Acknowledgments

Every story in this book is based on composite children from composite families, along with just a touch of poetic license. If you recognize yourself, it is because of the universality of our collective experiences, and not because I have been in your living room. Speaking with and listening to hundreds of parents and professionals (including physicians, lawyers, mediators, educators, therapists, psychologists, social workers, nurses, school secretaries) who deal with children on a daily basis, it has become increasingly obvious that the youngsters I encounter in my clinical practice are not all that different from the multitudes who are out there in our schools and our communities. I am grateful to all the parents who have shared with me both the joys and the frustrations of trying to raise responsible, independent, competent, unspoiled children amid the barrage of competing values that define our current culture.

I could not have written this book without a number of important people: Gail Baird from Creative Bound, who tolerates multiple ideas that appear to be going somewhere and who is always enthusiastic on the rare occasion when they do; my colleagues at Centrepointe Professional Services, who share experiences over brown-bag lunches and keep me grounded; Sally, whose unconditional support and constructive advice are always there when needed; Audrey, whose humor and wisdom connect me with my roots; Rolf, who has taught me that there is no such word as “cannot,” so that all things are possible if you are creative and willing to work hard enough, and who lets me have my space when I need it; and, of course, our three grown-up children, Natalie, Katy, and Jorin, who have become adults whom we not only love, but like, and can now pamper without anxiety.

Thank you all.
Pampered Children

We have known for a long time that there are certain factors essential to children’s physical and mental health and well-being: sufficient sleep, good nutrition, fresh air, exercise, nurturing, safety, and security. There is, somehow, something uncomfortable, maybe even unethical, about trying to find ways to deal with behavioral, emotional, or even learning difficulties through therapy or medical treatments if these basic building blocks are not firmly in place. How can a child, or any one of us, cope with even the normal stresses of everyday life if the mind/body machine is not well-lubricated, tuned up, and fully ready to function? Yet, parents are often heard to say: “He simply refuses to eat breakfast,” “We can’t get her to go to bed at a reasonable hour,” “He has become such a couch potato!” or “She just won’t wear a bike helmet.” These statements are worrying enough if the children are in their teens. But what if they are three or four years old? What if they have no energy to learn? Or are falling asleep in class? Or are becoming obese? Or if they sustain a head injury that takes away their future? “But how can we make him?” say the parents. “We’ve tried everything, and nothing works.” It always seems a little odd when parents wonder why they cannot get a child to do homework or the dishes, when they cannot make him do something upon which his safety, or even his life, actually depends.

It is tempting to think that parents such as these perhaps do not care for their children that much, or that they are neglectful or inconsiderate or dismissive. However, closer scrutiny usually indicates that this is far from the truth. In fact, most of these parents place their children’s well-being and happiness way above their own, and would do pretty much everything to
us is: “You gave birth to me. I didn’t ask to be born. You owe me.” So pay up we do.

One of the most powerful reasons why we pamper our children, whether it be by ministering to their every need, buying them material goods, protecting them, or giving in, is to attempt to compensate for something we have experienced in our own lives. Most frequently, this has to do with our own parents, and how we perceive we were raised. We conveniently forget that we were born in different times, with different value systems and different views of child-rearing. If our parents did not appear to care how we felt, this was usually a reflection of their socio-cultural context, and not of their levels of compassion as human beings. Whether this is or is not the case, however, we may genuinely struggle to avoid being overly punitive, or verbally abusive, or explosive. We may make statements like: “I swore I would never raise my voice to my children the way my dad did,” or “My mother would ignore me for days; I’m never going to ignore my children.”

Children of divorce or separation are often the subject of compensatory pampering. We’ve all read the books and the studies; we are all trying our best to avoid harming our children because our marital relationship has failed. Many parents these days seek therapeutic or counseling help in order to try to prevent their children feeling the sting of the separation. There is frequently a conscious effort on the part of parents to over-compensate so that the children do not feel the pain of loss. Sometimes, however, the pampering is a result of an effort to outdo the other parent — to win the “contest” as to who can provide the better environment for the child.

Lisa is the only child of two professional parents who have been divorced for as long as she can remember. Like so many children, she spends equal time with both her father and her mother, traveling back and forth every Sunday evening. Her parents want to make sure that they devote themselves to her whenever she’s in their home, so each of them puts the rest of life on hold every second week. Relationships, hobbies, friends, meetings, doctors’ appointments, work assignments — everything is rescheduled to the week when she’s not with them. The result is that Lisa has had 100 percent parental attention at all times.

