**Kirk Martin Parenting Tips**

I'm Not That Bad A Kid - 4 Ways to Change Behavior **(November 2014)**

Here are four things your kids want you to know and how to change your thinking so your kids' spirits aren't crushed.

"I'm not lazy and unmotivated. I just don't care about the things you care about right now."

You must discover what your kids care about (most likely not developing good study habits or homework!). So ask your kids what they care about. Listen. Don't react. Find ways for your kids to use their gifts and explore their passions outside the home. Find a mentor to encourage and hold your kids accountable.

"I'm not always being defiant. Sometimes I'm just anxious or scared so I fight you." Step back and assume the best about your child's intentions. Ask an adult wherever your child goes to give your son or daughter a specific job or responsibility. Ask the teacher, school bus driver, pre-school leader, assistant principal or sports coach to find ways for your child to feel helpful and like a grown-up. Your kids love helping other people (just not you!).

"I don't want to be in trouble all the time." Sometimes we think our kids are irritating on purpose. But what child would purposefully mess up and lose all his privileges every day? That doesn't make sense. So say this today to your child:

"I know...that you know...doing that is unacceptable in our home." How many times do we say dismissively, "What were you thinking?" "How many times do I have to tell you..." But imagine someone saying that to YOU. It's demeaning. So acknowledge that you know...that they know what they are doing is wrong. Then go further:

"My assumption is that you don't want to get sent to your room all the time. Maybe you just feel helpless to change. So instead of taking away your electronics, I want to show you how to make different choices. I am going to give you tools to stop blurting out, acting impulsively, stealing, hitting, fighting with siblings, etc." Give your kids tools to succeed...rather than reactively punishing them. What Irritates You Most?

We all have triggers, things that just get under our skin. It could be your child's posture, expression, attitude or perceived lack of work ethic. It could be your spouse's tone or negativity. Or maybe it's politicians, your boss, traffic, changes in your schedule, messy bedrooms, being taken for granted. And it may be something you've struggled with yourself and you keep beating yourself up over this one trait.

If you react emotionally to another person or situation, you are giving power over your emotions to that person or circumstance. It makes you powerless, angry and resentful. Some of you have generational patterns you are fighting-lecturing, negativity or intimidation you learned from your Mom or Dad.

One newsletter isn't going to change everything, but we can break one bad habit and begin getting back control of ourselves. So think about one specific trigger that irritates you. Write it down. Then develop one specific action that you are going to take the next time that trigger occurs. Make it simple and specific (click here for 40 specific strategies).

When my daughter saunters into the room with her attitude, I will casually remind her of two gifts she possesses or two reasons she has a great future ahead of her. "Sarah, you have always been amazing with kids and have such a big heart toward others. I can't wait to see how you use your gifts." "Emma, you know what I was thinking about today? How I love your curiosity and persistence. You've been that way since you were little, and those are two rare and valuable qualities."

When my son is negative and complaining, I will say, "Hmmm, I can understand why you'd be frustrated by that. So...is there anything I can help you with this afternoon?" When my spouse makes a comment that irritates me, I will first assume the best and seek clarification before responding...so I don't compound the problem. When my child begins to get worked up and angry, I sit on the floor and ask him if he will help me color/build with Legos. When I'm really anxious about heavy traffic, I will do the opposite of what I feel...and allow another driver to cut in front of me.

Know your triggers. Own up to them. Admit you need help with them. Ask your spouse and kids to help you. "Have you noticed how I get really uptight when this happens? What can I do next time so that I don't make everyone else uptight?" Humble leadership will change your family more than any lecture or rant. Create a new tradition, a different way to respond next time to that common trigger. Then do it again and again and again.

**March 10, 2015 *Posted to parents*:**

Kirk suggests these 7 tips:

(1) Speak to kids as adults. I speak to children, no matter the age, how I expect them to act-as adults capable of making good decisions. Never use the sing-songy "Mommy needs your help" tone even with toddlers. It sounds condescending to them and they will ignore you.

(2) Use a matter-of-fact tone. The matter-of-fact tone lets the child know that you are in charge, that you aren't fazed by their meltdown or anxiety. You are the rock they can count on. Your tone can either provoke or calm a child immediately.

(3) Practice a calm posture. When you stand over your child or pace and gesture dramatically, you create a defensive response and instability. So sit. Cross your legs. This changes your perspective, relaxes you and encourages dialogue. A calm posture shows that you are confident and in charge. The next time your kids argue with you, just lie down in the middle of the floor. And watch what happens!

