promise I'll do it later!

MOM: You and I both know that will never happen. Get upstairs, now, or you're not going anywhere!

DAUGHTER: Ugh! Why do you have to be so uptight? You're the only mother I know who is so uptight!

MOM: Yep! That's me! I'm such a horrible mom! (sarcastically) Can you believe that I would ask you to clean your room? What kind of horrible person must I be to make such a request?

Example #3 - This example is based on a real-life event that was videotaped and posted online. It is a role-play of a boy and his parents. The boy has been playing a popular online video game for several hours. It is now late at night and his parents ask him to turn off the video game and go to bed. This request triggers the boy into an extremely elevated level of Coercive Resistance. The duration and intensity of this role-play shows the level of Coercive Resistance some parents must contend with.



MOM: Paul, it's time to shut the computer off and go to bed. We have to get up early tomorrow.

BOY: Mom, please I want to finish this game so badly I've spent all day trying to get to this level!

MOM: How long will it take to finish?

BOY: What?

MOM: How long will it take to finish?

BOY: I'm not sure. It shouldn't take that long.

MOM: Oh Paul... Come on, not tonight!

BOY: Please, Mom, please! It won't take that long!

MOM: Even if I give you 10 more minutes, I don't think it will make any difference... You still won't want to turn that computer off.

BOY: Please Mom, I will! Trust me!

MOM: I can't Paul, you really need to go to sleep. Shut the computer off now!

BOY: Wait, Nooo! Mom! Pleeeeeassse!

MOM: Stop whining... Don't do that... You're a grown boy!

BOY: Please Mom! I want to finish this game so badly! Please! I've spent all day getting to this level!

MOM: Well, I'm sorry, but it's time to sign off the game and go to bed!

BOY: Mom! PLEEEEEEEAASSSEEEEE! PLEEEEEEEAASSSEEEEE! (Starts sobbing)

MOM: Are you crying over this?

BOY: No, I'm not. I'm not crying! I'm just asking to play my game for ten more minutes!

MOM: You can play again tomorrow night!

BOY: Stop... no... wait, no, stop, MOOOOOOOOOOOM!

DAD: What's going on here? Paul, stop it! We can't do this anymore!

BOY: Dad! Stop!

DAD: We can't!

BOY: PLEEEAAAASSSSEEEEEEE!

DAD: Do you understand what this video game is doing to you?

BOY: It's not doing anything bad! It's not the video game that's causing the problem, it's how you're reacting to it that is!

DAD: Go upstairs now, please.

BOY: NO! PLEEEAAASSSSEEE DAD!!! Just 10 more minutes.

DAD: Now!! Upstairs!!

BOY: Mom! Mom! Mom! Please!

DAD: Turn off the computer. Turn it off right now.

BOY: No! Please! \*screams\*

DAD: You're crying about a video game! Really...a video game?!

MOM: Sign off!

DAD: Here, I'm just going to disconnect the computer!

BOY: No! Dad! Dad! Dad, PLEEEAAASSSSEEE, I just want to finish this level.

DAD: Don't you understand? All you're doing is hurting yourself. This is why we have to put limits on this game. If we didn't you would stay up all night long!

BOY: No, I wouldn't... I can shut it off when I want to... I just want to finish this level. What's the big deal?! Dad!

DAD: The big deal is you have to wake up at 6 AM tomorrow! I can't remember the last time you woke up that early!

BOY: \*In a calmer voice\* Last winter when I woke up for skiing... I woke up at like 5:30.

DAD: You've never done that this season.

BOY: No! Last year!

DAD: Okay – that was a long time ago, Paul. I need you to shut off the game.

BOY: Dad! \*Incomprehensible roaring, screaming and gibberish\*

DAD: That's it... You're done with that game, you're not allowed to play that game for the next month!!

BOY: Whaaat?

DAD: You've crossed the line! We've argued about this way too long! I'm sick of this game! Your

whole family is going to spend the entire day at your soccer tournament tomorrow. Your mother has spent the entire day getting us organized and ready, and you don't care!

BOY: Dad!

DAD: You don't care! I'm sorry but that's the way it is. You don't care about anyone but yourself!

BOY: Whaat? That's stupid... Just because I want to finish this level, I don't care about anyone?

DAD: Goddamn it! Enough already!!!

BOY: Dad!

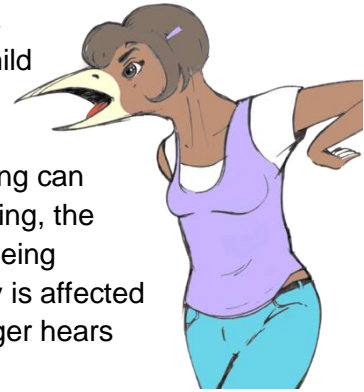
DAD: \*Yelling\* That's it. That is it! I am sick of this! You will never play that video game again.

What did you think of the children in the examples? Did they in any way sound like your child? If so, how do you handle it? Are you triggered into a "fight fire with fire" response? How well does that work for you? Do you feel that Coercive Communication is effective with your child?

These are all important questions to consider, because while Coercive Communication is the norm, it has the potential for great harm. Here are the six most common problems with Coercive Communication:

1. Coercive Communication does not work with all children- about 20% do not respond well. Instead of backing down and cooperating with parents (as 80% of children do), these 20-percenters become more emotional, oppositional, or defiant in their response, and are unable or unwilling to meet their parents' expectations. An example of an extreme 20-percenter is the boy you heard in the last role-play who was upset about having to shut off his video game. In my experience, most 20-percenters suffer from some form of psychiatric disorder, learning disability, or personality trait that makes it difficult for them to be flexible and understanding in response to other's feelings. In Relationship Centered Parenting, the conditions affecting 20-percenters are referred to as *Roadblocks to Success*. To learn more about 20-percenters, be sure to read Section 5 of this program, "Understanding and Helping Your Child's Overcome Roadblocks to Success." (As you hear the terms 20-percenters and 80-percenters mentioned throughout this program, know that these terms are not statistically based. Instead, they are metaphorical to emphasize the fact that while Coercive Communication works with most children, it does not work with all children).
2. When Coercive Communication does not work, it will not work, no matter how harsh or intense it becomes. Very rarely does a true 20-percenter convert to an 80-percenter. In fact, during the teenage years, the percentage of non-responders increases to 30-35%. Fortunately, the children who join the non-responder group during their teenage years typically revert to their more cooperative nature in early adulthood. While these children are not considered true 20-percenters, during the time in question, they upset and concern their parents as if they were.
3. Even if Coercive Communication works with your child, it usually does not feel good. When it takes you thirty minutes of nagging, lecturing, or threatening to get your child to take out the garbage or do homework, it does not leave you with a sense of pride or accomplishment when they finally do. Instead, you feel frustrated, annoyed, and angry because in your mind, they never listen! In addition, you wonder what is wrong with you, or your child, that makes everything so difficult.

4. Coercive Communication can cause the *Chirping Bird Syndrome*. This occurs when your Coercive Communication is so frequent that your child becomes desensitized to it. Your voice becomes nothing more than background noise. It is like what happens to people who own noisy pets, like a chirping bird. When the bird is first brought home, its chirping can drive the owner crazy. However, after several weeks of non-stop chirping, the owner gets used to it and can watch TV or do other activities without being disturbed. I know this because I once owned such a bird. If your family is affected by the Chirping Bird Syndrome, you are the bird and your child no longer hears your chirping, no matter how loud or frequent it is.



5. Coercive Communication is a two-way street and because Coercive Parenting Mode begets Coercive Resistance Mode (and vice versa), it can create a family environment of excessive stress, conflict, anger, hurt, and resentment. Over time this can result in a *toxic family environment*. A toxic family environment is when family members stop giving each other the benefit of the doubt and anticipate each other's negative responses. Once this occurs, family members feel stressed out just being around each other, even when not a single word is spoken between them. This stress makes everyone highly emotional and reactive. In such cases, even a compliment can be misinterpreted as a criticism, and a conflict can ensue. Individuals living in this kind of environment have reported cringing the second they hear the child's school bus or parent's car pulling up in front of the house. A toxic family environment makes all family members more susceptible to a variety of physical and mental health issues.

6. Coercive Communication can cause a broken parent-child relationship. This is the greatest risk associated with the use of Coercive Communication. Once the parent-child relationship is broken, you lose your ability to effectively influence and discipline your child. The rest of this lesson will provide you with an alternative to Coercive Communication and strategies that will reduce the risk of a broken parent-child relationship.



Considering the risks of Coercive Communication, here is my verdict on it use:

If Coercive Communication is working for you, great! You are the parent of an 80-percenter, and you can continue to successfully use Coercive Parenting tactics. Enjoy the fact that your child usually gets in line and cooperates with you. If, however, Coercive Communication is not working for you, I strongly encourage you to change your approach. To not do so has the potential to cause great harm to you and your family.

The Relationship Centered Parenting Model presented in this program is an alternative to Coercive Communication. It is based on information and strategies I have researched and directly witnessed to be practical and effective in managing children and creating a healthy family environment. I can honestly tell you that, when applied consistently as instructed, I have never seen Relationship Centered Parenting fail to improve a parent's effectiveness and the quality of the family environment. I hope that at the conclusion of this section, you will give Relationship Centered Parenting a try, and that it will benefit you in the same way it has benefited so many of my clients and my own family.

Relationship Centering Parenting is based on 3 insights that I learned from my work with families and the application of a variety of parenting models.

1. Coercive Communication is the norm, and it is here to stay. There is nothing you can do to



completely rid yourself of it. If you need to change your Coercive Parenting Style, the best you can do is reduce its intensity, duration, and frequency, while balancing it with alternative parenting strategies. At the conclusion of this presentation, you will be well equipped to do so if you wish.

2. There are three fundamentals to effective parenting (regardless of the parenting approach). The three fundamentals are self-mastery, a strong parent-child relationship, and effective discipline. The stronger you are in each, the more effective you will be as a parent. You will learn about these three fundamentals in Section 2 of this presentation.
3. There are four modes of communication when dealing with children; Save Your Energy Mode, Relationship Mode, Discipline Mode, and Coercive Parenting Mode. Your parenting effectiveness will be decided by your ability to implement these four modes of communication in a manner that best matches your child's personality and needs. You will learn about these four modes of communication, and the seven daily practices for implementing them, in Section 3 of this presentation.

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**This concludes Section 1 – Why Nagging, Lecturing, and Yelling Are the Norm. You are now aware of the Coercive Communication that goes on between you and your child, and the potential harm it may cause.**

## ***SECTION 2 - THE THREE FUNDAMENTALS TO EFFECTIVE PARENTING***

The three fundamentals to effective parenting are self-mastery, the strength of the parent-child relationship, and effective discipline. It is helpful to think of the three fundamentals as a three-story building, with Fundamental #1 (self-mastery) being the foundation. If the foundation is not strong and stable, you will not be able to build anything on top of it. In other words, without self-mastery it will be exceedingly difficult to have a strong parent-child relationship and effectively discipline your child.

### **Fundamental #1 - Self-Mastery**

Self-mastery is when you have reasonable control over your emotional and behavioral reactions. With self-mastery, you take care of your responsibilities, role model healthy behaviors, manage stress, communicate effectively, and have a cooperative relationship with your child's other parent so you can operate as a unified front when necessary.

With self-mastery, your child sees you as a role model, or someone who can be counted on as a source of strength and stability.

Do not be intimidated by this description of self-mastery. Having self-mastery does not mean you are perfect. It just means that you have reasonable control over your emotional reactions and life circumstances. The key word being reasonable.

### **Why is Self-Mastery Necessary?**

Self-mastery is necessary because without it, you will not be a good role model for your child. Instead of inspiring your child to do their best, you will be a source of instability and stress in their life. Over

time, this instability may negatively affect your child's emotional and psychological wellbeing. In addition, self-mastery is necessary because without it, you will stay stuck in Coercive Communication long after you have figured out it does not work with your child. Only through self-mastery will you be able to take a deep breath, bite your tongue, and respond in a more calm and effective manner.

If you do not have self-mastery, you must make it your top priority. I assure you that doing so will be the best investment of your time, money, and energy; far greater than anything else you can do for your child, including providing them with counselors, tutors, doctors, medications, or any other intervention intended to address the difficulties you believe exist in their life.

Remember, self-mastery is like the foundation of the building- unless it is strong and stable, nothing can be built upon it. In other words, without self-mastery, it will be exceedingly difficult for you to have a strong parent-child relationship and effectively discipline your child. In addition, it will make it very unlikely that your child will benefit from the other interventions you provide.

I have seen many parents improve their Self-Mastery using a combination of the following strategies.

- Take care of yourself physically: If you are physically unhealthy or compromised in some way, you will be mentally and emotionally compromised as well. See a doctor for a full physical evaluation. If you have any health issues, address them at once. In addition, be mindful that proper nutrition, exercise, rest, and sleep are essential to physical wellbeing.
- Engage in self-help activities: Self-help always includes learning new ways of thinking, responding, and coping with people and life stressors. The best way to start the self-help process is to go online and find books, podcasts, and YouTube videos specific to your life difficulties. Get into the habit of consuming self-help content daily, even if it's just for a few minutes. Be open-minded to the information and concepts you learn about. Many people have transformed their lives through reading or listening to self-help content (I also call it "wisdom content"). There is no reason to think you could not do the same.