When she was little, she got very used to this, and became distraught if anyone or anything interrupted her time with them. Both parents still dread the day when they might have to break it to her that there is a budding relationship in the offing. In fact, her mom actively avoids such involvement, because she knows that Lisa will not tolerate
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symptom</th>
<th>Depressed child</th>
<th>Pampered child</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negative mood</td>
<td>Usually pervasive, regardless of activity</td>
<td>Present when child is asked to do something he does not like to do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-report of sad feelings or hopelessness</td>
<td>Again pervasive; characterized by inability to see way out</td>
<td>Usually situational; child sees solution as adult changing expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irritability or anger</td>
<td>Can be touched off by very, very small issues, even when engaging in positive activities</td>
<td>Evident when denied desired activities, when told “no,” when asked to do something child does not want to do. Not present when engaging in desired activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes in appetite; failure to obtain normal weight gain; or excessive weight gain</td>
<td>Usually present, moderate to severe depression, over a period of time</td>
<td>Child may refuse to eat something he/she does not like in an attempt to be provided with alternatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes in activity level – agitation or slowing down</td>
<td>Generalized behavior over a period of time, or may be associated with ongoing mood swings</td>
<td>Present when child does not want to take part in an activity; then may be slow as means of avoidance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fatigue or tremendous loss of energy</td>
<td>Pervasive, not associated with any activity in particular; child simply cannot energize to do anything</td>
<td>Not usually a feature, unless associated with lack of sleep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings of guilt</td>
<td>Self-blame, self-recrimination quite common</td>
<td>Not usually a feature; child rarely experiences or reports guilt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low self-esteem</td>
<td>Common and pervasive</td>
<td>Sometimes. However, child may have high opinion of him/herself</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The concept of Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD) has been around for just over a century, encompassing symptoms and signs related to inattention, impulsive, and over-activity, with the resulting behavioral and learning difficulties. The diagnostic label has undergone many metamorphoses along the way, reflecting the evolving beliefs of the times. It began as a “defect in moral control” and “volitional inhibition,” later became the “Strauss Syndrome” and “Minimal Brain Dysfunction,” and subsequently “Hyperkinetic Reaction of Childhood” in the late 1960s. Recognition that there was more to it than over-activity led to a number of shifts through various labels to the present-day ADHD, with various recognizable subtypes (e.g., Restless/Impulsive, Inattentive, Hyperactive). ADHD is currently accepted as a neurologically based, rather than a behaviorally based, disorder, that is widely treated with medications such as Ritalin, Concerta, Dexedrine, and so on, and for which parental training in appropriate behavior management techniques is an important adjunct.

An emerging view of the same cluster of behaviors and characteristics postulates a “Disorder of Self Regulation,” which takes account of the fact that these children can become overly focused, as well as exhibiting a short attention span and distractibility, depending on circumstances. The whole notion of self-regulation, of course, requires investigation into whether a child is not only capable of controlling his impulses and maintaining his attention, but also whether he chooses to. Children are not born being able to discipline
themselves; self-discipline arises from years of training, and is, according to child development specialists, a “gift” to children from their parents. It is not, therefore, surprising that many pampered children, who have not been taught to wait, to persevere in the face of challenges, or to focus their attention, end up being misdiagnosed as having ADHD.

Angela, aged six, is referred for assessment toward the second half of her Grade 1 year because she has recently been diagnosed as having an Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder and placed on Ritalin, and her parents are asking for suggestions to help with her learning. She is the only child of their relationship, although both parents each have two older adolescent children from former marriages who spend considerable time in their home and who love Angie to distraction. Laughing, they say that she has “six servants!” They themselves are both experienced parents who figure that they can simply leave her be, and her development will just “unfold” as it did with their other children. They describe her as vivacious, affectionate, and a free spirit, with a wonderfully creative imagination and mature language skills, whose bubbly nature is a delight to them both.

It has come as a major shock at the recent parent/teacher interview to be told that Angie is in danger of being retained in Grade 1 because she is having great difficulty with her academics. Her teacher says that she is not paying attention in class, can’t sit still for circle time, loses things she needs, doesn’t finish what she starts, and is having great difficulty acquiring basic skills, claiming that everything is “boring.” She clearly does not enjoy printing, and prefers to be read to, rather than try to read for herself. The teacher had given them the name of a pediatrician to whom the school frequently referred children they suspected of having ADHD, and suggested they might want to have her assessed. They had filled in a number of forms, the doctor had spent five minutes with Angie, and they had come away with a prescription. Angie, of course, had not been on her best behavior that day, and made a bit of a mess of the waiting room and the doctor’s office. They have read the literature he gave them, and really feel that she fits the description to a T. They started her on the medication a few weeks ago, but they have observed a negative change in her sunny nature, and her teacher is still complaining that her work is not being done.