(4) Do not lecture. The next time your child confides in you, resist the urge to lecture. It will blow your kids away. Instead, say this, "I really appreciate you sharing that with me. I may have some thoughts on this, so if you're interested, come ask me later and we'll talk." Then walk away. You want your kids coming to you asking what you think, rather than always forcing it on them.

"Kirk, I have fought with my daughter since she came out of the womb. She told me, 'Mom, you need to respect my space.' I was a little taken back at first, but then I tried it. Last night, she told me about this particular situation and every part of my motherhood was screaming to lecture, but I zipped it and showed I trusted her. She came to me later and asked what I would do in her situation. For the first time in a long time, we actually had a good conversation and I praised her for her good choice."

(5) Get comfortable with silence. When we pick our kids up from school, our parental anxiety causes us to badger them with questions: "Did you make any friends today, how did you do on your test, do you have any homework?" Sometimes our sensory kids need to sit in silence or listen to music, with no pressure.

(6) Shhhhhh. Write notes and send emails-these do not require an immediate reaction and eliminate the defensive posture (excellent strategy for teens). Whisper-the louder your kids get, the softer your voice becomes. Instead of lecturing, use non-verbals: turn lights on and off to modulate noise level, use music to signal transitions, teach sign language to communicate without words. Music, by the way, is a fantastic way to get toddlers to get dressed, pick up toys, etc. "Bet you can't put your shoes on before this song is over." The rhythm in music is calming and will "pace" your child.

7) Talk while moving and doing. Just as "Honey, we need to talk" strikes fear in a husband, so does the phrase, "Sit down, look me in the eyes and tell me what's going on with you." This will cause your child to shut down from fear and intimidation. The best conversations take place while walking, swinging, sitting on the floor playing with Legos, lying in bed, playing catch, coloring or driving in the car. Create a relaxed atmosphere and your child will open up.

"Kirk, things were getting ugly with my daughter (10) last night. She was rolling her eyes, but I was acting worse, regurgitating how difficult she was and raising my voice. All of a sudden, my daughter stopped,

smiled, called her puppy and asked me to sit down. I asked her what was going on. She looked at me and said, 'I’ve learned to do something calming when you're getting upset and grooming Buster makes me calm.' I just about melted. She apologized and asked how she should do things differently next time without me yelling and feeling guilty. I apologized, too.

Now THAT is cool. Kids will often "get this" before you do. They crave calm, they need a good relationship with you, whether they are 4 or 14, and this can be done while commuting or cooking. Your relationships will change and you can break these patterns NOW. Your kids' behavior will change...and rather quickly. But you must change first.

**March 12, 2015**

Consequences & Discipline: The Real Issue

Despite how clear you make your expectations and consequences, your kids often don't listen and make bad choices. But so many discipline issues aren't as much about the child as they are about us. The crux of the issue is that YOU want your kids to behave...too badly. You NEED them to behave. You are so invested in their good behavior. You want your kids so badly to speak kindly to each other, to do their best, and to always make good choices.

Why do you WANT your kids to behave so badly?

- Because you love your children more than anything in the entire world.

- Because you don't want your child getting hurt.

- To validate your job as a Mom or Dad.

- So you feel like all your lectures have gotten through and worked.

- To keep from being judged and embarrassed.

- Because you were the "good girl" growing up and never disobeyed.

- Because you incorrectly think God is more interested in your outward behavior than your heart.

Why do you NEED your kids to behave so badly?

When your child makes a bad choice, it's a painful for YOU because now you have to actually follow through on the consequences. Then the show begins...your child gets REALLY upset, throws a tantrum, argues, negotiates, and calls you names. It's exhausting.

So you try to reason with them, plead with them, even beg them and give them second chances. And it completely backfires. Because now the child is in control and dictating the situation. You've lost.

And all of this is entirely in your control. When you can put behavioral choices back in the hands of your kids instead of owning it yourself, their behavior will change. It has very little to do with them. And everything to do with you, your tone, your posture, and your attitude.

Remember these three things:

(1) You are NOT a bad mother or father if your child makes a bad decision. That is THEIR choice, not yours.

(2) You are NOT responsible for their behavior, only yours. Show them how to handle conflict, control their emotions, and handle disappointment by doing this in your daily life.