If you want to take an even bigger step, consider joining a self-help group. From substance abuse to parenting, there are self-help groups for all of life's challenges. By joining a self-help group, you will have access to a support system of people who understand your pain and struggles (first-hand), genuinely care, and root for your success and well-being.

Pain shared is pain divided, at least temporarily. You never have to suffer alone. Ask for help and you will be amazed by the support you receive.

- If you can't develop self-mastery on your own, seek the support of a mental health professional: Be persistent in finding someone who is helpful. As in all occupations, there are both competent and incompetent counselors, therapists, and doctors. Do not be discouraged by an unpleasant experience. Keep searching until you find the person that is right for you. A competent professional can make a world of difference in helping improve your life.

If you obtain the services of a professional, be open to whatever recommendations are made. In some cases, medication may be suggested. Do not be offended by this. Sometimes medication is necessary to break out of a cycle of negative emotion and stress, and to redirect our lives towards health and wellbeing.

- Take a break (I suggest 2-3 weeks) from disciplining your child: By doing so, you will reduce the conflict and stress between you and your child and give yourself an opportunity to recharge physically and emotionally. As your energy level rises, so will your self-mastery. In Section 3 of this

presentation, you will learn how to pick your battles wisely and when it is best to confront or ignore your child's misbehavior. By learning to ignore certain misbehaviors and saving your energy for the bigger battle's worth having, you will be able to maintain a higher level of self-mastery throughout.

## **Fundamental #2 – A Strong Parent-Child Relationship**

A strong parent-child relationship is when your child feels secure in your presence and values your role in their life. With a strong parent child relationship, you and your child share quality time together, trust one another, and feel an immense sense of love and respect for each other.

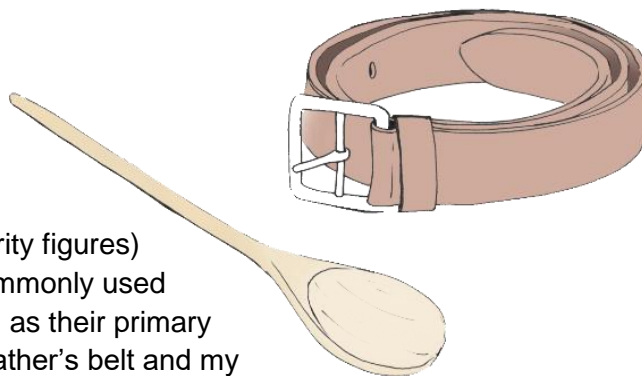
With a strong parent-child relationship, your child feels connected to you and takes what you say to heart, even when they disagree or feel upset, frustrated, or angry with you.

### **Why is a strong parent-child relationship necessary?**

A strong parent-child relationship is necessary because rules without a relationship equal rebellion. Children listen and cooperate with you to the extent that they value the relationship they have with you. If the relationship is not strong, children are more likely to be disrespectful, oppositional, and defiant. In this way, a strong parent-child relationship is the second floor of our metaphorical building—without it, there cannot be a third floor. In other words, without a strong parent-child relationship there cannot be effective discipline.

The need for a strong parent-child relationship is very much a modern-day phenomenon and reflects a shift in our family and social norms.

Years ago, children obeyed their parents (and other authority figures) mostly out of fear. The reason for this was that parents commonly used physical punishment (or the threat of physical punishment) as their primary means of discipline. I certainly remember the days of my father's belt and my mother's wooden spoon. I am sure many of you can relate.



Today, starting at an early age, children are taught that everyone (including themselves) has the right to equal and fair treatment. While learning these principles has benefited children (and society) in many ways, it has also empowered them to question and challenge authority figures, including parents.

Regardless of what you think of the societal changes that have taken place, they must be acknowledged and considered. Children are no longer afraid of authority figures, and they cannot be expected to obey you just because you are the parent. Today, children do not listen because they have to (out of fear); they listen because they want to. And often, they want to because they like you and do not want to damage or disrespect the relationship between the two of you. For these reasons, the strength of your parent-child relationship is the key to your parenting effectiveness.

If you have a strong parent-child relationship, great! Whatever you do, don't lose it! It is what enables you to influence and discipline your child effectively.

If you do not have a strong parent-child relationship, you will need to do whatever it takes to develop one, even if that means taking a timeout from correcting and disciplining your child. By doing so you

will reduce the stress and tension between you and have an opportunity to work on healing and strengthening the relationship. If you find it difficult to refrain from correcting and disciplining your child, remind yourself that rules without a relationship equals rebellion. Until you establish a strong parent-child relationship, you will not be an effective disciplinarian, regardless of the intensity of your Coercive Communication or the severity of your punishments.

I have seen many parents improve their parent-child relationship using a combination of the following strategies. In Relationship Centered Parenting, whenever you apply the following strategies, you are in what is called *Relationship Building Mode*. You will learn about Relationship Building Mode in Section #3 – “The Seven Principles of Relationship Centered Parenting” of this presentation.

### **Strategies to improve parent-child relationships:**

- Express your love frequently and in as many ways as possible: Say I love you, write notes, cards, letters, emails, and text messages. Be affectionate, give hugs and kisses, show interest in your child’s life, ask questions, and spend quality time together.
- Laugh and have fun: Tell jokes and riddles, watch comedy shows, laugh, and have fun together. It is difficult to have a troubled relationship with someone who makes you laugh and shares good times with you.
- Show respect: Be polite, avoid teasing, and speak in a tone that conveys patience and kindness.
- Be known: Within proper boundaries, talk to your child about your life experiences and the challenges and adversities you overcame in your life’s journey.
- Be understanding: When your child does something wrong or makes a mistake, take a minute to remember what it was like to be your child’s age. Think back to the time in your life when your emotions and impulses often got the best of you, when your friends and social life were the most important thing to you, when lying to your parents was necessary to avoid punishments and keep privileges. By taking that minute to reflect, you will be less likely to personalize your child’s misbehavior and more likely to respond in a way that fosters relationship building.
- Compromise and give choices: At times, say yes, even when you prefer to say no. At times give choices even if you prefer to take control.
- Share responsibilities together: Make the beds, wash the dishes, clean the house, do yard work, shovel the snow, and take care of other household responsibilities together. Working together is a bonding experience. In addition, it is of great benefit for your child to feel that they are a contributing member of the family. This will raise their self-esteem, help them develop strong work habits, and make them more inclined to help others.
- Lead with validation: Get into the habit of starting your conversations with validation. To validate your child, express your understanding of their thoughts and feelings, especially when they are upset about something. For example, if your child was complaining about a friend, instead of correcting your child by saying, “she’s your best friend, you don’t really mean that,” you can validate your child by saying, “You’re angry with her for what she did.” When you validate your child in this way, you are sending the message, “I understand you.” This is a message that over time is certain to encourage honest communication and strengthen the parent-child relationship.

Of course, the opposite is also true. By constantly correcting, lecturing, or reprimanding your child, you are sending the message, “you are wrong.” This is a message that over time is certain to discourage honest communication and weaken the parent-child relationship.

- Be diplomatic in response to misbehavior: In Section 3 (The Seven Principles of Relationship Centered Parenting), you will learn the importance of picking your battles wisely. In doing so, at times you will choose to be diplomatic in response to your child's misbehavior. To be diplomatic means that instead of coercing or disciplining your child, you talk to them in a friendly manner, provide guidance in brainstorming solutions, and allow them to make the final decision on how to handle the situation in question.

**To be diplomatic, use the following 6-step problem solving method:**

1. Lead with validation: Be friendly in your tone of voice. Before you say anything about the misbehavior, identify what you think your child is thinking and feeling at that moment. For example, "I know you are really annoyed with your brother right now."
2. Invite problem solving: Say to your child, "Can we talk about how you're feeling? Can we talk about what's going on?"
3. Brainstorm workable solutions: Ask your child, "What are your options? Let's come up with some ideas for how you can handle this situation."
4. Give choices: Summarize the ideas that were brainstormed. Ask your child what idea/option they prefer.
5. Let go and support your child's decision: Do not try to persuade your child into doing what you think is best. Let your child make their own decision. Ask them, "What do you want to do?" "How do you want to handle this?" Tell your child, "It's up to you. I will accept whatever decision you make." Support your child and give them the final say. This is the essence of the 6-step problem solving method, and it is very difficult when you child is making a decision you do not agree with.
6. Finalize the arrangement: Ask your child, "What are you choosing to do? When will you do this?" "How will we know that you carried out the plan?" By finalizing the arrangement, you make your child accountable in following through with their decision.

Here is an example of the 6-step problem solving method in action, it is a role-play of a mother and daughter interaction. The mother believes her daughter is spending too much time on her cell phone and computer, and it is interfering with her schoolwork. The mother decides to handle the situation in a diplomatic way and uses the 6-step problem solving method to discuss her concerns. Please note the mother's warm and friendly tone of voice throughout the interactions and her willingness to give her daughter the final word. The mother's diplomatic style is the hallmark of Relationship Building Mode which you will learn about in Section 3 of this lesson.

MOM: Maria, can I talk to you about something?

DAUGHTER: Sure mom, what's up?

MOM: Well, I'm a little concerned. Lately I've noticed you spending a lot of time on your cell phone and computer, and I'm starting to think that it is having a negative effect on your grades.

DAUGHTER: No way mom...my grades are fine! I don't know why you would say that!



MOM: Well Honey, I know you are a good student, but the last time we checked your grades, you had a D in English. You've never had a D before, not in any class.

DAUGHTER: Mom, that's not fair. I already told you, the only reason it's a D is because my teacher didn't include my last test grade... Once she does, my grade will be at least a C.

MOM: Again honey, I know you are a good student, and I trust that you will get your grades up... However, the amount of time you spend on your cell phone and social media really concerns me, I think it is a problem and I think it's starting to interfere with your schoolwork

DAUGHTER: So, what do you want me to do? Are you going to take my phone and computer away?

MOM: No, not at all, I was just hoping we could discuss it and come up with an arrangement that works for both of us. Can you think of any options?

DAUGHTER: Uh, I don't know, uh, maybe I could do my homework when I get home from school and talk to my friends afterwards? Is that what you want me to say?

MOM: Honey, please trust me when I tell you, I don't want you to say anything... I just want to see if we can work something out... Can you think of any other options? Please tell me whatever comes to mind.

DAUGHTER: Ok... that's fine, I could talk to my friends first and then do my homework after dinner, you could put a time limit on the amount of time I talk to my friends.

MOM: Great, anything else?

DAUGHTER: Uh, I don't know, you could keep my phone until my homework is done... That's all I can think of! ORRR - we don't change anything, and you trust me with my schoolwork.

MOM: Alright, great! Just to summarize...#1- Homework first and then friends, #2- Friends first and then homework, #3- A time limit on friends, #4- I hold your phone until your homework is done, #5- No changes, and I trust that you are being responsible. Okay, I think that covers it, so what do you want to do? It's your decision.

DAUGHTER: Really? You're going to let me decide? Okay...Honestly, I don't think we need to change anything... I feel I have my schoolwork under control and that my cell phone and computer use is not the reason I am getting a D in English!

MOM: Okay... that's fine, if that is how you want to handle it, that's what we'll do... I hope you are right in what you are saying... However, if you are not, can I assume that we will have this conversation again and you will be open to changing your approach?

DAUGHTER: Definitely - if you let me do it my way and my grades do go down, I will change my approach... That's a promise!

MOM: Ok, I'm happy to hear that and I'm glad we had this conversation...Thank you!

### **Fundamental #3 - Effective Discipline**

Effective discipline is when you are confident in your ability to discipline your child when necessary. With effective discipline, you clearly state rules and expectations, consistently follow through with stated consequences, and restrict developmentally inappropriate, unhealthy, or dangerous behaviors.

With effective discipline, your child accepts you as an authority figure and knows if a battle ensues, you will win.

## **Why is effective discipline necessary?**

There are five reasons why effective discipline is necessary:

1. Regardless of how physically mature a child may appear, developmentally, children often lack the ability to delay immediate gratification, even when significant consequences may result. For example, if given the opportunity, many children would eat fast food daily, play video games late into the night, choose hanging out with friends over studying, drive dangerously, and drink alcohol before legal age.
2. Effective discipline serves as an external control to keep children safe and healthy until they develop internal control to manage impulses and make better decisions.
3. Children are naturally self-centered. Without effective discipline, family functioning can be dominated by the needs and wants of a single child. This is a recipe for frustration, anger, and resentment for parents and siblings.
4. Effective discipline ensures that no one child is running the household.
5. Personal accountability is the ultimate life lesson everyone needs to learn. This lesson begins in childhood, and parents are in the best position to teach it. When this lesson is not taught, a child is more likely to be irresponsible and blame others for their mistakes. These qualities put a child at elevated risk for relationship problems and numerous other life difficulties. Effective discipline ensures that children will learn personal accountability, and they will be more likely to take responsibility for their actions and the outcome of their lives.

## **If effective discipline is so important, why are many parents reluctant to discipline their children?**

There are two reasons for this:

1. Children make effective discipline difficult. Even 80-percenters give their parents a tough time when they are told what to do or punished for misbehavior. Over time, parents get worn down by their child's coercive resistance and begin to avoid taking disciplinary action.
2. Parents worry about their children's emotional well-being and feel bad when their child gets upset. Many of today's parents, who were raised under an authoritarian style of parenting, have consciously or subconsciously vowed to parent their children differently. They want to make their children happy and give them all the things they missed growing up. This mindset runs contrary to effective discipline and results in a permissive parenting style.