A thorough psychological assessment, conducted off medication, shows that Angie is a child with high-average abilities and no evidence
doesn’t like doing. She seems to listen fine when being offered something pleasurable.

*Teachers’ response: Often.* Both her classroom teacher and her French teacher comment that Angie often seems to be in a world of her own, or chatting with her neighbor, and that they frequently have to say her name and repeat what they have said in order to ensure that she has listened. It is hard for them to say whether her listening is selective, since they are mostly asking her to get on with her work.

“Does not follow through on instructions and fails to finish school work (not due to oppositional behavior or failure to understand instructions)”

*Parents’ response: Often.* Both parents admit that it is hard to get Angie to finish what she starts, or to get her to do what they ask her to do. She procrastinates and procrastinates, until they end up doing it for her. “It’s just easier,” they both say. “We’re often in too much of a hurry to wait.”

*Teachers’ response: Very often.* Her classroom teacher says that she doesn’t think it’s oppositional behavior, because Angie is such a pleasant, polite, but somewhat immature little girl. She just sees her as not really focusing on what has been said, and being more interested in playing than working.

“Has difficulty organizing tasks or activities”

*Parents’ response: Occasionally.* Most of the time at home, Angie is fairly bossy, and gets everyone else to organize things for her, which they do to keep the peace. But she seems to know what it is she wants and how she wants it!

*Teachers’ response: Very often.* In the classroom, Angie seems very “scattered,” according to her teacher. She can’t seem to get things together to get on with her various activities, and looks to others to do it for her. “It’s as if she’s used to having servants,” her teacher comments.

“Fails to give close attention to detail or makes careless mistakes in schoolwork, work, or other activities”

*Parents’ response: Very often.* Because she is so creative and is always following new ideas, both parents agree that Angie is a “big picture person” for whom details are not important. “She’s just like me,” confesses her mother. “I can’t bear having to dot the ‘I’s and cross the ‘T’s!” They notice that she does not
Learning Problems

It may come as something of a surprise to find a chapter on learning problems in this book. This is because most of us tend quite rightly, not to associate learning disabilities with parental goals or messages, or with children’s personality or behavioral characteristics, but rather with underlying neurological or neuropsychological difficulties within the central nervous system that affect the ability of the brain to process certain types of information in certain ways. There are, however, a number of situations where the messages that a child has internalized about himself or the world around him can interfere to a significant degree with his ability to be an active learner, to practice various skills, and to solve problems independently, using his full range of cognitive abilities and learning strategies.

Jessica is 13 and in Grade 8. She was diagnosed with a mild learning disability about four years ago when the family was living in British Columbia. While she struggles a little with her reading and her written skills, she apparently has her greatest difficulty in math, to the point where she has developed quite a phobia about it, becoming excessively nervous when she knows she is going to be asked to perform. She is currently barely passing, and her teacher is concerned that her advancement to Grade 9 may be affected. Her parents are asking for a reassessment in order to ascertain the degree of problem, to determine how to help her, to settle on an appropriate high school placement, and for guidance for her in terms of future career directions and a life without math.

Thorough psychological and educational assessments confirm that she is a bright young lady, and reveal no pattern of abilities that is even
PART II

The Pampered Child Syndrome
How to Manage It
and How to Avoid It
is simply an isolated instance or passing phase. We can then determine whether any action needs to be implemented to take back a misperceived message, to correct an undesirable behavioral pattern, or to see whether what we, as parents, are doing is consistent with what we are attempting to achieve. Such ongoing monitoring is required if we are to fulfill our mandate as parents. This is what parents do. As Barbara Coloroso has said, parenting is neither time-efficient nor cost-efficient.\(^1\) Nor is it always convenient. However, we need to be aware of some of the same lessons we are trying to teach our children: “short-term pain for long-term gain;” “a stitch in time saves nine;” and “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.”

**Note**

Many parents worry because the managers have very different styles, perceptions, and attitudes with respect to raising children, and spend countless hours, even years, trying to persuade each other to change so that their approaches are homogeneous. Rather than waste energy in this direction, it helps to remember that child-rearing is at least an 18-year-long venture. In any other aspect of life, if we were to consider hiring only two individuals to complete such a lengthy project, we would surely choose people who had as wide a range of different skills, knowledge, perceptions, and experiences as humanly possible. Thus, the task becomes more focused on the development of a common mission statement, policy decisions, and overall blueprint, rather than on personality differences between the executives. We then need to pull together to make our differences work for the family, instead of fighting against each other.