(3) When you allow your kids to OWN their own choices--without MAKING them behave, pleading, or threatening--then your kids will learn to be responsible. You will have given your child the greatest gift-the ability to handle disappointment, conflict and tough situations. Don't you wish your spouse could handle these things?! Then raise kids who can do so. You will be changing an entire generation of kids.

So why don't things change? Because we keep saying it's the kids' issues when it's your issue because you have reacted this way for years, maybe decades. Because good intentions never work. And because quite honestly, most people aren't willing to do the hard work necessary to break these patterns within themselves.

So you can try the new behavior chart or fad. It won't work for longer than a week. Ugggghhhhh! Because the truth is you need to change. Are you willing to listen to the CDs for the next 30 days? Just while commuting or walking or cooking? Because if you break these patterns now, your kids won't have to when they are your age. Their behavior will change…and rather quickly. But you must change first.

**March 31, 2015**

She groaned and repeated the five Daily Calm messages she used in one day, because they all fit together.

(1) I believe you are capable of handling this yourself without me fixing it for you.

(2) Step back so your kids can step up (and be responsible).

(3) Acknowledge your child's feelings. "I can tell you are frustrated. What do you want to do about it?"

(4) Let kids study on an exercise ball, trampoline, upside down.

(5) Ask siblings, "Why are you giving your brother power over you?"

MORNING ROUTINE

"When I got up, my younger son (9) was already freaking out over what to wear and eat. He tried to suck me into his vortex of negativity so he could take out his frustration on me. I looked at him and said, 'I can tell you are overwhelmed, but I believe you can figure this out yourself' and walked away. It was SOOOO liberating. I gave him space to process his emotions instead of jumping on him. And guess what? After a few inappropriate words, he got dressed, ate and left for school on time. He didn't handle it perfectly, but HE did it without me fixing everything."

HOMEWORK

"My teenager was getting particularly upset because homework is more difficult for him than the younger one. I usually stand over them, get frustrated myself, or even occasionally just do some of the problems for them just to get it done! Instead of getting sucked into their negativity, I used that calm, confident voice and said, 'Homework time stinks! I'm so glad I don't have to do it anymore because it's YOUR job...BUT I bet we can make it fun.

'Josh, bet you can't get your math done lying upside down off the sofa while I quiz Caleb on his vocabulary words while he's jumping on the trampoline!'

"They got up from the table and we all ended up outside doing homework, Josh on the ground, Caleb jumping. It still wasn't perfect, but we avoided the big meltdowns. The best part? I finally had that discussion turning school work over to THEM instead of me fretting over it and owning it. It's really hard, but worth it."

SIBLING FIGHTS

"Later that evening, the boys were doing their usual arguing and sibling squabbles. Instead of being the referee and separating them, I sat on the living room floor, began dealing cards to myself, and casually said, 'When you push each other's buttons, it makes you weak and I kind of lose respect for you. I believe you two are grown up enough to work this out without your mommy doing it for you.' They sat down, played cards, and we actually had a mature conversation and handled conflict! Wahoo. There is hope for my boys!"

Kudos to this Mom for having the courage to trust her kids to be responsible for themselves. It is hard, but if you do this, you will notice three changes:

1) You will eliminate so many of the power struggles throughout the day.

2) You will have time to enjoy your daily life and your kids because you are being responsible for yourself and not everyone else.

3) Your kids will grow in confidence knowing they ARE capable of handling things without you micromanaging them. Begin this when your kids are toddlers.

Is this hard? YES!! So be prepared for every challenging day. That's why I want you to get DAILY CALM. Every single day of the year, you will wake up to a very short reminder of how to control yourself, calm your child, be assertive about your needs, get respect, stop the meltdowns.

**March 31, 2015**

Your job as a parent is NOT dependent on how your child behaves...but rather how YOU behave, especially when they misbehave. Before you address your child's behavior, first think, "What can I do to control my own tone, posture, and attitude?" If you had these reminders right at your fingertips every single day, your daily life would be very different. No more living at your wit's end.

Have you and your children ever screamed at each other? How about screamed and thrown things? Casey and I did. Last week.

Here's the scene. We had been conducting two live events per day for a week, so both of us were exhausted. Casey had kindly pulled our rental SUV up so I could walk out of the hotel, hop in, and go train teachers about an hour away. We LOVE training teachers and parents on the same day--that way, both sets of adults have 10-20 practical strategies that help kids rather than crush their spirits.