## **If you have effective discipline:**

Stay strong in disciplining your child. At times, your child - and societal norms - will make you feel insecure about the discipline you are imposing. Your child will tell you that none of their friends' parents are so strict. In getting to know their friends' parents, you may discover that they are right. When this happens, reassure yourself that you are providing your child with what is needed for them to stay healthy and safe, and to have the best chance of maturing into a responsible adult.

## **If you do not have effective discipline:**

It is time to prove yourself as the authority figure in your family. To do so you must develop the following mindset:



It is not okay for your child to always get their way, and it is not okay for them to treat you like a doormat. It is your right and responsibility to discipline your child when needed. If you fail to do so, and your child does not learn the lesson of personal accountability, they will be at greater risk for school underachievement, substance abuse, relationship problems, and many other life difficulties. You must accept your responsibility as the disciplinarian, and you must learn how to do it effectively.

Once you have the proper mindset, you must be patient and persistent when disciplining your child. Be certain that your child will not relinquish their power easily. You will need to fight, and win, many battles before your child accepts your position of authority and gives you the respect and cooperation you deserve. As difficult as it may be, your effort will be well worth it. You will regain control of your family and provide your child with what they need to stay safe and develop into a responsible adult.

I have seen many parents develop effective discipline using a combination of the following strategies. In Relationship Centered Parenting, when you are applying these strategies, you are in what is called *discipline mode*. You will learn about discipline mode in Section 3 (The Seven Principles of Relationship Centered Parenting) of this presentation.

- Choose your battles wisely. Do not confront your child on every misbehavior. Save your energy for the misbehaviors that matter most. This is always a good idea, especially with teenagers and 20-percenters. This strategy will be discussed further under the heading of “Choose Your Withdrawals Wisely,” in Section 3 of this presentation. You will learn a system for deciding when a battle is worth fighting.
- Specifically explain rules, boundaries, and expectations. Be clear about the consequences that will occur if they are violated. You must do this regularly throughout the years as your child goes through different developmental stages.
- Speak in an alpha tone of voice when disciplining your child. The alpha tone of voice is confident and commanding. Think of Clint Eastwood as Dirty Harry, in a calm and confident tone of voice saying, “Go ahead, make my day.” As opposed to Hulk Hogan and the emotionally charged tone of voice used with Coercive Communication.
- Use logical consequences when punishing your child. Logical consequences are consequences that are proportionate (not harsh or excessive) and related to the misbehavior being addressed. For example, if your child comes home one hour late, their consequence would be to come home one hour earlier the next time they go out.
- Use contingency rather than time-based consequences. With contingency based consequences, the consequences last for as long as it takes for your child to demonstrate healthy behavior, as opposed to lasting for a designated time. For example, instead of saying you lost your video game privileges for a month, you say, you lost your video game privileges until all your homework is done.
- Be physically present to monitor and confirm your child’s compliance with stated consequences. It is not effective to trust your child to follow through with consequences on their own or to have someone else do it for you. If you cannot be physically present to ensure your child's compliance, you are better off not setting the consequence at all.
- Confront misbehavior in a consistent and structured way. Here is a 5-step method for doing so:
  1. State the limit or expectation.

2. Restate the limit or expectation plus explain the consequence.
3. Impose the consequence and explain the healthy behavior required to end the consequence.
4. Monitor your child's compliance to the consequence, plus the healthy behavior required to end the consequence.
5. End the consequence and re-institute the child's privileges.

The following is an example of the 5-step discipline method in action. It is a role-play of a mother and son interaction. The mother does not want her son to go out on a date before finishing his homework.

SON: I can't believe this! You're telling me I can't go out with Amber tonight because my homework isn't done?

MOM: That's right, you need to finish your homework. Until you do, you have no privileges, that includes NOT going out with Amber.

SON: Why are you doing this? She is expecting me in 15 minutes! Why can't I just do my homework when I get back later tonight?

MOM: Sorry, Joe. That's the rule. I've told you this before. You must finish all your homework before you go out. Get your homework done, and then you can go out with Amber.

SON: You are so unfair! I can't believe you! You are treating me like I'm five.

MOM: I'm sorry you feel that way. But this is the rule and I expect you to follow it.

*\*30 minutes later\**

SON: My homework is done... Can I go out now?

MOM: Glad to hear. I would like to see it, please show me your completed homework, and then you can be on your way.

When disciplining your child, always keep in mind the idea of contingency rather than time-based consequences. Again, what this means is your child's consequences end only when they can demonstrate the desired healthy behavior.

With contingency based consequences, the magic word is "UNTIL", i.e., "You have lost your cell phone until BLANK." You fill in the BLANK with whatever healthy behavior you want your child to demonstrate. If you are ever in doubt about how to fill in the BLANK, consider the following healthy behaviors that everyone needs to develop.

- Mood Regulation: the ability to control one's emotions.
  - You have lost your cell phone until you calm down and can explain to me what happened.
- Social Skills: the ability to communicate and deal with others appropriately.
  - You need to sit quietly in your room until you can be more friendly with your brother.
  - You cannot go out tonight until you apologize for what you said and treat me with respect.
- Responsible Decision Making: the ability to learn from mistakes and understand how to solve problems.
  - You cannot play video games until you talk to me about what's going on and how you plan

- to address it.
- You have lost your car until you write a two-page report on the dangers of smoking.

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**This concludes Section 2- The Three Fundamentals to Effective Parenting. You now understand the importance of self-mastery, a strong parent-child relationship, and effective discipline. The degree to which you possess these three fundamentals will determine the degree to which you can positively influence your child's attitude, behavior, and life choices.**

## **SECTION 3 - THE SEVEN PRACTICES OF RELATIONSHIP CENTERED PARENTING**

The recommendations and strategies presented in this section are referred to as the Seven Practices of Relationship Centered Parenting. The word practice implies your skills are a work in progress and can only be developed through repeated use. As you apply The Seven Practices of Relationship Centered Parenting, be prepared for times of relapse. Inevitably, no matter how motivated you are to change your parenting approach, you will revert to your natural Coercive Parenting style. When this occurs, do not be discouraged. Instead, understand it is a normal part of the growth process, acknowledge the relapse, and recommit yourself to the Seven Practices of Relationship Centered Parenting.

Relationship Centered Parenting is based on the belief that a strong parent-child relationship is the key to effective parenting. As such, how you interact with your child is like managing a relationship bank account - you must be mindful of your deposits and withdrawals. Only when your deposits exceed your withdrawals, do you have capital in the account. This capital is what enables you to influence your child; the greater the capital, the greater your influence, and the more likely your child is to be cooperative in disciplinary situations. If you bankrupt the account, all your influence is lost, and the more likely your child is to be oppositional and defiant in disciplinary situations.

In Relationship Centered Parenting you make deposits and withdrawals through four modes of communication. These modes of communication are based on an understanding of Coercive Communication and the Three Fundamentals of Effective Parenting. You have two modes for making deposits and two modes for making withdrawals.

**The four modes of communication are as follows:**

### **Deposit Modes:**

- 1) Relationship Mode (related to building and supporting a strong parent-child relationship)
- 2) Save Your Energy Mode (related to developing and supporting self-mastery)

### **Withdrawal Modes:**

- 3) Discipline Mode (related to exercising effective discipline)
- 4) Coercive Parenting Mode (related to reactive coercive communication)

The 7 Practices of Relationship Centered Parenting will guide you in strategically applying these modes of communication. In doing so, you will successfully manage your relationship bank account

and have the capital to influence and effectively discipline your child. In addition, you will be able to cultivate a loving, respectful, and cooperative family environment.

### **Practice #1 - Make Self-Mastery a Top Priority**

Daily, to the best of your ability, take loving care of yourself; exercise, eat right, read, spend time with positive and supportive people, and make time to relax and have fun. If this is not enough to develop your self-mastery, seek the support of a caring professional or support group.

Remember that without self-mastery, you will stay stuck in Coercive Parenting Mode and remain unable to control what you say/do in response to your child's misbehavior. The result will be ongoing conflict and stress between you and your child, along with the risk of developing one of the problems caused by Coercive Communication (previously discussed in Section #1 of this presentation). This includes the possibility of increased oppositional or defiant behavior, the chirping bird syndrome, a toxic family environment, or a broken parent-child relationship.

Of the seven principles presented in this section, this principle of self-mastery is the easiest to dismiss. It is commonplace for parents to ignore their own health and well-being. If this applies to you, I hope I have made a strong enough case for why this needs to change. Until self-mastery becomes a top priority, and you develop a reasonable degree of control over yourself, little will change in your life, particularly the difficulties and frustrations you experience with your child.

### **Practice #2 - Be Aware of Your Relationship Bank Account**

On a regular basis, gauge the quality of your relationship bank account. If the account is depleted and the strength of the parent-child relationship is compromised, do whatever you can to make it better - even if it means backing off and not correcting or disciplining your child for a while. If you find it difficult to do so, remind yourself that rules without a relationship equal rebellion, and without a strong parent-child relationship, your child will reject the guidance and discipline you try to provide.



### **Practice #3 - Make Daily Deposits**

You make deposits whenever you communicate in Save Your Energy Mode or Relationship Mode.

You are in Save Your Energy Mode when you say nothing in response to your child's misbehavior or, despite wanting to say NO, you say YES to your child's request. To respond in this way, you must reassure yourself you are not being neglectful, and your child can learn and grow from whatever natural consequences occur because of their actions and decisions.

You are in Relationship Mode whenever you express your love and understanding, joke around, laugh, do fun activities, show respect, lead with validation, and respond diplomatically to your child. You are also in Relationship Mode when you choose to handle misbehavior with the 6-Step Problem Solving Method that was explained in Section 2 (The Three Fundamentals of Effective Parenting) of this presentation.

By operating in these two modes, you are making deposits into your relationship bank account. These deposits provide you with the relationship capital you need to influence your child's values, behaviors,

and decisions. You make these deposits strategically and generously with the understanding that the greater your capital, the greater your influence, and the more likely your child is to respect and cooperate with you.

### **Practice #4 - Choose Your Withdrawals Wisely**

You make a withdrawal whenever you are in Coercive Parenting Mode or Discipline Mode. You are in Coercive Parenting Mode when you resort to nagging, lecturing, yelling, and other emotional tactics to get your child to do what is needed. By now, you understand the potential problems with Coercive Parenting Mode and hopefully you will develop the self-mastery to use it sparingly.

You are in Discipline Mode whenever you say “No” to your child, tell them to do something, or correct their misbehavior. When disciplining your child, it is recommended you use the 5-step discipline method explained in Section 2 (The Three Fundamentals of Effective Parenting) of this presentation.



The practice of choosing your withdrawals wisely could just as easily be called, “choose your battles wisely,” because to choose a withdrawal is to choose a battle. It does not matter how big or small the withdrawal is, nor how much capital you have in the relationship bank account, with every withdrawal there will be a battle. Your child is certain to respond with some degree of coercive resistance. Do not be surprised by this and never take it personally. If you take it personally, it will trigger your emotional reactivity, short circuit your self-mastery, and put you in coercive parenting mode whether you want to be there or not.

You also need to choose your withdrawals wisely because with each withdrawal, you are reducing the capital in your relationship bank account and compromising your position of influence. Remember, the lower the capital, the less influence you have and the more likely your child is to be oppositional and defiant in response to you.

### **How to decide whether a withdrawal is worth it:**

Below are examples of three areas of concern that most parents have.

#### Character concerns, such as:

- Your child is talking badly about others
- Your child is being rude at the dinner table
- Your child is wearing clothes that you feel are inappropriate
- Your child is using profanity
- Your child is not doing chores, or not doing them well
- Your child is not doing their homework or studying hard enough
- Your child is underachieving or failing in school
- Your child is being disrespectful to you or other family members

#### Health concerns, such as:

- Your child is not eating the food you cook
- Your child is staying up late at night

- Your child is not brushing their teeth
- Your child is leaving the house without a coat when it is cold outside

Safety concerns, such as:

- Your child is going on inappropriate websites or accessing inappropriate materials
- Your child is using alcohol or drugs
- Your child is engaging in reckless behavior including speeding/careless driving, risky stunts, or fighting
- Your child is refusing necessary medical or psychological treatment

**With regards to each identified concern answer the following questions:**

- Do I have the self-mastery to confront this misbehavior or concern without becoming reactive and losing control?
- Do I have enough capital in the relationship bank account for my child to cooperate?
- Is it worth the battle? Does the nature of my concern warrant the stress of the battle and the withdrawal it will cause? Even if I win the battle, can I really correct my child's behavior or attitude in this situation?
- Am I willing and capable of consistently following through with the stated consequences?
- Am I willing and capable of doing whatever it takes to win the battle, even if that means going to my bottom-line consequences? Bottom-line consequences (especially with 20-percenters) often create a tough love situation; for example, physically restraining the child, taking the child to the hospital, calling the police, or asking the child to move out if they are of legal age.

If you answered YES to all the questions, your child's misbehavior is worth the battle, and you are ready to make a withdrawal. This puts you in Discipline Mode, and you are prepared to deal with whatever coercive resistance your child dishes out. However, if you answer NO to even a single question, you are better off responding to your child's misbehavior in one of the two deposit modes; Save Your Energy or Relationship Mode.

How you answer these questions will be determined by a variety of factors including your current energy level, the day's stress load, child's personality, child's emotional state, and other personal and family considerations. Only you know the factors involved in your decision and it is unfair for anyone to question or judge whether you choose to discipline your child's misbehavior. To withdraw, or not to withdraw, is a highly personal decision that can only be made by you - the parent of the child.