There are not too many advantages to being a single parent. However, once it is understood that, even if outnumbered, a lone manager can never be outvoted, it becomes somewhat clearer that there is no need to make each decision by committee, and that there is never a tie vote on the management team. Single parents can define their own mission statement, use their own family values to set policy, and make determinations about daily decisions without waiting for approval. The responsibility that falls on such shoulders is, however, often overwhelming, especially if it is combined with grief and the remaining aftermath of tragic loss. It is difficult for a single parent to muster the strength and resilience needed to counterbalance the pack mentality that can develop when there is more than one child to manage. And it is simply hard work to run a family alone, even if the hierarchy is uncontested.

If there has been a separation or divorce, children are in the unfortunate position of having to answer to two different managers in two different companies, often complicated by hostile takeovers and reconstituted partnerships. Despite the inherent difficulties that may impact for many years, children are able to deal with the notion that they are working two different jobs. They can deal with a variety of working conditions and management styles, provided that their two managers do not try to interfere in each other’s new company and that they recognize the difficulties faced by the children as they struggle with the frequent transitions from one to the other, and strive to cope with a double life.

Separated or divorced parents of pampered children are in great danger of exacerbating the child’s problems if they enter any kind of bidding war, like Lisa’s parents in Chapter 2. It is so easy to “buy” a child’s affection, even in
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Original intention…</th>
<th>Counterbalance…</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We want our children to be given reasons for things that they are asked to do.</td>
<td>We are willing to share reasons where reasons exist, because this helps everyone understand the philosophies behind what we do in the family. If there is no reason, we shall try to find one. There is no obligation to provide a reason that a child believes is adequate, nor is it necessary to provide a reason with which a child concurs. “Because I said so” is a good enough reason when it comes from a trusted authority figure who has the child’s best interests in mind.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We want our children to be treated equally and fairly.</td>
<td>We recognize different needs in our children, and whenever possible will strive to meet these, as they arise. We also recognize that it is unfair to treat our children equally, since they are then deprived of their right to individuality. We shall attempt to treat each of our children according to his or her needs. We shall also teach them that life is not always fair, and that sometimes we just have to “suck it up.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We want our children to express their feelings and be heard.</td>
<td>We recognize our children’s right to hold an opinion and to express it when the time is appropriate. We also recognize that our children will have a range of feelings, both positive and negative, and they have the right to these. We shall provide an environment where children can express them safely. We shall teach them, however, that, while we are willing to listen to their opinions and feelings, there are times when children should be seen and not heard, especially when other people are talking or when their views are not relevant to the situation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We want our children to have positive self-esteem.</td>
<td>We value our children and we want them to value themselves. However, we recognize that personally driven accomplishments, triumph over adversity, and learning from mistakes are valuable experiences that, in fact, contribute to positive self-esteem. We also recognize that humility and self-awareness are qualities that temper overly inflated self-regard.</td>
</tr>
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should be concentrating on our basic attachment relationships in order to provide the solid foundation they so clearly require.  

The assumption made here is that parents quite definitely matter. In fact, we are the most powerful instrument of change in a family. Professionals can be helpful, but only in so far as we want and allow them to be. It is important for parents to recognize that professionals are the “management consultants” – hired help, whose advice we can seek, but are not obliged to follow. We cannot dump our families in their laps and expect them to be fixed without any work on our part. We need to be willing to be introspective; to examine our own personality and other characteristics that affect our interactions with others; to discuss and collaborate with our partners; to be ready to go it alone if we are forced to do so; and to remain flexible and open to changing strategies, and even values, as our children grow and mature. When our children do not like what we do, or the values we model and teach, or the behaviors we expect from them, we may review and we may change. Or we may not. If we do so, it will be because we have considered thoroughly the options we have, and decided on a particular course of action, the consequences of which we are prepared to uphold, but will not be because our children disapprove.

**Diff’rent strokes, Diff’rent folks**  
In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Diana Baumrind and her colleagues conducted some seminal research looking at child characteristics that appeared to be related to certain parenting styles. The results have been extrapolated to produce two main dimensions of parenting: one that is concerned with parental feelings toward the child, ranging on a continuum from coldness, rejection, and distance, to warmth, acceptance, and closeness; and the other that is more action-oriented, and reflects the degree to which parents use structure and rules, ranging from highly restrictive and structured to extremely permissive and unstructured. Permissiveness may indicate a dearth of rules or expectations, or it may occur within an environment that appears to have rules but, in fact, where there is only sporadic follow-through. The combination of these two dimensions results in four distinct parenting approaches.