When I opened the door to load my luggage, a big box was in the way. I asked Casey to move it to the back. He got irritated. I reacted and barked at him. He begrudgingly opened the back hatch, shoved the box in, and slammed the hatch shut. I snapped at him not to treat the car that way. He responded dismissively. We were both snapping at each other.

Plus we are both strong-willed and were exhausted--so neither of us were in the mood to back down. As we pulled away, we noticed the back hatch rattling. I got out and noticed the latch wasn't working. "Great, you broke it when you slammed it!" I said in an accusing, smart-alecky tone. Casey replied with a snotty comment about how the car wasn't made well. I yelled again, "Have fun paying $500 to fix it. And if we don't make it to the event on time, you owe me the fee."

It was a needless cheap shot because I knew he'd been concerned with his bills lately. I was angry at myself...because I had chosen to be upset for no reason, so I was getting back at him for "making me" upset. Before long, the Calm Dad & Calm Kid were the poster children for Screaming Dad & Disrespectful Son. We were yelling, cursing, throwing things. It was comical--except it's not when you're angry!

But I knew the right thing to do. "Motion changes emotion". I knew it would escalate if we stayed near each other so Casey went in the hotel to ask for some rope. With that short break, I collected myself and went through my calm process. Acknowledge, apologize, find common ground.

When he came back out, my tone was different. Soft, humble, quiet. "Casey, I know you are really tired and frustrated. I apologize for goading you and not stopping. I was wrong. I appreciate you working so hard this week and taking care of details so I could rest. On the drive over, let's listen to that World War I podcast you're interested in."

My humility lead Casey to a place of contrition--rather than demanding an apology. We discussed what happened and came up with a new packing plan together. So here are five lessons from this episode:

(1) You are going to mess up. You are. It's just being human. Don't beat yourself up.

(2) Rather than continuing to escalate situations for hours and days and weeks, it's important to recover more quickly and restore the relationship.

(3) Acknowledge how the other person feels--it is tremendously reassuring and calming. Apologize for your own actions--it's difficult to escalate when one person humbles himself.

(4) Switch your body posture, tone, and manner of speaking. Move from accusation to gratitude. The quickest way to change your child's behavior in volatile moments is to first control your own.

(5) Be prepared for these moments. They happen daily. We prepare for everything else in life--but not for the tough emotional moments with the people we care most about. So we hurt our kids, our spouse, ourselves. Be prepared. After fifteen years of doing this, I know this to be true: parents who listen to the CDs with their kids on a regular basis are different. They don't have nearly as many meltdowns, fights, and power struggles over homework, bedtime, getting kids to listen, and more.

**April 2, 2015**

(1) Require exercise or fresh air. To counter your kids turning into irritable zombies, here is a hard and fast rule we enforced with 1,500 kids over the course of a decade. They didn't like it, but it worked. "If you choose to play Minecraft, video games, text or have your head in a screen, then you must exercise outside for five minutes immediately afterward or walk the dog for fifteen minutes."

"But I don't want to go outside."

"Good. Then you don't want to get on your screens."

"No. Come on. Really? Why?"

"It's a simple choice. No exercise after screens, no screens for three days."

Bonus: Moms and Dads, I guarantee you if YOU leave your screens behind and go outside and play (yes, show your kids the games you played as kids, including the mischievous ones!), your kids will eventually follow.

(2) Lead by your example. Call a family meeting (just to make your kids groan!) and say with a grave tone, "We need to talk about screen use in our home. It's out of control." Then pause for effect. "I am on my screens way too much."

Then watch your kids mouths hang open. They didn't expect THAT! Boom!

"I lecture you about always being on the computer, phone or video games when I am just as obsessed. I'm tired of not giving you my undivided attention when I pick you up from school because I'm texting a friend. It bugs me when I get sucked into the TV or computer screen and stay up too late. Will you help me with that?"

Kids respect honesty and authenticity. It is difficult to argue with someone who tackles hard issues with humility. Being vulnerable allows them no cover at all, because you are owning up to your issues. Ask your kids to be creative in developing solutions for you. They may say, "Why don't you keep your phone in the glove compartment when driving, Mom? Maybe we say the word, 'popcorn' every time you're distracted by a screen. Why don't we have a screen-free zone every night from 5-7pm or 'Technology-free Tuesday'?" If your kids come up with solutions for YOU, they are more likely to be honest about their own obsessions.