While I do not tell parents how to respond to specific incidents of misbehavior, when asked for guidance about withdrawals, I tell them the following. If you are a parent of an 80-percenter and your relationship bank account is full, you may be able to make regular (daily) withdrawals in response to all three areas of concern: character, health, and safety. If you are a parent of a 20-percenter, even with a relationship bank account that is overflowing, you may need to be very conservative and focus your withdrawals primarily on safety concerns.

As you make necessary withdrawals, stay mindful of your deposit-withdrawal ratio. While many parenting experts recommend a 10-1 deposit/withdrawal ratio, a 4-1 ratio is more realistic and obtainable. Of course, the more deposits the better! This is particularly true when you anticipate making a significant withdrawal. In such cases you can intentionally boost the frequency of your deposits with the hope that it will reduce the intensity of your child's coercive resistance and the

battle that may ensue.

## **Practice #5 - Make Every Disciplining Situation a Teaching Opportunity**

In Relationship Centered Parenting, the goal of effective discipline is not to punish, but rather keep children safe and teach them important life skills. The 5-step discipline method explained in Section 2 (The Three Fundamentals of Effective Parenting) of this presentation turns every disciplinary situation into a teaching opportunity. It empowers you to confront misbehavior, set limits, impose contingency based consequences, and support your child in developing important life skills. When in doubt about how to apply this method, simply remember the magic word; UNTIL. For example, you cannot have dessert (the consequence) until you eat your broccoli (the healthy behavior), or you cannot use your cell phone (the consequence) until you finish and show me your completed homework (the healthy behavior).

## **Practice #6 - Be Persistent in the Face of Setbacks and Continued Misbehavior**

Be persistent! No matter what you do or how you do it, the battles between you and your child will continue. No parenting approach will make your child perfectly responsible, cooperative, or compliant. Despite your best efforts, your child will continue to misbehave and cause you great stress and emotional upset. Do not view this as a failure! Progress, not perfection, is the name of the game. Accept that the nature of your parenting journey will be three steps forward and two steps back. No one step determines the outcome. It is the ratio of steps and their trajectory that is most important.

Be persistent! When you start focusing on how wonderful and perfect other people's children are, remind yourself that perception is not reality, and you have no idea what is going on behind closed doors. Most parents experience their fair share of hardships and adversities with their children. In some cases, this involves serious illnesses, accidents, disabilities, substance abuse, and other life altering conditions or events. Avoid the tendency to compare your situation to others, remind yourself you are not alone in your suffering, and believe better days will come for you and your family.

Be persistent! Parenting is a marathon, not a sprint. Remind yourself you may not experience the fruits of your labor for many years to come. Your child may not reveal the true impact of all your love and sacrifice until they are well into adulthood.

## **Practice #7 - Let Go and Have Faith**

Letting go means accepting that you have no power over the quality or outcome of your child's life (no matter how hard you try). If you had that power, your child would not suffer or fail a single day of their life. Letting go means accepting your child has their own life's journey and must find their own way to a successful, meaningful, and satisfying life.

### **Having faith means believing:**

- Your child can learn and grow from the pain and consequences of their actions and decisions, just as you did in becoming the person you are today.
- There are many different paths to success, even if your child has strayed from the more secure and direct path, in time they will find their way.
- You are strong and capable, and you can handle any of life's challenges including the heartbreak



caused by your child.

- You can be healthy and happy even if your child is not.

Having faith means you hold onto these beliefs no matter how dark, or bleak your child's circumstances are.

Your ability to let go and have faith will be essential in developing your self-mastery and ability to respond to your child in Save Your Energy and Relationship Modes.

## **Relationship Centered Parenting in A Nutshell**

A strong parent-child relationship is the key to effective parenting. As such, how you interact with your child is like managing a relationship bank account. Deposits build capital and strengthen the parent child relationship, while withdrawals weaken it.

The greater your ratio of deposits over withdrawals is, the stronger your parent-child relationship will be, the more influence you have in shaping your child's attitude and behavior, and the more likely they are to be cooperative in disciplinary situations.

The lower your ratio of deposits over withdrawals is, the weaker your parent-child relationship will be, the less influence you have in shaping your child's attitude and behavior, and the more likely they are to be oppositional and defiant in disciplinary situations.

In every parent-child interaction, you will be making a relationship deposit or withdrawal. In doing so, you have four modes of communication to choose from:

### **Deposit Modes:**

1. Save Your Energy Mode
2. Relationship Mode

### **Withdrawal Modes:**

1. Coercive Parenting Mode
2. Discipline Mode

It is crucial that you choose your modes wisely. How well you communicate in each mode and the relationship account balance you create is what decides your parenting effectiveness.

### **Review - The Seven Practices of Relationship Parenting:**

1. Make Self-Mastery a Top Priority
2. Be Aware of Your Relationship Account
3. Make Daily Deposits
4. Choose Your Withdrawals Wisely
5. Make Every Disciplining Situation a Teaching Opportunity
6. Be Persistent in The Face Setbacks and Continued Misbehavior
7. Let Go and Have Faith

## **Relationship Centered Parenting in Action:**

What follows are four role-plays involving the same father and daughter situation regarding missed homework assignments. In each role-play, the father responds in a different mode of communication. The first two responses are relationship bank account deposits, while the last two responses are relationship bank account withdrawals.

### **Save Your Energy Mode:**



FATHER: (Expressed with genuine concern) Malania, I heard from Ms. Arnold that you are missing three assignments. Is that true?

DAUGHTER: Yeah, Dad. But it's not my fault. Ms. Arnold always misplaces my assignments.

FATHER: Okay, it must be so frustrating to do your work and to have it misplaced. How do you plan on handling it?

DAUGHTER: I don't know, maybe I will talk to her tomorrow when I see her.

FATHER: Okay. That's fine! I trust that you'll do the right thing. Please let me know how it turns out. Good luck!

DAUGHTER: Okay, Dad.

### **Relationship Mode:**



FATHER: Malania, can I talk to you about something please?

DAUGHTER: Yeah, Dad? What's up?

FATHER: I received an email from Ms. Arnold. She told me that you have three missing assignments in her class. What's going on?

DAUGHTER: What's going on is that she is a scatterbrain, I am almost positive that I turned those assignments in to her!

FATHER: Okay, it must be so frustrating to do your work and to have it misplaced. How do you plan on handling it?

DAUGHTER: I don't know, maybe I will talk to her about tomorrow.

FATHER: Listen Honey, I can understand your frustration, but I am very concerned about your grade in her class. I think it is important that you make a definite plan for how you want to handle it. Can we discuss your options and come up with a plan?

DAUGHTER: But Dad, I've already turned those assignments in. I know she is not going to want to hear it. There is nothing for me to do unless I want to do all the assignments over again.

FATHER: So, are you saying that you don't want to talk to Ms. Arnold about it and that you don't plan on doing the assignments, even if it means taking a zero?

DAUGHTER: I guess so...

FATHER: OK, it's your choice, but I really hope you reconsider. Let me know if you change your mind or if I can help in any way.

DAUGHTER: Okay, Dad.

**Coercive Parenting Mode:**



FATHER: (Obviously annoyed) Malania, can you come down here please? I just got an email from Ms. Arnold. You're missing three assignments. You told me you were up-to-date and doing well in her class!

DAUGHTER: I am doing well in her class and I'm almost positive I turned those assignments in! Believe me Dad! She loses everything, you can ask anyone in my class, and they'll tell you the same thing.

FATHER: (Interrupting his daughter in an angry tone) Ugh, I am tired of your excuses! You promised me that you were going to do better this marking period! But now we're back to the same old lies and excuses! You know what, you're grounded, indefinitely.

DAUGHTER: Oh my God, you're so impossible! You never listen to my side!

FATHER: I'm impossible? I'm impossible? What about you Malania? There's just no getting through to you. You're a smart girl and you need to start doing better in school. Do you even want to go to college? Do you want to be successful in life?

DAUGHTER: Of course I do. But....

FATHER: (Interrupting his daughter again) But what? If you want to be successful you must do your work and you must take school more seriously! If you put half the energy into doing your homework than you do in trying to get out of it, you'd be a straight A student! This is unacceptable, and I'm tired of it Malania!

DAUGHTER: Homework is pointless! I don't even understand why I must do homework when it's just a repeat of what I already learned in school. It's just busy work, that's all it is, and it's unfair.

FATHER: Well life is not fair! The quicker you learn that the better. I'm telling you right now, you are grounded indefinitely. And that's not going to change UNTIL you make up those assignments and show a better attitude towards school. How's that for unfair?

DAUGHTER: Dad! You never understand!

FATHER: And you never take responsibility for anything. How about this, I'll change when you change.

**Discipline Mode:**



FATHER: Malania? Can you come down here please?

DAUGHTER: Yeah, Dad! What's up?

FATHER: (In a calm but firm tone) I received an email from Ms. Arnold; she told me that you have three missing assignments in her class. What's going on?

DAUGHTER: What's going on is that she is a scatterbrain, I am almost positive that I turned those assignments in to her!

FATHER: I am sorry if that is the case, I can imagine how frustrating that is. However, you will need to do those assignments again. It is unacceptable for you to take a zero on them.

DAUGHTER: There is no way I am doing those assignments again, that's totally unfair. Why do you

have to side with Ms. Arnold?!

FATHER: I'm not siding with Ms. Arnold. It's just that you have missed a bunch of assignments this year, and not just in her class. I am not going to get in the middle and try to figure out whose fault it is. The simplest solution is for you to redo those assignments and turn them in tomorrow. You need to do those assignments now!

DAUGHTER: No way, that is totally unfair.

FATHER: You need to do those assignments now, and you will not have any privileges until they're done.

DAUGHTER: I can't believe this, you are being so unfair! No other parent would do this to their kid.

FATHER: I understand your frustration with me and your teacher, but regardless of how you feel, those assignments need to get done. You can have your privileges back the second they are finished.

DAUGHTER: Fine.

### **Additional Points of Consideration Regarding Relationship Centered Parenting**

#### **It is beneficial for children when parents are a unified front.**

This is the case whether the parents are married to each other, or not. It is highly recommended that both parents listen to this Relationship Centered Parenting presentation, either together or individually. By doing so, parents will learn terminology that will make it easier for them to effectively communicate with each other. For example, parents will find it easier to say, "This is not worth a withdrawal for me," than trying to explain why they do not want to confront a child's poor table manners. Many parents also report through the Relationship Centered Parenting terminology, they are better able to problem solve and make joint decisions about their child.

#### **Parents are not the determining factor in the outcome of their child's life.**

Research suggests that variables such as genetically determined personality traits, social norms, and friend groups may have the greatest influence on a child's values, attitudes, lifestyle, and life outcomes. What this means is, even if we provided our child with perfect parenting (whatever that might be), the outcome for our child might still be underachievement, alcohol or drug addiction, depression, anxiety, other psychiatric illnesses, criminal behavior, violent behavior, homicide, suicide, accidental death, or some other life tragedy. Sorry to be the bearer of this sad news. But this is what the research shows. It also explains why children raised in the same household can be so different and have such contrasting life outcomes.

#### **If the research is correct, then why are we working so hard to be good parents? Here are two great reasons:**

1. Regardless of the outcome of our children's lives, parenting is important because it determines the quality of our family environment, the emotional wellbeing of each family member, and the nature of our shared memories.
2. Even if the impact of our parenting was only 1% (I am certain it is much greater), that 1% counts. As loving parents, we want to make it the best 1% possible. In doing so, we will find comfort in knowing we did not just wing it with our child. Instead, we educated ourselves and did everything in

our power to nurture, protect, teach, and support our children's health and wellbeing.

**Be patient and forgiving with yourself. You are not perfect, and you never will be, and the good news is you do not need to be.**

At times, you will become emotional and reactive. You will say and do things you know are ineffective and later regret it. Progress, not perfection, is the only realistic expectation to have. In developing your self-mastery, you will pick yourself up, dust yourself off, and start over again. You will need to start over, and over again - a million times over if necessary. That is the essence of self-mastery.

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**This concludes Section 3 - The Seven Practices of Relationship Centered Parenting. You now have an alternative to coercive parenting that gives you the best chance of effectively managing your child's behavior and creating a loving, respectful, and cooperative family environment.**

## ***SECTION 4 - HELP YOUR CHILD SUCCEED IN SCHOOL***

What can you do to help your child succeed in school? Here is what the research says:

- Communicate the values of education and your expectations for school.
- Help your child set academic and life goals.
- Teach your child learning/study strategies.
- Support independent learning by providing your child with access to the library, books, museums, etc.
- Be involved with your child's school.
- Monitor your child's homework.

Simply put, the more you are involved in your child's education, the better they will do in school. I know this is not earth-shattering news and many of you already know this. Unfortunately, it is often difficult to be involved in your child's education to the degree that is needed. From working a full-time job, chauffeuring children around, cooking dinner, doing laundry, paying bills, responding to emails, and other important responsibilities, there are many life circumstances that get in the way.

I wish there was a secret strategy that I could provide that would make it easier for you to help your child succeed in school. Unfortunately, there is not! If you really want to help your child succeed in school, you must override the life circumstances that get in your way and make your child's education your top priority. On a regular basis, you must encourage, monitor, and hold your child accountable for doing schoolwork. This is particularly true if your child is having academic difficulties.

