

Marvin Marshall's **Parenting *without* Stress**[®]

How to Raise Responsible Kids While Keeping a Life of Your Own

Parenting Tips for Always Staying in Control—*without* Using Coercion in Any Way:

P = Send POSITIVE messages.

Become aware of the number of times you state something negatively that **could be stated positively**.

Also, promise with the positive by using *contingencies*, rather than *consequences*—*which are usually interpreted as punishments*. Notice the difference between how the following two are heard:

“As soon as you finish your work, you can go.” (Contingency, stated in the positive)

vs. “If your work is not done, you’re not going.” (Same message, but negatively stated)

C = Offer CHOICES.

Choice empowers. The choices can be limited, but the sooner a young person starts to make choices the more responsible the person will become. If a youngster will not do chores or fulfill responsibilities, **increase** the number of options so the child has more from which to choose. Choice gives ownership, a critical component for changing behavior. **Elicit**, rather than **impose**, and **offer 3 options** (choices).

In relationships, not losing is more important than winning. As long as a person has a choice, the person does not lose. Your child has a desire for empowerment, for control. Offer *reasonable* choices.

A person always has the possibility to choose a response—be it to a situation, a stimulus, or an urge.

Choice ends when life ends. Don’t accept victim-type thinking, such as: “He made me do it.” “I couldn’t control myself.” “I had no other choice.” People who believe they are victims can NEVER be happy.

R = Encourage REFLECTION.

Reflection fosters growth and responsibility. **Ask evaluative questions that lead to reflection**.

Here is a series of four reflective questions that prompt changes in behaviors:

(1) “What do you want?” (2) “Is what you are choosing to do helping you get what you want?”

(3) “If what you are choosing to do is not getting what you want, then what is your plan?”

(4) “What are your procedures to implement your plan—specifically, “What will you do?” “What else?”

Be cautious of “why?” questions; they allow the person to give an excuse, be a victim, and avoid responsibility.

Besides, people (of any age) often do not know, find it difficult, or don’t want to articulate *why* they do *what* they do.

- ✓ **Limit your “telling.”** This requires constant attention. Although your telling may be to help, it is often perceived as criticism. *Telling* sends a negative message—especially to adolescents—that what the youngster is doing is not good enough. No one likes to hear this message. *Do you like to be told what to do?*

Consider: When you *tell*, who does the thinking? When you *ask*, who does the thinking?

- ✓ **Seek to understand.** Listen to your child—without inserting your opinion. *Be curious*—instead of judgmental. Cultivating the habit of listening to understand can transform relationships.

Avoid listening *in anticipation* of what you think your child will say. This poor listening habit will tempt you to interrupt. Listen to learn. *Your child wants to be acknowledged*. A parent who listens well acknowledges. Besides, your listening can be a model for adolescents—who do not listen well.

“Zip the lip” is extremely difficult for a parent, but it is the surest way to improve communications.

- ✓ **Express your needs.** Give your child the opportunity to help you. Children grow by giving. “I need you to help me with this.” “I need quiet time.” “I need assistance with dinner.”

- ✓ **Use acknowledgments** more than praise. Acknowledgment/ recognition/ validation simply **affirm**. “I see you made your bed,” fosters reflection and feelings of self-competence—which leads to more growth. In contrast, saying, “I’m so proud of you for making your bed,” encourages decision-making to please you. Developing responsibility, rather than pleasing you, is better for your child.

- ✓ **Rewards do not motivate young people to be responsible.** *They merely change motivation*—from thinking of the *act* to thinking of the *bribe*. Let your child know that you expect responsible behavior. Society does not give rewards for expected standards of behavior.

Besides, rewards fail the critical test: “What will I get if no one is there to see me?”

- ✓ **You can remain authority** without being punitive by *reflective questioning*. Instill the mindset that your objective is to **raise responsibility**—not to punish. However, if a consequence is necessary, **elicit** it from the youngster—**rather than impose it**. In this way, the youngster owns the consequence. The reason is simple: People do not argue with their own decisions.