(3) Teach impulse control and delayed gratification. "Kids, you have 27 minutes this afternoon to play on your video games. BUT, if you turn off your screens two minutes early, I will give you an extra four minutes tomorrow night."

It's a great, concrete way to teach impulse control and delayed gratification. It may be three weeks later, but when your kids come and tell you, "Mom, we turned off our screens two minutes early," you can give them intense praise. "Now THAT is a good choice and that's what self-control looks like. Your father can't even do that." Okay, don't add that part!

A skeptical Dad asked this: "So you're telling me that you can help me eliminate the power struggles over video games, minecraft, social media, etc. so screens don't ruin our family life?" Absolutely. Few people REALLY make the changes necessary to get a different result. You can keep yelling, begging, and fighting over, "Just one more minute, I need to save it, I need to get to the next level!" Or spend $97 and get the most comprehensive answers to your toughest screen issues, like what to do when schools require use of an iPad for homework. It will change your home life.

**April 23, 2015**

How to Motivate An Upset Child/Student

A 10-year-old boy came sulking into the classroom angry and disruptive. Before training teachers at a school, I watched Dereyon throw himself into a chair. He wanted attention, but he sure didn't want to do homework. So here's how I got him to jump into his homework in 5 minutes without a fight.

By the way, our most effective tool is getting parents and teachers on the same page. Each teacher we train has an effect on hundreds of kids over time. So if you want us to come train your teachers and parents, bug your PTA/PTO. It's phenomenal training.

1. I calmed my anxiety and frustration. When you react emotionally to your child's emotion, you pour fuel on the fire. Deep breath. Be the grown up. Control yourself.

2. I did not invade his space and sit with him. Instead, I waited for him to look over at me (warily, I admit). When he did, I asked if he could come help me plug in a cord for my computer. That way, he had to physically move from his space to mine. Motion changes emotion. It's how you begin to change emotions. Very cool.

3. I created a job so that he would feel helpful and transition from sulking to completing a specific activity. I didn't focus first on why he was upset. I thanked him and asked him to sit with me.

4. I asked about his gifts. When Dereyon sat down, I noticed that he had drawn all over his left arm. "Do you like drawing?" "Yeah, kinda." "Let me see your arm. You're pretty good, huh?" "I'm okay." "No, you're more than okay. Plus I can tell you are right-handed." "How do you know that?" "Because you have nothing on your right arm." Smile. "So you're an artist--do you actually draw on paper?"

With that, Dereyon grabbed his backpack. "Do you want to see some things I've drawn?" he asked excitedly. I knew then that we had connected with something that was important to him and that he was proud of. Connect with your child's talents and passions. This is the one never-miss, always-works way to connect with any child.

5. I built his confidence. When Dereyon pulled out notebooks with drawings, I took time to notice details and make a big deal of his gift. I built him up.

Notice the first five steps had NOTHING to do with why he was upset. Instead, I drew him into my calm place, and redirected him physically and emotionally.

6. I sought to understand, not interrogate. While I was looking at the drawings, I casually said, "May I ask you a question." (I wanted to respect his space and not force myself on him.) "Yeah." "When you came in today, why were you so upset?" I didn't look him in the eye because I wanted a conversation, not a defensive reaction. He paused and said, "I wasn't upset." I smiled and said, "Yes you were and that's okay. I just was curious why." He thought for a moment and told me he was mad because he had missed the bus and had to walk to the center. It is perfectly okay for children to get upset and frustrated. What is not okay is taking it out on others.

7. We talked about specific ways he could handle his frustration next time. Just snapping, "Calm down!" doesn't work. We have to show kids how to control their emotions and behavior.

8. I transitioned by building on a strength.

"Wow, you ARE a good artist. That's one thing I can't do--draw well." "You can't?" "Nope. So why don't you get your homework out and we'll see what else you are good at doing?" This is positive priming. We had now moved Dereyon to a calm place, discussed why he had been upset and how to handle it better next time, and built him up by recognizing one of his gifts. He could now dig into homework from a position of strength and confidence.

**April 28, 2015**

Arguing

1) Step backwards or sit down. Do not engage. There is no need to win. But some of you struggle with that. YOU need to have the last word! Stay out of the courtroom.