To make matters more difficult, you can anticipate your child will resist and discourage your involvement. This will cause you a great deal of stress and frustration. At times, you will feel angry and resentful, and at times, you will want to give up and let your child fend for themselves. However, if you are serious about helping your child succeed in school, you must stay on the course. You must be strong and persistent in following through with the necessary actions and do so for however long it takes your child to develop the work and study habits necessary for school success.

This section will show you how to give your child the support they need to do their best in school. It will teach you a daily routine for encouraging, monitoring, and holding your child accountable for doing schoolwork. This routine is called Productive Time. It comes directly from my work with children who underachieve in school. Productive Time has been used by hundreds of families and has proven to be effective in helping students do better.

## **An Overview of Productive Time**

There are three reasons why a child can underachieve in school; they may have difficulty with the content of learning, the process of learning, or both. *The content of learning* has to do with a child's ability to comprehend, recall, and apply the content of a subject matter (ie, math, science, language arts, or social studies). *The process of learning* has to do with a child's ability to be motivated, stay organized, pay attention, complete homework assignments, participate in class, and study for quizzes and tests. If your child has difficulty with the content of learning, then providing them with a tutor may be enough to help. If, however, your child has difficulty with the process of learning, additional support may be needed. This includes mental health services, study skills training, school accommodations, or extra support with homework.

Productive Time was designed to help children who have difficulty with the process of learning. It consists of a daily routine for staying organized, completing homework assignments, and studying for quizzes and tests. If a child fails to follow through with the required routine, they lose their privileges for the rest of the evening, or until they show you their completed work. The loss of privileges is a contingency-based consequence intended to teach, rather than punish, your child. As such, once a child completes their Productive Time responsibilities, their privileges are restored. The goal of Productive Time is to provide a child with the accountability necessary for staying motivated and developing the work/study habits essential for school success.

Productive Time works best when it is implemented with your child's full cooperation. For this reason, you are encouraged to practice Relationship Centered Parenting, and to approach your child in Relationship Mode when introducing the idea of Productive Time. By making Productive Time optional, as is the case in Relationship Mode, the hope is that your child will voluntarily agree to it. If your child refuses, despite your repeated attempts to get their cooperation, you have the right to switch into Discipline Mode and to impose Productive Time on your child. For a more detailed explanation of Relationship and Discipline Modes, please review Section 3 (The Seven Principles of Relationship Centered Parenting) of this transcript.

When imposing Productive Time, you must be fully committed to addressing your child's school underachievement in Discipline Mode. This means that you have deemed your child's school underachievement a withdrawal worthy concern, and you are willing to battle over it daily. Your guiding principle is "broccoli before dessert". You require your child to eat their broccoli (finish all their schoolwork), before being allowed to have their dessert (enjoy their privileges). To successfully impose Productive Time, you must uphold this principle regardless of the stress or conflict it causes between you and your child.

If you need to impose Productive Time, you can expect things to get worse before they get better. Your child will not be happy about Productive Time and will try to discourage you from imposing it by intensifying their coercive resistance. To succeed at imposing Productive Time, you must be resilient and weather the storm. With time and consistency, your child will eventually accept the Productive Time routine. Typically, it takes a full marking period to successfully create a Productive Time routine,

and two full marking periods for the routine to have a positive effect on your child's schoolwork and grades.

### **Before You Get Started - The Prerequisites to Productive Time:**

- Practice Relationship Centered Parenting daily. This is particularly important if your child is a chronic underachiever. Chronic underachievers are typically 20-percenters who do not respond well to coercive parenting. In other words, if your child is a chronic underachiever, it is very unlikely you will be able to nag, lecture, reprimand, guilt, shame, threaten, or punish your child into doing better in school.
- View each lesson of the 1-2-3 Succeed Program at [www.123succeed.com](http://www.123succeed.com). By doing so, you will better understand the skills and strategies necessary for school success. This will help you gauge your child's strengths and deficits with regards to the process of learning. In addition, you will use the information on the Six Success Skills to implement key aspects of Productive Time.
- Well in advance of discussing or imposing Productive Time, address your child's school underachievement in Relationship Mode. In a friendly and diplomatic tone of voice, ask your child to talk about their school difficulties, empathize with whatever feelings come up, brainstorm workable solutions, emphasize your willingness to help, and encourage your child to view the materials provided on [www.123succeed.com](http://www.123succeed.com).

By viewing the materials on [123succeed.com](http://123succeed.com), your child will learn the Three Essential Ingredients for School Success, Six Success Skills, and Understanding and Overcoming Roadblocks to Success. At the conclusion of each lesson, your child will receive a certificate of completion that confirms your child's understanding of the material. You are encouraged to review each certificate of completion and to discuss the key learning points from each lesson. In doing so, you will reinforce the information presented, and your interest and commitment to helping your child do better in school.

As your child completes each lesson, encourage them to begin implementing the recommended skills and strategies. Monitor their progress by periodically asking them about their schoolwork and checking their grades, planner, binders, and other school materials.

If over the course of several weeks it becomes clear that your child is not implementing the recommended skills and strategies, offer them more help. If your child accepts your help, provide them with a general explanation of Productive Time and seek their agreement and cooperation in implementing it. If your child resists, in true Relationship Mode fashion, let them have their way. Do not try to convince or coerce them into cooperating with you. Instead, casually mention that if their schoolwork does not improve, you may need to impose productive time whether they want it or not. You are encouraged to have this conversation with your child multiple times, with the hope at some point they will cooperate.

As stated earlier, Productive Time works best when it is implemented with your child's full cooperation. The more cooperative your child is, the easier it will be to implement Productive Time and the more helpful it will be. If your child continues to resist Productive Time despite your best efforts in getting their cooperation, consider shifting into Discipline Mode and imposing Productive Time. While this is not the ideal situation, Productive Time can still be highly effective.

To determine if you are ready to switch to Discipline Mode, and hold your child accountable for productive time, reference the questions in Section 3 (The Seven Principles of Relationship Centered



Parenting) on how to choose your withdrawals wisely:

- Do I have the self-mastery to confront this concern without becoming reactive and losing control?
- Do I have enough equity in the relationship account for my child to cooperate?
- Am I willing and capable of consistently following through with the stated consequences?
- Am I willing and capable of doing whatever it takes to win the battle, even if that means going to my bottom-line consequences? Bottom-line consequences (especially with 20-percenters) often require some form of tough love; for example, physically restraining the child, taking the child to the hospital, calling the police or (depending on the age of the child) asking the child to move out.
- Is it worth it? Does the nature of my concern warrant a withdrawal, and the battle it will cause? Even if I win the battle, can I really influence my child's behavior in this situation?

Think carefully about your answers, especially your answer to question number three about consistency. If you answer YES to question three, that means you are willing to battle over Productive Time several days a week. This will be a huge commitment on your part and is certain to cause daily stress and conflict between you and your child.

If you answer NO to any of the questions, you are not ready to switch into Discipline Mode and hold your child accountable to Productive Time. Should that be the case, with Relationship Centered Parenting you still have three other modes of communication to choose from in addressing your child's school underachievement. While Coercive Communication Mode is not recommended, the other two remaining modes are, this includes Save Your Energy and Relationship Mode. See Section 3 (The Seven Principles of Relationship Centered Parenting) of this presentation to review all four modes of communication.

Only when you answer YES to all five questions will you be ready and able to impose Productive Time on your child.

### **The Four Steps to Implementing Productive Time**

Before you begin, it is essential the three prerequisites to Productive Time have been fully met. Failure to do so will reduce your chances of successfully implementing Productive Time and helping your child do better in school.

#### **Step 1 - Explain Productive Time to Your Child:**

Tell your child that Productive Time is a daily routine that will help them do better in school. This routine works best when the two of you work together as a team. Explain that it requires each of you to carry out certain responsibilities every day, and by doing so, they will have the best chance of making their school life easier and more successful.

**Stress to your child that for them to do better in school, each of you will have four daily responsibilities.**

Your child will need to:

- Use their 1-2-3 Succeed Planner and System of Organization
- Take notes in every class

- Read their school material
- Complete their homework & study

You will need to:

- Help them maintain their 1-2-3 Succeed Planner and System of Organization
- Check their notes
- Encourage them to read school materials
- Hold them accountable for doing their homework and studying

**In addition to explaining each of your responsibilities, also explain the following:**

Productive Time will take place every day after school. You can schedule Productive Time at the beginning of the week, or you can just plan it as you go along. Whether scheduled or not, Productive Time begins when you tell your child, It's Productive Time, please sit at your workstation and begin doing your homework.

At the start of Productive Time, you will sit with your child and check their planner and binders. When doing so you will help them stay organized by adjusting and correcting their planner entries to the proper format, chunking their assignments, filing their papers, and giving feedback on their notetaking. You will need to do this without frustration, judgment, or criticism.

While you check your child's school materials, they will be doing their homework. Once you are done checking, you are free to either stay with your child and do work of your own (i.e., paperwork, paying bills, reading, writing) or leave your child alone while you tend to other responsibilities. If you leave your child, it is important to stay nearby and check on them periodically. Your child needs to know that even if you are not in the same room, you are monitoring them throughout Productive Time.

Productive Time can end once your child informs you that they have completed all their homework and other Productive Time responsibilities. Once this happens, you will check and confirm that all your child's homework is done, give feedback on their planner, review and give feedback on their notes, quiz them for any upcoming tests, and ask questions about grades, assignments, and other school matters.

If you deem your child's work complete and done to satisfaction, they are free to enjoy the rest of the evening without any restrictions. If, however, you deem your child's work not complete or done to satisfaction, they lose all their privileges for the remainder of the evening or until they show you the completed work done to your satisfaction.

After explaining Productive Time to your child, emphasize that while it sounds difficult and unpleasant, it really is not that bad. Explain that throughout Productive Time, you are going to be as patient, understanding, and supportive as possible; the goal of Productive Time is not to give your child a hard time, but make their school life easier and more successful, and that by working together that goal is certain to be accomplished!

**Step 2 - Initiate the Start of Productive Time By Having Your Child View the Program Introduction and Lessons 1-3 of The Six Success Skills at [www.123succeed.com](http://www.123succeed.com):**

It is best to initiate Productive Time over the course of a weekend. Have your child go to [www.123succeed.com](http://www.123succeed.com) and view the following videos on the designated days:

- Saturday: 1-2-3 Succeed Program Introduction
- Saturday: Six Success Skills Introduction and Lesson 1 (Organization)
- Sunday: Six Success Skills Lesson 2 (Note Taking) & Lesson 3 (Reading School Materials)

By initiating Productive Time over the weekend, you will ensure your child has enough time to view the lessons and implement the instructions. Success Skills Lesson 1 (Organization) will require approximately 2.5 hours, and Success Skills Lessons 2 (Note Taking) and 3 (Reading School Materials) will require a combined 2.5 hours.

Inform your child that they need to view Success Skills - Lesson 1 and set up their planner according to the instructions provided. Once your child has completed Success Skills - Lesson 1, review their planner and assist them in gathering the school materials necessary to implement the color-coded organization plan. Once you have done so, choose the best location for Productive Time and assist your child in setting up their workstation.

Next, have your child view Success Skills - Lessons 2 (Note Taking) and Lesson 3 (Reading School Materials). Once your child has viewed both lessons, discuss the information and help them set up their notebooks for the four-point note-taking system. Inform your child they will be expected to take notes and read school materials daily.

Once your child has viewed Success Skills - Lessons 1-3 and set up their planner, binders, notebooks, and workstation, inform your child they will have their first Productive Time the next school day. This will be on Monday if you are following the recommendations thus far.

### **Be realistic about the first few weeks of Productive Time.**

Understand that it is going to take time and patience to establish a consistent Productive Time routine. The first few weeks may be rough. Both you and your child may struggle to carry out your Productive Time responsibilities.

Your child may resist and become oppositional towards Productive Time. They may struggle with using the planner, taking notes, and completing their homework. They may forget to bring home their planner and other school materials. They may get emotional when questioned or given guidance regarding their schoolwork or other Productive Time responsibilities.

You may forget or be too tired to initiate Productive Time. You may not have the motivation or patience to go through your child's planner or notebooks. You may feel angry or resentful that your child needs the extra attention. You may feel overwhelmed about adding one more responsibility to your already stressful and demanding daily routine.

Do not be discouraged by the challenges of Productive Time or the slow pace of progress. Understand that your child's school difficulties did not develop overnight and that they will not be resolved overnight. Focus on the idea of progress not perfection.

For the first few weeks, consider it an accomplishment if you and your child can simply initiate and carry out Productive Time. Do not worry or be upset about the quality of your child's schoolwork or grades. Be happy with the smallest of achievements and be generous in deeming work done to satisfaction. Assure your child that if they stay with it and continue to carry out their Productive Time

responsibilities, good things will happen. Take failures and setbacks in stride. Be persistent in restarting Productive Time whenever you realize you have not done it in some time.

### **Step 3 - Have Your Child View Lessons 4-6 of the Six Success Skills and Require Them to Practice Those Skills Whenever They Need to Prepare for a Quiz, Test, or Exam:**

Once your child is consistently implementing Success Skills Lessons 1-3, have them view Success Skills Lessons 4-6. You can do this any time after the first week of initiating Productive Time. Lessons 4-6 will teach your child crucial study and test taking skills and strategies. Once your child has completed these lessons, discuss the key learning points from each lesson and provide them with the recommended materials (for example, flash cards). Inform your child from that point forward, you will expect them to apply the recommended study and test taking skills and strategies, and you will assist them in doing so by checking their flash cards and quizzing them the night before quizzes, tests, and exams.