In turn, these four different parenting styles produce distinctly different characteristics in the children who live with them, as shown in the following.
children. It is important to realize that we can indeed be more structured, and have more control over our children, without becoming authoritarian, provided we continue to supply the nurturing that they need. Structure and clear expectations within a warm, nurturing environment have consistently been shown to correlate with healthy adjustment in children of all ages.

**Law and order**

There are other individual personality factors that contribute to whether we are likely to be comfortable providing structure by setting expectations and rules for our children. For the half of the world born loving and needing order, the concepts of structure, routine, decisions, benchmarks, organization, and decision making are second nature. Rules help us to predict and plan behavior and the behavior of others, and they bring a beautiful sense of tidiness to the world. Decisions reduce ambiguity and ambivalence, and enable us to tie up loose ends and get things done. Perhaps most important of all, structure reduces our anxiety, because it brings pattern to the chaos of indecision. We cannot understand why everyone would not recognize this and appreciate the opportunity to have a regulated, orderly life. We have no difficulty with the concept of including and upholding rules and expectations within our parenting style.

The remainder of the population, on the other hand, abhors order. We prefer to leave the world to unfold spontaneously, and to wait and see what happens. We are wonderful listeners, and we do not judge others. We don’t want to commit to a decision, because there may be some more information forthcoming that could well change it. Thus, we prefer to maintain a very large and open “in-tray”, rather than attempt to create a filing cabinet. Routines, calendars, planners, policy manuals, lists, rules – all of these leave us cold. We sense that our freedoms are threatened and our anxiety skyrockets. We sympathize and empathize with our children who seem to be stifled by the rigidity of rules, and we try hard to parent without them wherever possible. We prefer to negotiate to reach consensus, rather than to impose solutions. What if we don’t have all the information…?

As with most other personality traits, we tend to be attracted to individuals who provide the balance. Those of us who are organized appreciate flexibility in others, and recognize that they somehow provide us access to the mellow side of life. Those of us who revel in our personal messes value those who bring order, make decisions, and get things done. When our differences
### Eating patterns and habits

**“Red flag” responses**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Are there any particular foods your child will not eat?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• She’s a very picky eater.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I can’t get her to eat any fruits or vegetables.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• She’s decided to become a vegetarian, so she won’t eat any meat, eggs, cheese, or dairy products, just salad.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• She’s always on some diet or other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• She’ll only eat Kraft Dinner or plain spaghetti or Kentucky Fried Chicken.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• She won’t try any new foods, so I have to give her the same things every day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• She’ll only drink pop.</td>
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</table>

### What expectations do you have about mealtimes?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What do you mean, expectations?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• None, really. We’re such a busy family, we never eat together. It’s every man for himself!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I know it’s good for kids to have family meals together; I read that in a magazine. But no one seems to want to; they’re too busy watching TV or playing on the computer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I’d like him to eat everything on his plate, but that’s such a huge battle, it’s not worth it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• My husband/wife/partner doesn’t get home until too late, and the kids need to eat earlier.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I try to get him to stay at the table, but he just won’t.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Mealtimes just aren’t a good time in our house. Somebody always ends up screaming at somebody, the kids pick at each other all the time, it’s terrible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I’m fed up with having to cook something different for everybody in the family; I just run out of ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• He asks what we’re having and then has a fit!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
because they remove him from the situation every time he decides he needs to be. Parents can then agree to try to reduce the child’s anxieties in ways other than removal from a situation they, as adults, know to be safe for him.

At older age levels, they are often still dealing with dependence/independence issues under different guises. There is the mother who wants her 20-year-old son to be more independent, to make his own decisions, and to function more maturely in second-year university, who at the same time is expecting him to e-mail her his essays before he hands them in so that she can edit them. There is also the father who complains that his 15-year-old daughter has no sense whatsoever of the value of money, who at the same time does not believe in giving her an allowance to budget, preferring instead to have her come to him asking for handouts every time she wants to buy something. Many parents complain that their children don’t do what they’re asked to when they are asked to, at the same time making it so that spending, cajoling, badgering, and generally spending hours at a time negotiating something that is essentially non-negotiable. We have all been there in some form or other with our own children as we parent them. Mostly, we catch ourselves, and somehow resolve the inconsistencies. It is constructive and helpful for parents to recognize that it is often helpful to beat themselves up for what they have done in the past. Once they have identified, in the here and now, that what they are doing is not working toward the goal they have now established or re-established, they have reason to try something different.