2) Listen. Sometimes we get so busy talking over each other or countering the other person's point that we miss what our child (or spouse!) is really saying or wanting. Ahhhhh. You have felt that way with your spouse before. It's how your kids feel, too.

(By the way, this is the root of most marriage issues. When was the last time you had a real conversation with your spouse? You haven't for a long time so you have a string of misunderstandings and resentments build over time. Click here to learn how to actually connect with your spouse, even if he's an engineer!)

3) Identify the real issue. What's really going on? Use an even, matter-of-fact tone. "I'm curious. I don't think you really want to argue and lose all your privileges. So take a minute and let me know what you really want out of this."

4) Write it down. Use a whiteboard, poster board or a sheet of scratch paper. Write down exactly what your child really wants. There is power in writing it in black and white, so you can keep coming back to that desire.

5) Use your code word to separate for a few moments to simply decompress, deal with the anger, and get perspective. Be quiet for a few minutes. Then invite your child to go for a walk, play catch, groom the dog... and talk to you like an adult.

**May 12, 2015**

Dear Mom and Dad,

I want you to know what it's like to be me.

My brain runs like a washing machine powered by a Ferrari engine. It runs all the time and it runs fast, churning and tumbling ideas like shirts and pants and socks mixed together. I can be talking to you and having another conversation running inside my head. I can be in class listening to the teacher, but be fully engaged in a daydream about Legos or playing a new song on my guitar.

You know how I sometimes repeat questions? It's not that I didn't hear your answer. It's just that in the second between the time I asked and you responded, I went somewhere interesting in my mind. Sometimes I have so many thoughts swimming inside my head that I just blurt things out because I'm afraid I will forget them.

I kind of like all this energy inside my head because I can keep myself entertained in there by myself. But other times I feel scattered and like there's not much order up in my brain. Everything's swirling. That's why I like things to be just so and I why I need to know what we're doing all the time. It's why I end up wearing or eating the same things all the time. New things freak me out a bit because I don't know what to expect, so please don't be mad at me when I'm anxious.

I want to do well in school. But sometimes the ideas in my head are so strong or interesting, and when I follow them even for a few seconds, I fall behind. And once I'm lost in class, sometimes I figure I may as well just keep thinking about these ideas. It's like they call to me to work on them and see them through.

This is hard to explain, but sometimes I feel my body screaming to me to move and like I need contact, to push up against something. It makes me feel better inside. I'll be sitting in class and if I haven't gotten any exercise, I feel like I'm about to explode. But then I know my teacher will get upset if I get up, so I sit there kind of frozen, not sure what to do. I promise I don't get in trouble on purpose.

Okay, I was lying. Sometimes I do get in trouble on purpose. I like to get the reaction from people when I'm bored. It wakes my brain up. And if I'm really bored or my body is screaming at me, I'll get in trouble just so I can get out of class to walk down the hall. It's such a relief. But then I feel bad later and I know everyone is mad at me.

I don't expect you to understand this, but little things just bother me. I'm not making it up to be difficult, I promise, so please don't be mad at me when I tell you some place smells really bad or I have to change my socks or it's too loud and I have to leave the room. I know you get tired of fixing the same thing for me to eat, but a lot of foods just don't feel right and it feels like I'm going to gag. I'll try better.

Sometimes being a kid is tough for me. I'd rather be doing grown up stuff, I'd rather hang out with adults and older kids. I get bored with kid stuff pretty easily. It's like I have an adult brain and ideas, but I'm stuck inside a kid's body. That's why I like to hang out with Uncle Jeff and work down at Mr. Brown's shop with him--he gives me grown up jobs and trusts me. And he always says I do a good job for him, and that makes me feel good.

There's something inside me that says if I can just get through childhood, I'm going to make a great adult one day. I'll be a good Dad because I know what it feels like to hurt as a kid and be misunderstood. And I know I don't always do great in school, but I have good ideas and I can work really hard when I'm passionate about something. I don't have any fear of the future, it's just the present that isn't much fun.

Okay, I know I say I'm all grown up and everything in some ways, but things hurt me more than you think. I know you guys are trying really hard and I'm difficult, but I kind of know that everyone wishes I were different. I see the way Grandma and Grandpa treat Adam and Grace differently than me. You know all those little comments you guys make, the way Dad shakes his head in disapproval, the way Mom groans and all those hushed conversations you have with the teacher, therapist and principal? I know what it means. I know people think I'm a bad kid because I don't always behave like my brother and sister or the other kids.