If your child shows any interest or willingness to learn more student success strategies, have them view the Three Ingredients to Success Lessons 1-4 and the Understanding and Overcoming Roadblocks Lesson.

### **Step 4 - When Deemed Necessary - Switch to Discipline Mode and Impose Productive Time. As Explained Earlier in this Section, This Step Can Only Be Taken If You Have Answered “Yes” to All Five Questions Regarding Choosing Your Battles Wisely:**

It is best to implement the following instructions during a time when you have adequate self-mastery and a strong parent-child relationship. By doing so, you will hopefully reduce the intensity of your child's negative response and the likelihood of conflict.

After explaining Productive Time as indicated in Step #1, continue with the conversation, and tell your child that because they continue to struggle in school, you have decided to impose Productive Time. Stay emotionally in control regardless of your child's reaction and, in a calm but commanding tone of voice, inform your child of the Productive Time rules and consequences.

#### **Explain to your child the following Productive Time rules:**

1. Your child must write their homework assignments down in their planner every day for every class in the correct format (the correct format can be found in Lesson 1 of the Six Success Skills Student Success Training portion of this program).
2. Your child must bring their planner to and from school every day.
3. Your child must complete each day's homework assignments including projects and studying.
4. Your child must sit in a designated location during Productive Time.
5. Your child must show you their planner at the start and conclusion of each Productive Time. All homework assignments must be written in your child's planner every day. If no homework is given, your child must write “None” in the designated space.
6. Your child must do their homework and study for the designated time.
7. Your child must do homework and study without any distractions. This means no internet scrolling, social media, TV, cell phone, video games, or other privileges are allowed during Productive Time.

The only exception to this rule is listening to background music if that helps them focus.

8. Your child may take a quick 5-minute break (to stretch, use the bathroom, or get a drink) every 20 minutes of Productive Time.

A special note regarding Rule #1: Your child needs to write their homework assignments down in their planner every day, for every class in the correct format. No one, not teachers, guidance counselors, or child study team case managers, can be responsible for making sure your child writes their assignments down. This will be solely your child's responsibility. This philosophy differs from the approach taken by many parents and helping professionals. Often, teachers or other staff members are asked to monitor and make sure a child is writing down homework assignments. I do not support this often-used approach for the simple reason that I have never seen it work. On the other hand, I have seen many students develop the habit of using their planner consistently when they are held accountable for doing so.

**Explain to your child the following Productive Time consequences:**

- If your child does not write assignments down in their planner correctly, they will lose at least half of their privileged time for the remainder of the evening.
- If your child does not use Productive Time constructively (for example if they get up frequently, doodle, and procrastinate), the clock stops ticking, and Productive Time is extended by the amount of time that is being wasted.
- If your child does not complete their homework by the end of Productive Time, they will not have any privileges for the remainder of the evening or until they show you all their completed work. No privileges mean no use of TVs, computers, cell phones, video games, or other items or activities deemed privileges. Of course, your child is free to finish their homework or spend time with the family.

Next, explain to your child the exact instructions you will give them at the start of Productive Time. The purpose of this is to make your child aware of the exact routine that will be followed, and to emphasize the structured and serious nature of Productive Time.

**Tell your child the following:**

Every day at the START of Productive Time, I am going to say, "It's Productive Time, you have 10 minutes to get to the kitchen table (or wherever the designated workstation is), take out your planner, and begin your homework."

After the ten minutes have passed, I'm going to say, "It's now Productive Time, the clock starts to tick when you show me your planner."

DURING Productive Time, if I see you are not doing your homework, I will remind you to focus and be more productive, and I will monitor you more closely.

If you are doing your homework, I will compliment you on your effort, ask you if I can be of any help, and give you the freedom to work on your own.

At the END of Productive Time, I am going to say, "Productive Time is now over, please show me all of

your completed homework.”

If all your homework is complete and done to my satisfaction, I am going to say, “Great job, all your homework is done... You have all of your privileges for the rest of the evening.”

If all your homework is not complete or not done to my satisfaction, I am going to say, “I am sorry, you did not complete all of your homework (or you did not complete it to my satisfaction), you have lost your privileges for the rest of the evening or until you show me your completed homework.”

Once you explain all the rules, consequences, and instructions for Productive Time, you initiate Productive Time and follow through with all stated rules and consequences.

No matter how much your child protests, complains, argues, yells, cries, or sulks, you stay the course and hold them accountable for using their planner, taking notes, reading school material, completing homework, and studying daily. If they fail to do so, you withhold their privileges for the remainder of the evening or until they show you their completed work. You win whatever battles occur, even if that means going to your bottom-line consequences to do so.

In carrying out Productive Time, have a “failure is not an option” mentality. You understand that the process of imposing Productive Time will be more like a marathon than a sprint. You are ready to stay the course for as long as it takes for your child to cooperate with Productive Time and develop the work habits necessary for school success.

## **7 Keys to Successfully Implementing Productive Time:**

1. You have good self-mastery in implementing Productive Time. You do not become emotional or reactive in response to your child’s coercive resistance. You avoid fighting “fire with fire” no matter how intensely your child escalates their coercive resistance.
2. You make Productive Time your top priority. You do not let other responsibilities or life circumstances get in the way of implementing Productive Time. You have an “everything else can wait” attitude, and you drop whatever you are doing when implementing Productive Time. You do this without anger or resentment. You understand that your child needs this extra support, and you do your best to provide it to them with love and patience.
3. You establish Productive Time as a daily/weekly routine in the manner explained in this lesson. In my experience, the parents who are most successful in implementing Productive Time are those who make it a family-wide routine. In such cases, during Productive Time, every family member is expected to shut off their technology (and other potential distractions) and do their homework, read, exercise, pay bills, or do something else that is considered productive for that individual. This includes both parents and children.
4. You are physically present to initiate and monitor Productive Time. You cannot trust your child to follow through with Productive Time on their own. You cannot ask a babysitter, older sibling, grandparent, or anyone else (no matter how much authority they have over your child) to do it for you. The only exception to this is if you hire a tutor or academic coach to conduct Productive Time with your child.
5. You are consistent in following through with all stated rules and consequences. This is particularly important if you have switched to Discipline Mode and are imposing Productive Time. In Discipline Mode, you are emotionally in control, strong, commanding, and confident in your communication

style and you consistently follow through with all stated consequences.

6. You have persistence and grit in the face of your child's Coercive Resistance. Even if you can implement Productive Time in Relationship Mode and your child is cooperative at the start, at some point your child will resist Productive Time. To have persistence and grit means you do not take your child's coercive resistance personally and you do not let it stop you from following through. No matter how intense your child's coercive resistance may be, you have strong self-mastery, and you are able to endure it without becoming emotional and reactive.
7. You have persistence and grit in the face of your own limitations and failures. The truth is, much to the delight of your child, no matter how motivated you are, you will at times slip up and fall out of your Productive Time routine. In some cases, you might not even realize it until several days or even weeks have gone by. To have persistence and grit means you take those setbacks in stride. You understand that setbacks are normal. When setbacks happen and you realize it, you restart Productive Time over again - over and over again - a million times over if necessary.

### **Final Thoughts Regarding Productive Time**

I developed Productive Time in direct response to the needs of underachieving students and their parents. It has been field tested and modified several times over, and it has been used with hundreds of families. After many years of development and application, I am certain Productive Time is effective in helping underachieving students do better in school. I am enthusiastic about sharing Productive Time with you and encouraging you to give it an honest try. If you administer it as instructed, in the context of Relationship Centered Parenting, it will give you the best chance of helping your child do better in school.

### **Words of Caution Regarding Productive Time**

While I am certain of the value and benefit of Productive Time, I also know it is not for everyone. Productive Time requires a degree of self-mastery, time, energy, and patience that some parents do not have, or are not willing to give. This is particularly true with parents of children who are oppositional and defiant by nature and who more aggressively resist parental guidance and authority.

If you decide that Productive Time is not for you, you must resist the natural tendency to address your child's school underachievement through Coercive Parenting Mode. I say this because in my twenty plus years of working with underachieving students, I have learned that you cannot nag, lecture, reprimand, guilt, shame, punish, or threaten a child into doing better in school. No matter how emotional you get or how hard you push, I have never seen these Coercive Communication tactics work - never, not once. In addition, these tactics have the potential to do great harm.

As a matter of review, here are the 6 most common problems with Coercive Communication presented in Section 1 – Why Nagging, Lecturing, and Yelling Are the Norm:

1. Coercive Communication does not work with all children. 20% of children do not respond favorably to Coercive Communication. Instead of backing down and cooperating with parents (as 80% of children do), 20-percenters become more emotional, oppositional, and defiant in their response. In my clinical experience, many 20-percenters have a mental health condition, learning disability, or personality trait that makes it difficult for them to be understanding and accommodating in response to the feelings of others.

2. When Coercive Communication does not work, it will not work, no matter how harsh or intense it becomes. Rarely does a true 20-percenter convert to an 80-percenter. In fact, during the teenage years, the percentage of non-responders increases to 30- 35%. Fortunately, the children that become non-responders during their teenage years usually return to being more cooperative in young adulthood. While they are not considered to be true 20-percenters, during the time in question, they upset and concern their parents just as if they were.
3. Even if Coercive Communication works at times, it usually does not feel good. If it takes you thirty minutes of nagging, lecturing, or threatening your child to take out the garbage or to do their homework, you're not going to feel a sense of pride or accomplishment when they get up and do it. Instead, you will feel frustrated, annoyed, and angry because in your mind, they never listen! In addition, you will wonder what's wrong with you or your child that makes everything so difficult.
4. Coercive Communication can cause the Chirping Bird Syndrome. This occurs when your Coercive Communication is so frequent that your child becomes desensitized to it. Your voice becomes nothing more than background noise. It is like what happens to people who own noisy pets, like a chirping bird. When the bird is first brought home, its chirping can drive the owner insane. However, after several weeks of non-stop chirping, the owner gets used to it and can watch TV or do other activities without being disturbed. If your family is affected by the Chirping Bird Syndrome, you are the bird and your child no longer hears your chirping, no matter how loud or frequent it is.
5. Coercive Communication is a two-way street and because Coercive Parenting Mode begets Coercive Resistance Mode (and vice versa), it can create a family environment of excessive stress, conflict, anger, hurt, and resentment. Over time, this can result in a toxic family environment. A toxic family environment is when family members stop giving each other the benefit of the doubt and anticipate each other's negative responses. Once this occurs, family members feel stressed out just being around each other, even when not a single word is spoken between them. This stress makes everyone highly emotional and reactive. In such cases, even a compliment can be misinterpreted as a criticism, and a conflict can ensue. Individuals living in this kind of environment have reported cringing the second they hear the child's school bus or parent's car pulling up in front of the house. A toxic family environment makes all family members more susceptible to a variety of physical and mental health issues.
6. Coercive Communication can cause a broken parent-child relationship. This is the greatest risk associated with the use of Coercive Communication. Once the parent-child relationship is broken, you lose your ability to effectively influence and discipline your child.

If you decide that Productive Time is not for you, instead of resorting to Coercive Parenting Mode, I encourage you to consider addressing your child's school underachievement through Relationship or Save Your Energy Modes. This calls for a more hands-off approach. Of course, this is difficult advice for many parents to hear because they find it difficult to control themselves enough to stop their coercive parenting. It flows out of them like steam from a pressure cooker. For others, it is difficult because they believe it is their parental duty to push their child to excel, particularly in school. They feel guilty or inadequate at the thought of backing off and letting their child struggle or fail.

Either way, these parents find themselves stuck in a no-win situation. They want their child to change and do better in school, but they cannot, or will not, implement Productive Time, or some other program like it. They want to be more effective and reduce the stress and conflict in their home, but they cannot back off and let their child experience the natural consequences of their actions. In both instances, they revert to coercive parenting mode with the hope that at some point it will work; that a



light bulb will go off in their child's head and they will be inspired by the intensity of their emotions and the impact of their rewards and punishments.

If you are stuck in Coercive Parenting when addressing your child's school difficulties, you must ask yourself, "How is that working for me?". If the honest answer is, not very well at all, we are constantly fighting, they continue to do poorly in school, I am totally fed up them, and the stress is now starting to cause problems between me and my spouse - it is time to consider an alternative. You can stop your Coercive Parenting and choose to communicate in Relationship or Save Your Energy Modes.



To make this change, you will need to change your mindset. Instead of feeling responsible for the outcome of your child's life and working so hard to prevent and protect them from the pain and consequences of their actions, you will need to embrace the attitude of *loving detachment*.

With loving detachment your mindset is, "I love you more than life itself and would jump in front of a bus for you." At the same time, "I understand this is your life and you must experience it on your own terms. I trust that you are strong enough to cope with all life's adversities and that you will learn and grow from the pain and consequences of your actions. In addition, while I hope and pray that as an adult you will live a healthy, successful, and happy life, my happiness and well-being is not dependent on it. As close as we are, we are two separate people, and we are each responsible for the quality and outcome of our own lives. I am hopeful I can feel good about my life even if the outcome of your life is not what I wished it would be."