Encourage parents to explore alternative strategies that might add to their repertoire

It is all very well to help parents identify gaps in their arsenal, and may be helpful in its own right. However, most parents approach professionals in order to acquire some more weapons with which to fight the battle. In the absence of confidence in addressing this issue on our own, we can fruitfully direct parents to books, courses, conferences, workshops, support groups, other professionals, and so on. A cursory glance on the shelves at major bookstores will boggle the minds of most of us, and make it clear that there is a wealth of information out there. However, not everyone reads books, or attends parenting education events. Experience indicates that audiences for these media are overwhelmingly female, while fathers are left at home “babysitting.” Using a management analogy has been reasonably successful in recruiting male readers, since it uses terminology (management team, leadership, policy, procedures, conflict resolution, labor relations) that men are not sensitive about using, unlike the softer, less concrete language often used in
parenting books (empowerment, empathy, active listening, reflection). However, we have a long way to go.

Another critical issue for everyone, parents and professionals alike, to recognize is that all children are different from each other, even those born to the same mother and father, and even those born at the same time. A first child is born to inexperienced, even if enthusiastic, parents, and never has the experience of an older sibling to emulate or tolerate. Some children, of course, remain the sole child, and parents are forced to judge all their parenting experiences based on the responses of this one-off product—a situation that can sometimes leave them wanting when it comes to reality testing, or comparing their child to others in order to judge what is normal. A second child is, by definition, always preceded by a previous model, even if that first child tragically has not survived, and has parents who now have some experience. This may not be useful, given the propensity for second-born children to be quite different from their older sibling, whether by accident or design. A third or subsequent child is often born to parents who are more settled, perhaps more comfortable financially, and often more patient and less anxious than they were with their first-born. As parents, we develop our own philosophies and methods over the years, and know what works and what doesn’t within our own families. Thus, it may be stating the obvious to note that there are unlikely to be many parenting strategies that apply across the board to children of all ages, with different basic temperaments and personalities, and different genders (yes, boys and girls are different). There is clearly no single list of parenting techniques that will apply universally, and most parents appreciate this. They are usually quite grateful for additional suggestions, however, that they may or may not incorporate, depending upon whether or not they work. This said, there are some suggested strategies to be found later on in this book that are general in nature, but provide some guidelines for parents who wish to add to their own tool set.

Extract ourselves from the family in an ongoing fashion

Unlike most other professionals, those of us involved with mental and physical health have as our goal our own redundancy. In other words, our job is to do ourselves out of a job. From the very first time we meet our clients, our objective should be to encourage their independence from us, and our intervention plan needs to incorporate the length of time we can contract to work with the parents or family. We need to encourage them to define the problems for us so that both we and they can understand what is going on, and then
1. Treat each individual with respect.
2. Decide in advance what needs to be accomplished. Establish the goals of identifying and planning to meet the child’s needs.
3. Ask permission to take notes. It’s a courtesy.
4. Begin and end with a positive and encouraging comment.
5. Don’t rush the meeting. Arrange a follow-up meeting if further discussion is necessary.
6. Listen actively; reflect and acknowledge what the other party is saying.
7. Be willing to agree whenever possible.
8. Explain so that others can understand.
9. Agree on at least one action step each.
10. Summarize, plan and follow up.

It is also helpful for us to ensure that we establish a means of communicating with parents on a continuing basis, even if parents do not seem interested in doing so, and even if we are not interested in doing so. Leaving the door open and the bridge intact can go a long way to assuring a child that the adults are, indeed, willing to do their jobs, so that he can get on with his.

**Don’t forget the children**

Having addressed the factors that are important in ensuring good communication among the adults, it is important to look at the role of the child in this scenario, especially the pampered child who believes that he or she is entitled to be treated the same as adults, that authority is something to be debated, and that life is a level playing field. It is important, therefore, to help parents to re-establish a hierarchy that takes into account such factors as seniority, responsibility, experience, knowledge, and authority. While children play a critical role in the understanding and implementation of any changes at school or home, it is important for the adult players to consult around issues of concern prior to a child being brought into the picture. It does no one’s credibility any good to have parents and teachers arguing, debating each other’s weaknesses or uncertainties, or even discussing each other’s part in the new scheme of things, in front of the child or children involved. In fact, this weakens the adults’ positions and inappropriately empowers the child. Once the adults have come to some agreement about what plans are likely to be put
into place, a child’s opinion can quite legitimately be sought. Adults do need to understand, of course, that seeking a child’s opinion, validating that opinion, and even agreeing with that opinion, does not mandate that the child’s suggestions must be implemented.

Jenny’s parents have been concerned that she is not challenged in her Grade 5 classroom. Because she is verbally very precocious, her parents believe her to be intellectually “gifted” and bored in school. Her teachers have expressed discomfort at the fact that she does little or no work in class, does not seem to understand some of the concepts, and yet brings back homework that is immaculately completed and 100 percent accurate. They see her as challenging their authority in the classroom, and see her parents as overly protective, pushy and pandering.