That's why I like hanging out with Buster a lot, because he likes me the way I am because I give him lots of attention and take him on walks. And that's why I like to play video games and be alone sometimes. It's like my heart can only take so much and then I have to withdraw a little bit.

I know I don't get invited to birthday parties like Adam and Grace. It used to really hurt me, but in some ways I like not having a lot of friends. It's partly by choice, because I'm pretty content inside actually.

I like who I am, but it's tough when no one else seems to. Why does everyone want to change who I am? I'm not unhappy with myself--I'm uneasy because since I can remember, everyone around me has been so negative and tried to fix what they think is wrong with me.

You want me to talk more, but you just psychoanalyze me. Besides, it's difficult to express my thoughts and feelings verbally-they just get jumbled up. I'd rather express them in my writing and music. I want you to know that I feel things deeply, I do. I hurt with the kids who get left out, and one day I'm going to help those kids. I know how it feels.

I know you get concerned because I stay up late at night and don't sleep much. But I like it when it's quiet. I can hear my thoughts better. And my world is peaceful then.

Thank you for all you do for me. You think I don't appreciate it, but I do. I know I'm not exactly the way you want me to be or the kid you expected, but I'm going to be good as an adult and you'll be proud of me then.

Mom and Dad, don't worry about me. I may not do great in school or be the most popular kid, but I'm content inside. I like the way my brain works, I like my energy. If everyone would stop trying to fix me, I'd be okay. Please stop trying to make me be like everyone else. I like who I am. Do you?

~ Your son/daughter

**May 27, 2015**

Change Your Mornings THIS Way

How YOU behave in the morning has a huge impact on your kids' attitude for the rest of the day. So try these three strategies this week.

(1) Control yourself first. Get control of your attitude. Start the day thinking of one thing you are grateful for. Then walk into your most challenging child's bedroom, sit on the side of the bed, and:

- Compliment your child on a good choice they've made recently.

- Draw them into a conversation about their passions coupled with action. "Hey, I heard something interesting about [insert their interests here]. Love to talk to you about that after you get dressed and come down for breakfast."

Instead of the entire morning being an anxious peppering of do this and do that, you actually begin the day with a conversation.

(2) Do a treasure hunt. This works especially well with younger kids, who love looking for stuff and solving puzzles. "Hey, I hid your favorite Lego fire engine in the back yard. Bet you can't find it before I get breakfast ready."

Get your kids up and moving first thing, outside in fresh air, completing a specific task, using their problem solving skills, with a fun game, rather than barraging them with an endless list of to-do's.

(3) Elicit your kids' opinions. You have strong-willed, curious, attorneys who rarely get asked their opinion. Listen to what this family did. Way cool.

"Kirk, one morning I got my Daily Calm message and read it to my hubby and kids. I asked them what they thought about it. Well, it completely surprised me. The kids were all over it. 'Yeah, Mom, I think controlling yourself would give us an opportunity to do things ourselves.' The next morning it was 'Apologize and be vulnerable.' After my hubby and I apologized for yelling so much, my kids actually apologized for not being more helpful and listening. Wow!

"Here's the funny thing. One day I forgot to bring it up and my youngest said, 'Mom, what did the calm guy tell you to do today so you don't yell at us?' We burst out laughing. It's become a tradition now that has changed our family life in real ways."

**June 9, 2015**

MOMS

1. You are not responsible for everyone's happiness and moods. Moms, you do way too much. You think it's your job to make sure everyone is happy.

It is NOT your job to make sure everything goes perfectly for your family. You cannot micromanage away disappointment in life.

2. Control yourself and your anxiety, not other people. If you have been around Celebrate Calm for very long, you know this is a bedrock principle. I can only control one person in life--myself. Most of the power struggles in your home are triggered by your anxiety and need to control your kids.

3. Take care of your self. Practice self-care. Put yourself first.

You have always put everyone else first and neglected yourself in order to make everyone else happy. You were taught that taking care of yourself is selfish. No way. if you do not care enough about yourself to take care of yourself.... emotionally, physically and spiritually...no one will care about you or your needs.

4. Be assertive.

Tell people exactly what you want. This is an important skill to develop. Being bossy is when you tell other people what THEY are going to do. Being assertive is when you tell other people what YOU want. That's it.