To develop this attitude of loving detachment, you will need to reflect on it daily. You can do so by stating it to yourself as you would a prayer, mantra, or meditation. Of course, you will also need to act on it. This will require you to step back and allow your child to experience the natural consequences of their actions. Whether it be leaving the house without a coat and being cold throughout the day, or not studying for a test and getting a poor grade, the challenge will be the same. You will need to override your instinct to protect and control your child, and you will need to let go and have faith that your child can learn and grow from the pain and consequences of their actions. You will need to do this repeatedly until you discover the truth behind loving detachment; the more you let go, the more powerful natural consequences become, and the more likely your child will learn from their mistakes. In addition, the more likely your child will seek your support and guidance when needed. Once you know this truth, the shift from Coercive Parenting Mode to Relationship Mode or Save Your Energy Mode will become easier and more natural. This will enable you to restore the peace in your home, the quality of your parent-child relationship, and get you out of the no-win situation you are currently in.

If you decide that Productive Time is not for you, I strongly encourage you to consider the above recommendations and take a more hands-off approach to your child's school difficulties. I can make these recommendations with confidence because of something else I have learned in my twenty years of working with underachieving students and their parents.

There are many different roads to success, some smooth and direct, others bumpy and full of detours. Regardless of the road taken, the key to success has more to do with a person's sense of determination, strength, and resiliency, than good grades and a college diploma. Fortunately, you can

help instill these qualities into your child.

When you have a strong parent child relationship, your child draws inspiration from you and feels more secure and capable in this world. When you have a troubled parent-child relationship, your child is stressed by you and feels more vulnerable and insecure in this world. It is for these reasons that very few things are worth compromising or destroying your parent child relationship over, especially grades and school performance.

Once you develop the mindset of loving detachment, and you recognize that grades are not the most important factor to life success, you will be able to let go and have faith in response to your child's school difficulties. You will be able to do this with a clear conscience knowing that you are being strategic in your response and not neglecting any of your parental responsibilities.

In emphasizing the value of a hands-off approach, I want to be clear about my position on helping a child with school difficulties. I believe it is best to be directly involved in a child's schoolwork and to hold the child accountable to a daily routine for organization, completing homework assignments, and studying for quizzes and tests. I advocate the use of the Productive Time Routine, which I developed over many years of working with underachieving students and their parents. If a child is not agreeable to such a routine, their parent or guardian should respond in Discipline Mode and impose the routine against the child's will. If a parent for any reason cannot do this effectively, then it is best for the parent to take a more hands-off approach. This requires the mindset of loving detachment and the capacity to respond in Relationship or Save Your Energy Modes. While the more hands-off approach is not ideal for addressing a child's school underachievement, it is far healthier and more constructive than responding in Coercive Parenting Mode.

Coercive Parenting Mode is the least effective response to a child's school underachievement, and over time it can cause a great deal of harm to your child and family. Unfortunately, many parents of chronic underachievers get stuck in Coercive Parenting Mode. If this pertains to you, my hope is this lesson has empowered you and given you options for getting out of the no-win situation you are in. I know you can do it and I wish you the best of luck!

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**This concludes Section 4 – Help Your Child Succeed in School. You now have a system (Productive Time) to help your child do better in school. If implemented as instructed, it will help your child develop the habits necessary for school success. Unfortunately, not every parent has the time, energy, or fortitude to implement such a system. If that is the case for you, it is completely understandable. If you cannot implement productive time, the best thing to do is avoid coercive parenting and address your concerns in Relationship Mode or Save Your Energy Mode.**

## ***SECTION 5 - UNDERSTANDING & HELPING YOUR CHILD OVERCOME ROADBLOCKS TO SCHOOL SUCCESS***

In this lesson, you will learn why some kids continue to underachieve in school despite everyone's best efforts to help them. Before I provide you with this information, I first want to acknowledge how you are feeling.

It feels awful to have your child underachieve in school. When this occurs marking period after

marking period, it wears you down. At some point, your concern and compassion turn into frustration and anger. Even though you love your child and always will, at times it is difficult to like them. As your negative feelings intensify and your patience grows thin, your level of Coercive Parenting rises and the relationship between you and your child becomes more combative and strained.

Your child's school difficulties may become a dark cloud that hangs over your family. The stress it causes may spill over to other relationships and create bad feelings between you and your spouse, and others (like teachers, friends, and extended family members) who offer their opinion on how you should be managing your child.

If these are your circumstances, it is crucial you know the following three principles to why some children struggle with emotional, behavioral, and school difficulties. Knowing these principles will help you to better understand the nature of your child's difficulties, cope with the stress you are feeling, and intervene more effectively.

1. If your child could do well, they would do well. No child intentionally chooses to underachieve, and disappoint parents, teachers, or coaches.
2. The brain is the organ that runs our lives. Only when your child's brain is functioning at its best, most healthy level, will they be able to do their best in school.
3. To help your child succeed in school, you must identify, understand, and account for the roadblocks that are negatively impacting them.

### **Principle #1 – If Your Child Could Do Well, They Would Do Well**

Despite how it may appear, no child intentionally chooses to underachieve and disappoint teachers and parents. Children by their very nature, particularly from early childhood to adolescence, want and need to please the important adults in their lives. In addition, children want and need to feel competent and capable in relation to their peers. When children are successful in school, these important needs are met and their self-esteem and motivation for learning grow stronger. Unfortunately, the opposite is also true. When children struggle in school, these important needs are frustrated and their self-esteem and motivation for learning grow weaker.

To protect themselves from the psychological harm of their school difficulties, and to get parents and teachers off their backs, children often resort to the following defense mechanisms:

- Denial: "I'm doing better this marking period. You'll see when I get my report card."
- Minimization: "It's only one missing assignment. It's only one bad grade. It's only the first marking period... It's only 7<sup>th</sup> grade."
- Rationalization: "School is a waste of time, when will I ever need to use this information in life?"
- Blame: "That teacher doesn't like me, he's always picking on me, he's such a jerk."
- Distraction: The child fights with siblings, has frequent emotional meltdowns, and acts out in a variety of ways that divert the parents' attention away from the child's schoolwork.

While some children have a primary defense mechanism that they use all the time, most children use all mentioned mechanisms to varying degrees. These defense mechanisms make it appear as if the

child is intentionally being deceitful, and that they do not genuinely care about school. This is very upsetting to parents, many of whom respond with Coercive Parenting in the hope that it will motivate their child to work harder and do better in school.

For some parents, Coercive Parenting means becoming angry and aggressive. These parents will ground their child for extended periods of time, take away every conceivable privilege, call their child disparaging names, and in some cases, even resort to physical punishment.

For others, Coercive Parenting means becoming hurt, disappointed, and rejecting toward their child. These parents will not talk to their child for days, lecture their child about their lack of future potential, and remind their child that at 18 they are free to move out and fend for themselves.

To avoid such Coercive Parenting tactics, parents must understand the true nature of defense mechanisms. Despite how it may appear, children do not use defense mechanisms to manipulate or deceive others. Instead, they are trying to protect themselves from the frustration, guilt, embarrassment, or shame of their school difficulties and the disappointment they are causing their parents and teachers. When children use these defense mechanisms, they believe what they are saying, and are often just as shocked as their parents to find out the extent of their missing assignments, poor grades, and other school difficulties.

Remember, if your child could do well, they would do well, and they would rise in response to your Coercive Parenting tactics. In other words, they would get motivated, work harder, and do better in school in response to your nagging, lecturing, yelling, and punishments. If this is not happening despite your best efforts, chances are your child is suffering from a roadblock to success and may very well be a 20-percenter as discussed in Section #1 of this presentation.

### **What Are the Roadblocks to Success?**

Roadblocks to success are life circumstances or mental health conditions that negatively impact a child's emotional wellbeing. Roadblocks override a child's willpower and self-discipline and make it difficult for them to consistently stay organized, pay attention, do homework, and study; and they are the main cause of school underachievement and emotional/behavioral difficulties.

Most parents have great difficulty recognizing the presence of roadblocks. Because they want their child to be healthy and capable, it is difficult for them to consider any information that suggests otherwise. As a result, parents are likely to interpret their child's school underachievement as a willful act of laziness or poor motivation, rather than an indication of roadblocks. Despite being negative and critical, this interpretation brings parents comfort because it implies that a child has control over their school difficulties and can correct it at will. While this interpretation can protect parents from the upset of recognizing their child's roadblocks, it also prevents them from seeking the services and resources their child needs.

If your child has ongoing school difficulties, it may be time to consider the possibility that roadblocks are a factor. If you are ready to do this, there are two broad categories of roadblocks you need to know about: External Roadblocks and Internal Roadblocks.

### **What Are External Roadblocks?**

External Roadblocks are the negative life circumstances, people, events, and experiences that are

detrimental to a child's safety and well-being. There are many diverse types of External Roadblocks.

The following are the External Roadblocks most frequently reported to me by children and parents:

- A child is rejected by a close friend (or group of friends). The friend turns their back on the child and starts hanging out with a new group of kids.
- A child is bullied at school. On a regular basis, they are called names, physically intimidated, or assaulted.
- A child has parents with marital problems. They fight aggressively and make the child's home feel unsafe. The child worries about his parents getting divorced, or at times wishes they would.
- A child has an alcoholic or drug-addicted parent who is not involved in the child's life, or who is often in a bad mood and takes it out on the child.
- A child has a parent with a debilitating or chronic illness and the child witnesses the parents' physical and emotional pain and suffering.
- A child has a personal secret, perhaps their sexual orientation or history of abuse, and worries that if others find out, they will be rejected, mistreated, or punished.
- A child experiences the death of a family member, friend, or classmate. The death may be due to an illness or some unexpected tragedy.

External Roadblocks stand in the way of a child's success because they stress and distract the child from schoolwork. Over time, the stress of External Roadblocks can cause many physical and psychological symptoms including the following:

- Preoccupation and obsessive thinking about the External Roadblock
- Difficulty with focus and attention
- Feelings of anxiety, worry, sadness, anger, or insecurity about life
- A loss of motivation towards school and other life activities
- Headaches, stomachaches, and other digestive problems. Rapid heartbeat, heart palpitations, sweating, numbness or tingling sensations, and other physical symptoms
- Thoughts of suicide or violence
- The development of a variety of Internal Roadblocks, which you will learn about shortly

It is easy to see how External Roadblocks can interfere with a child's school success. Since most children are reluctant to talk about their personal lives, it is important that parents and teachers be on the lookout for external roadblocks and intervene on the child's behalf when necessary. In some instances, this may require the involvement of school administrators, police officers, or other authority figures responsible for the safety and welfare of children. Only by removing or minimizing the impact of External Roadblocks, can children do their best in school. If your child is experiencing External Roadblocks, you are encouraged to do whatever you can to protect and help your child.

### **What Are Internal Roadblocks?**

Internal Roadblocks are mental health conditions that interfere with a child's ability to function at home, in school, or other major areas of life.

To understand the impact of Internal Roadblocks, it is important to understand how the brain works.

### **Principle #2 – The Brain Is the Organ That Runs Our Lives. Only When Your Child's**

## **Brain Is Functioning at Its Best, Most Healthy Level, Will He Be Able to Do His Best in School**

The brain generates every thought, feeling, and action we will ever have. When the brain is working at its best, most healthy level, our thoughts, feelings, and actions are consistent with our goals. This enables us to do the following:

- We can control our emotions
- We can think rationally
- We can understand and cooperate with others
- We can learn, remember, and communicate information accurately and effectively
- We have strong motivation and self-discipline in pursuing our goals

Simply put, when our brain is working at its' best, most healthy level, we are emotionally stable, motivated, and self-disciplined in taking care of our responsibilities, getting along with others, and effectively managing our lives.

Unfortunately, because the brain is an organ, just like all other organs of the body, it is susceptible to glitches and malfunctions. When we experience glitches and malfunctions of the brain, our emotions, urges, and impulses get the best of us and override our will and better judgment. This makes it difficult for us to do what is necessary in pursuing our goals, and it makes us vulnerable to a variety of mental health conditions.

### **What Are Glitches?**

Glitches are the mildest of the Internal Roadblocks. They cause a temporary breakdown in healthy functioning. While glitches may occur randomly, they are often triggered or intensified by stress. Glitches are normal. Everyone has glitches in every organ of their body.

For example, the skin is an organ, and if you have skin, you will have glitches of the skin. It does not matter what kind of skin you have; you can have the clearest and most beautiful skin in the world. If you have skin, you will have glitches of the skin, and therefore at times you will have pimples, dry skin, or a rash.

It doesn't matter who you are, there is not a person in the world who has not had glitches of the skin. The same is true with the brain. The brain is an organ, and if you have a brain, you will have glitches of the brain.

It does not matter what kind of brain you have; it can be the happiest and most optimistic brain in the world. If you have a brain, you will have glitches of the brain and at times, you will feel down and discouraged about life.

You can have the type of brain that enables you to pay attention, work hard, and be self-disciplined. If you have a brain, you will have glitches of the brain and at times, you will feel distracted, lazy, and impulsive.

It doesn't matter who you are, no one is perfect. Everyone has glitches of the brain, and at times everyone struggles with how they think, feel, and act. While all of us experience glitches, many of us also experience malfunctions.

## What Are Malfunctions?

Malfunctions are the most serious of the Internal Roadblocks. They cause an ongoing or severe breakdown in healthy functioning. There are many distinct types of malfunctions that go by a variety of names including diseases, disorders, illnesses, conditions, syndromes, and disabilities.

Malfunctions are normal in that they are common; many people experience malfunctions with various organs of their body.

To use the skin as an example again: while everyone at times will have a pimple or two (which is a glitch), many people will have acne (which is a malfunction). Acne is a skin condition that causes frequent and severe pimple outbreaks. The acne can be severe enough to cause physical pain and permanent scarring.