All adult parties meet, without Jenny, although her parents are uncomfortable with this. In fact, they do not tell her that they are meeting with the teachers without her, because, they say, she would be “devastated” that they would talk about her “behind her back.” They manage to establish several goals for Jenny: to ensure that she completes the work she is required to do in class, even if she maintains it’s “boring”; to encourage her to check with her teachers when she knows that she does not understand a concept; to have her complete as much of her homework on her own as she can, within an agreed time frame so that the teachers can more clearly monitor her understanding and her learning; and to meet again in a month’s time to evaluate progress and goals. Her teachers stress the need to stick with this plan, even if Jenny doesn’t agree, which everyone anticipates. In fact, they spend some time trying to think of an exhaustive list of all the potential objections that are quite likely to be raised, and all the behaviors they might expect. All the adults agree to give the plan a try for a month. Her main classroom teacher will discuss expectations with Jenny at school, and her parents will discuss the same expectations with her at home.

When her parents pluck up the courage to share this plan with Jenny, they sit down with her together to avoid the good cop/bad cop scene, and tell her that they are interested in her comments and her own suggestions. Despite this mature approach, the vast majority of their predictions come true. She rants and raves; she says how unfair everyone is; she says they can’t make her; she tantrums; she sulks; she tells her parents that she hates living in this home and she’s going to...
expected to comply, with little or no choice in the matter. The command may be prefaced with “Please,” as in “Please come for supper now.” There are, however, times when it may sound like a request (“Would you mind…,” “Would you like to…,” “Do you want to…,” “Please could you…”). This can be very confusing for a child, since she may answer the question with “No, thanks,” or “Not right now,” or “When I’m finished…,” only to discover that this does not appear to be the correct response, and to find herself confronted by an irate parent. If we are to say what we mean, we need to be more direct. “Please turn the TV off now.” “Please put your things away and come for supper.” “It’s time for homework.” No less pleasing, but much more straightforward. If we are to mean what we say, we need to ensure that our commands are carried out by following through with the “…or else…” portion.

Advice, on the other hand, is given without a need to be acted upon. “It’s cold outside, you might want to wear your jacket” is something we might say to our children, our spouse, or a visitor. To take our advice will bring the other person some benefit, we believe. To refuse it will be the other person’s loss. Advice given repeatedly is called nagging. However, if the recipient never acknowledges receipt, we may be forgiven for repeating ourselves. Advice, by definition, is not followed up with any kind of imposed consequence. We cannot say “or else you are not allowed out” if our advice to wear a jacket is not acted upon; otherwise, it has become a command.

There are many parents, especially of pampered children, who are very confused by these two concepts. Parents who deliberately choose not to impose their power are reluctant at the best of times to issue commands. Instead, they tend to make everything sound like a request or a piece of advice, and are then irritated or perplexed when their children treat what they say as if it were a request (“No, thanks,” “Not right now”). Pampered children are quite used to being cajoled or persuaded, and tend to interpret even a more direct order as if it were merely a suggestion. Parents who are more definite can manage to make advice sound like an order, being particularly fond of prefacing everything with: “You should…” as in “You should talk to your boss about getting a raise,” “You should get started on your project if you don’t have any other homework,” or “You should tell your friend you don’t want to play with her if she’s being mean.” Children who are used to parents talking in this fashion have a difficult time with the transition to advice, since they tend to interpret everything parents say as parents telling them what to do, and they become unnecessarily hostile and defensive. It is important for both adults and children to clarify communication. “Are you asking me or telling me?”
minor aspect of the situation with which we are dealing. “We are going to Grandma’s.” (No choice.) “Would you like to sit in the front seat or the back seat?” “Would you like to wear your red T-shirt or your blue sweater?” “Would you like to smile or frown?” The second is that we are not obliged to provide choices in situations where we require something to be done. Every parent needs to be able to say: “Because I said so!” and mean it.

In order for the parents of pampered children to use the Godfather and the Trudeau strategies appropriately and effectively, it is necessary for the mindset to be in place that parents have the right to act without their children’s consent. If you have come this far in the book without getting that idea, you need to go back to the start, do not pass “Go,” and do not collect the $200. If you enter a power struggle or a debate you cannot win, they will be in the position of having no one they can trust to act on their behalf and in their interests. Please believe that your children need you to be willing to act unilaterally if necessary, so that they feel safe and secure under your protection.

Strategy 7: Use natural or logical consequences wherever possible

Natural or logical consequences are both simple and effective means of managing behavior. The beauty of natural consequences is that they are defined as whatever happens subsequent to a given action, given no artificially imposed intervention. If we leave toys out where other children are playing, they will probably be played with and perhaps misused or abused. If we are rude to someone, they may not want to spend time with us. If we insist on having our way, not sharing, or not taking turns, we will have no friends. If we run out of money, we have no means of buying anything. If we do not eat, we become more hungry. When the consequence fits the crime, an important, relevant message is sent, and we are much more likely to associate the two and remember them.

Unfortunately, some natural consequences are dangerous. If we walk in front of a moving bus, we may not survive. If we play on the street, we could be hit by a car. If we stick our finger in an electrical socket, we could be electrocuted. If we drink a 40-ounce bottle of liquor, we could get alcohol poisoning. If we have unprotected sex, we could contract a sexually transmitted disease and/or become pregnant. Parents are quite obviously and necessarily not going to permit these to happen, simply in order to teach our child a
will create uncertainty and mistrust, which is usually the opposite of what we are intending to happen.

There is, of course, an enormous variety of possible consequences to an infinite set of potential behaviors, so there is no single list that can respond to all situations. The following advice provides a simple set of expectations or principles that can provide a logical foundation for further refinement.

**Rules for Living**

*Author unknown*

If you open it, close it.
If you turn it on, turn it off.
If you unlock it, lock it up.
If you break it, admit it, and fix it.
If you can’t fix it, call in someone who can, and pay them at least what they are worth.
If you borrow it, return it in the same or better condition.
If you value it, take care of it.
If you make a mess, clean it up.
If you move it, put it back.
If it belongs to someone else and you want to use it, get permission.
If you don’t know how to operate it, leave it alone.
If it’s none of your business, don’t ask questions.
If it ain’t broke, don’t try to fix it.
If it will tarnish someone’s reputation, keep it to yourself.
If it will brighten someone’s day, say it.

*(Taken from Lists to Live By by Alice Gray)*

**Strategy 8: Use “I” consequences**

Much to every child’s surprise, there is no commandment anywhere that says parents must: lend the car; give a reason for not lending the car; spend money; give a reason for not spending our money; pick someone up on demand; drive anyone and anyone’s friends anywhere; spend time or effort on anything at all, let alone for someone who cannot even be civil; or put up with any kind of abuse, even if the individual maintains that everyone else uses that kind of language. In fact, to protect our own belongings, space, time, effort, money, and dignity, we each need to have some notion of ourselves as separate, whole human beings with boundaries of our own. We have to believe that we have
selves. For many children, this means an increase in their acting out or other negative behavior, primarily in order to force parents to resume the parenting role. Children will escalate their behavior until parents respond.

The reasons why a parent would let himself or herself be physically, verbally, or emotionally attacked by his or her own child are complex, and far beyond the scope of this book. Anyone reading this who finds himself or herself in such a position needs to think very carefully about exploring the situation further, not only in order to try to deal with the underlying issues of self-worth, but also, and for some perhaps more importantly, to try to understand the strong messages being delivered to the child. Such a child is at huge risk for abusing others, especially others with whom he or she develops a loving relationship. There are many women who seem to be unable to defend their own integrity and dignity, but who can be rallied to prevent their children from perpetuating the pattern, as we know they can and probably will. If we truly want what is best for our children, we will simply not let them engage in these behaviors.

So we need to engage in self-awareness. We can practice acting with conviction and confidence, even if we don’t feel either of them inside. We can pull ourselves up to our full height, shoulders back, chin up, and walk resolutely. We can learn to turn on our heels, not just back away – or we can stand our ground in silent protest. We can get down to a child’s level and look him directly in the eye. We can learn to lower our voices when we are angry, instead of raising them. We can buy time to plan what we want to say or to make decisions.

We gain confidence baby step by baby step. We need not get discouraged if at first we set the bar fairly low; at least we’ll be able to surmount it. Once we’ve beaten the initial odds, we’ll raise the bar, both for ourselves and for our children. We will see our successes only if we look for them, so we need to look for them; otherwise we will stay focused on our failures and defeats. Just as our children do, we also need reinforcement for our efforts; otherwise, we shall stop doing whatever we’re doing. It is well established that we need a lot of positives in order to counteract the negatives in our lives.

We can be true to ourselves and find integrity. We can hold our heads up in front of others and find dignity. We can learn to state our own needs and wants clearly to others, including our children. We can tell others how we feel, and we can try to be part of the solution, instead of part of the problem. We can work on our other relationships – with partners, extended family, friends, co-workers, neighbors, pets, whatever. We can develop our talents and
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