The same is true with the brain. While everyone will at times have glitches of the brain, many people will have malfunctions of the brain.

For example, while everyone at times feels down and discouraged, many people experience depression. Depression is a disorder of the brain that causes people to feel excessively sad, worried, angry, irritable, or hopeless. It can last from weeks to years and often requires medical treatment. People with depression are at significant risk of poor self-esteem, social isolation, and school or work difficulties.

While everyone at times has trouble focusing and doing work, many people have ADHD. ADHD is a disorder of the brain that makes it difficult to concentrate, sit still, and complete tasks. It affects people 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and usually lasts a lifetime. People with ADHD are at greater risk of relationship problems, car accidents, substance abuse, and school or work underachievement or failure.

While glitches of the brain can slow a person down, they are not strong enough to stop a person from achieving their goals. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for malfunctions. Malfunctions can cause many life problems and limit a person's potential. Fortunately, it does not have to be this way. Malfunctions can be overcome through proper identification and treatment. Therefore, it is important for parents to be aware of malfunctions and to know how to intervene with them.

There are many Internal Roadblocks that negatively affect a child's ability to succeed in school. The three most common are:

- Mood Regulation Disorders
- Attention Regulation Disorders and
- Learning Disabilities

The following is a brain-based model for understanding these Internal Roadblocks. It is not intended to be a literal explanation of brain anatomy or functioning, but a brain-based metaphor that emphasizes the physiological nature of Internal Roadblocks.

## **Mood Regulation Disorders**

Mood Regulation Disorders are the most common of the Internal Roadblocks. These roadblocks include conditions such as depression and anxiety. Mood Regulation Disorders occur when there is a malfunction in the limbic system of the brain.

The limbic system is located at the core of the brain. It plays a crucial role in regulating emotions, urges, impulses, and cravings. Because of its role in these instinctual responses, the limbic system is often referred to as the “animal brain.”

Scientists and researchers used to believe Mood Regulation Disorders were related to an overactive limbic system caused by a deficiency in the neurotransmitter serotonin. Therefore, medical treatments focused on medications that raised serotonin levels. While these medications have been helpful in the treatment of mood regulation disorders, current research has challenged the theory that these disorders are caused by a serotonin deficiency.

When your child’s limbic system is working properly, they experience their emotions within a healthy range of intensity. This means that your child’s emotions are reasonable and proportionate to whatever life circumstances are occurring, and that they can respond accordingly.

For example, if your child’s limbic system is working properly and they have a math test in five days, they will experience the appropriate amount of anxiety in anticipation of their test. On a scale of 0-10, their anxiety might be a 2 on the day they learn about the test, and progressively rises to a 7 on the night before the test. At those levels, their anxiety would motivate them to study and sharpen their mental focus in doing so.

When there is a malfunction in the limbic system, your child experiences their emotions outside of the healthy range of intensity. This causes a great deal of emotional instability and makes it more likely for them to overreact to frustrating and stressful circumstances.

For example, if your child’s limbic system is not working properly and they have a math test in five days, they may experience an excessive degree of anxiety in anticipation of the test. On a scale of 0-10, their anxiety might be a 7 on the day they learn about the test, and quickly rises to a 10 on the night before the test. At those levels, their anxiety would interfere with their ability to study. They would be distracted by worrisome thoughts of failing the test, lowering their GPA, disappointing you, or not getting into a good college.

## **Attention Regulation Disorders**

Attention Regulation Disorders are the second most common of the Internal Roadblocks. These roadblocks include conditions such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and Oppositional Defiant Disorder. Attention Regulation Disorders occur when there is a malfunction in the prefrontal cortex region of the brain.

The prefrontal cortex is located on the surface of the brain directly behind the forehead. It plays a significant role in mental focus, impulse control, decision-making, and self-discipline. Because of its role in what are considered higher level cognitive skills, the prefrontal cortex is often referred to as the “executive” or “wise” brain.



Many scientists and researchers believe that Attention Regulation Disorders are related to an underactive prefrontal cortex caused by an imbalance in the neurotransmitter dopamine. That is why medical treatments often include medications that raise dopamine levels.

Only when your child's prefrontal cortex is working properly can they consistently pay attention in class, stay organized, use their planner, do their homework, and study for quizzes and tests.

When there are malfunctions of the prefrontal cortex, children will experience one or more of the following symptoms:

- Inattention
- Hyperactivity
- Impulsivity
- Difficulty with self-discipline

The onset, number, and intensity of these symptoms will determine the type of Attention Regulation Disorder and its impact on the child's school performance.

Children with Attention Regulation Disorders often have significant school difficulties. Many times, these difficulties become evident at important transition points such as when a child goes from elementary to middle school, or middle school to high school.

### **Learning Disabilities:**

Learning Disabilities are the third most common of the Internal Roadblocks. These roadblocks include conditions such as Dyslexia, Dyscalculia, Dysgraphia, Auditory Processing, Visual Processing Disorder, and others. Learning Disabilities occur when there is a malfunction in one of the information processing centers of the brain.

Information processing centers are found throughout the brain and include (but are not limited to) many of the following regions:

- **The Prefrontal Cortex:** The Prefrontal Cortex is found on the surface behind your forehead. In addition to its role in our ability to pay attention, be organized, predict rewards and consequences, problem solve, stay motivated, and control impulses; the prefrontal cortex also plays a key role in problem solving, memory, language, judgment, and rational and analytical thinking.
- **The Temporal Lobes:** The Temporal Lobes are located on the sides of your head around your temples and ears. The Temporal Lobes have many functions in learning, such as organizing information, memory, and speech. It plays a role in memory retrieval, visual memory, and factual memories.
- **The Amygdala:** The Amygdala is located at the core of the brain (near the lower part of the temporal lobes) and is considered part of the limbic system. The Amygdala is responsible for the storage and organization of memories relating to emotion. These memories are later recalled and used for reaction in similar circumstances. It also plays a role in which memories to store and in organizing the storage of all memories. This role is important in learning.
- **The Hippocampus:** The Hippocampus is also located at the core of the brain and considered part

of the limbic system. The Hippocampus is involved in the formation of new memories. It does this by creating concepts and organizing experiences into them. This helps identify the context of actions and events.

I refer to the information processing centers of the brain as the student brain. When there are malfunctions in the student brain, a child will have difficulty receiving, processing, storing, or communicating information accurately and effectively.

It is important to note the presence of learning disabilities does not tell us anything about a child's intelligence. A child can be highly intelligent despite having learning disabilities. To confirm what I am saying, do an internet search on the topic of famous people with learning disabilities. You will be surprised at the extensive list of successful scientists, writers, athletes, actors, and politicians your search turns up. This is an important idea to share with children because many of them feel "dumb" because of their learning disabilities. Knowing this information can help them feel more comfortable talking about their school difficulties and accepting whatever extra help and support they need.

### **Additional Internal Roadblocks**

In addition to the three most common Internal Roadblocks, there are several others you need to be aware of including:

- Substance Abuse Disorders
- Personality Disorders
- Impulse Control Disorders
- Eating Disorders
- Other Psychiatric Disorders

Internal Roadblocks are the result of malfunctions in the brain, usually involving one or more of the four brain regions described in our brain-based model. Children with one roadblock are likely to have multiple roadblocks. This is because a malfunction in one region of the brain has the potential to throw the brain out of balance and disrupt the functioning of multiple brain regions.

While we do not know the exact cause of most Internal Roadblocks, the following conditions are often a factor:

- Heredity- roadblocks often run in the family.
- Problems during pregnancy and birth - learning disabilities can result from anomalies in the developing brain, fetal exposure to alcohol or drugs, low birth weight, oxygen deprivation, by premature or prolonged labor, illness, or injury.
- Accidents after birth - Internal Roadblocks can be caused by head injuries, malnutrition, or toxic exposure (such as heavy metals or pesticides).
- External Roadblocks - traumatic life experiences can alter brain functioning and activate many brain malfunctions.

Since it is outside the scope of this presentation to go any further in our discussion of Internal Roadblocks and their causes, my hope is that this introductory information will motivate you to do more research on your own.

By taking the time to educate yourself more fully about the Internal Roadblocks discussed in this

section, you will be in the best position possible to identify the roadblocks that may be impacting your child's life and to assist in overcoming them.

### **Principle #3 - To Help Your Child Succeed In School, You Must Accurately Identify, Understand and Address Whatever Roadblocks Exist**

The good news about roadblocks is, in most cases, they can be successfully treated and overcome. The key to doing so is to accurately identify the roadblocks in question. This is crucial because different roadblocks respond to different treatments. For example, if a child was having difficulty concentrating because of an anxiety disorder, the most effective treatments would be individual Cognitive Behavior Therapy and medications that raise serotonin levels. On the other hand, if a child was having difficulty concentrating due to Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, the most effective treatments would be Family Therapy and medications that raise dopamine levels. In referencing medications, I am not in any way recommending or advocating their use. The decision to medicate a child is solely at the discretion of parents in consultation with a trusted physician. The point here is to show how different roadblocks respond to different treatments and the need for an individualized treatment plan.

If you think your child may have roadblocks to success, go to [123succeed.com](http://123succeed.com) and download the Roadblocks Assessment Questionnaire. Your download will also include the answer key for determining the results of the questionnaires. Keep in mind, your results are not intended to provide you with a medical diagnosis or treatment plan - only a physician or mental health professional can do so. Instead, they are intended to be a starting point for better understanding the nature of your child's difficulties and available treatment options.

Do not be alarmed if your results indicate that your child has multiple roadblocks. This is common since the Roadblocks Questionnaire is a screening tool that is extremely sensitive to the possibility of roadblocks, and errors on the side of false positives. You are encouraged to discuss all identified roadblocks with your child's physician and follow through with whatever recommendations are provided. Of course, it is possible that your child's physician may determine they do not have any of the roadblocks in the questionnaire, and no further action is needed.

If you are reluctant to fill out the questionnaire because you fear your child will be labeled, consider the following. Labels are unavoidable. Some can hurt and some can heal. When children struggle in school, they often hear labels like lazy, slacker, and underachiever directed at them. Whether they admit it or not, they also give themselves labels like lazy, bored, and dumb. These are the labels that hurt, and eventually cause the worst learning disability of all: the loss of interest in learning. The opposite holds true for labels that help children feel understood and give them insight into the nature of their struggles. I will share my own personal story with you to show this point.

I had major roadblocks in my childhood and early adulthood, one of them being a learning disability that caused me to struggle in school. I remember (in middle school) sitting in class, waiting for my turn to read aloud, and feeling ashamed knowing I would not get through a paragraph without making several mistakes. By the time I was in high school, my self-esteem was at an all-time low and I was certain I would not make it to graduation.

What turned my life around was my passion for the game of basketball. I really wanted to play for my high school team, and to do so I had to have a 2.0 GPA. With mostly Ds and a couple of Fs on my first marking period report card, things did not look good. Fortunately, I had some great coaches and teachers who were willing to help. They taught me several study skills (like those found at

123succeed.com) and held me accountable for doing my schoolwork (like the Productive Time Routine). Through my own hard work, and the support of others, I was able to graduate high school, and eventually college, with respectable grades.

It was not until my early twenties that I discovered I had a learning disability. At the time, I was thinking about attending graduate school but felt very insecure about doing so.

Even though I had a college degree, academically I felt like a fraud. At the age of 23, I still had trouble with my reading and writing skills. I feared this meant I was dumb, and it was only a matter of time before I would be exposed. I also feared that with my limited ability, there was no way I could make it through graduate school. Discovering I had a learning disability changed all of that.

I now had a name for what was affecting me. It was called Dyslexia. This label was much better than the labels I put upon myself. It provided me with an explanation for why I struggled in school. It reassured me I was not alone; that there were many people just like me, and there were professionals who could understand and help. Learning all of this was empowering. It gave me the reassurance, hope, and courage to face my fears and receive help for my learning difficulties.

With this newfound awareness, I improved my reading and writing skills (this certainly did not happen overnight, and to this day I still have some deficits), attended graduate school, devoted my life to the service of others who struggle with similar life difficulties, and achieved my dream of opening my private practice.

While there were many factors to the outcome of my life, the healing powers of a label like Dyslexia certainly was important and helpful! Do not be afraid of any roadblocks! Take what you have learned in this lesson and be determined to figure out what is causing your child's school difficulties. Only by doing so can you help your child maximize and achieve their fullest potential. I know you want this more than anything, and I hope that my Relationship Centered Parenting and 123succeed.com resources are helpful to you and your child.

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**This concludes Section 5 - Understanding and Helping Your Child Overcome Roadblocks to Success. You now understand, despite their low grades and poor work habits, your child wants to succeed. As well as the importance of healthy brain functioning, and the need to accurately identify, understand, and treat whatever roadblocks are affecting your child.**

## ***Section 6 – Closing Remarks***

This concludes the Relationship Centered Parenting presentation. I hope you found the information worthwhile and relevant to your family's circumstances. I encourage you to implement the ideas and strategies provided. I am confident that in doing so, you will become more effective in managing your child's behavior and creating a loving and cooperative family environment. My confidence is based on my many years of clinical experience and witnessing how Relationship Centered Parenting has helped so many of the families I have treated, and my belief that it can help you in the same way.

In closing, I want to thank you for taking the time to download and read my Relationship Centered Parenting transcript. I wish you and your family the best of health and wellbeing!