5. Reclaim your individuality by cultivating your gifts, talents and passions. You had dreams as a child, something you always wanted to do or be. When you had kids, you gave all of that up to be a mom. Don't just be a mom. Take time to cultivate your own gifts, talents, and passions. It's not healthy to have your entire life revolving around your kids.

DADS

1. Instead of expecting everyone else to change, lead and model the behavior you want your kids to have. Maybe you're the one who stomps through the house when things don't go your way like I did. You expect everyone else to control themselves, but you can't control yourself. The "my way or the highway" approach simply doesn't work--you don't like it when your boss does it at the office! Men, you respect other men who lead by example on the football field and battlefield. So lead by example and your kids will follow. And they will respect you, not fear you.

2. Give your wife three minutes of eye contact and undivided attention today. Close your laptop, leave your cell phone in your pocket. Listen to her. Acknowledge that what she is feeling is legitimate. It's not THAT hard!

3. Control your own emotions, mood and body posture.

The next time things get emotional in your house or the kids get upset, sit down. Or get down on one knee like a quarterback when you come home at the end of the day. Speak softly, but firmly, with no emotion and no drama. Watch how your kids begin to react.

4. Get on the same page as your spouse.

If your wife says curfew is at 9, but you undermine her because you want to be the fun Dad, your kids will use that against you both. You have to be on the same page. Sure, she may coddle the kids and sure, you're too tough. So work out your differences in private so your kids aren't confused by different rules and expectations. Again, you'd never allow this to happen at the office.

5. Put the same amount of energy and persistence you invest in your job into your kids and wife.

What if you spent the next month investing the same amount of energy and persistence into your relationships as you do with work? What would happen? How would your relationships change? I guarantee you will be more successful at work--because you will have a home that is calm and not ruled by chaos.

**August 25, 2015**

Anxiety is caused by unknowns, circumstances beyond our control.

That's why new situations are difficult for our kids.

#1. Familiarity is critical. Reduce unknowns. Visit your child's school early and often before schools begins. Do not wait until back-to-school night. Get comfortable walking the halls, knowing where the cafeteria is, getting used to the smells (huge for sensory kids). Practice the locker combination, play on the playground, keep Legos or comfort items in the classroom. Homeschoolers, give your kids some ownership of their work.

Your anxiety as a parent will sabotage any new experience. When your kids sense your own anxiety, it makes them feel less confident. Keep working on your own issues!

#2. Make a personal connection.

Make an appointment to meet your child's teachers when they are relaxed and no one else is around. Find an interest your teacher and child have in common (love of dogs, a sports team, music, etc.). It creates a personal bond that is important once struggles surface in the school year. Bring your child's teacher something that will make their lives easier--school supplies, something your child has made, brownies! No, we're not bribing here, just using common courtesy.

#3. Give kids a specific job.

The best way to counter unknowns (are kids going to like me, am I going to have too much homework, is the teacher nice?) is to provide specific, concrete responsibilities. Specific is important. "Go in and have a good time," "Get ready for class." etc. is too broad and generic. Plus, our kids love to help other people (just not their parents!).

"Morgan, when you come to my class, it would help me a lot if you could refill my water bottle/ sharpen pencils / write the assignment on the board." When Morgan walks in the room, instead of being nervous, her focus is on completing a concrete task. It also gives the teacher an opportunity to thank and praise Morgan for helping. By the way, this also helps improve focus and attention in class.

No matter where your child goes (to the in-laws, Tae Kwon Do, church), our kids need specific jobs and responsibilities, especially ones using their gifts and helping others.

How A Student Used This Plan

My son asked if he could meet his teacher alone before school started and work out a plan--I was stunned. He's always been a great artist, but usually draws on his arms more than canvas. So he asked the teacher if he could make posters for her classroom. When the other kids asked about her insanely creative signs, the teacher pointed to Zach and he came home beaming. For the first time in his life, he is known for something good rather than being the problem kid. Thank you, thank you."

**8-27-15**

So I ask you this question. The next time your kids irritate you, even with a disrespectful attitude, meltdown, or argument over homework, how can YOU respond differently? How can you turn that negative into an opportunity to problem solve and be closer to your kids? Really think about it. Then take action. Like General Patton. It's hard, but easier than constantly lecturing, fighting, and yelling!

Try treating your kids like YOU would want to be treated when you're upset. See how your interactions go. Ask your kids to do the same for you.

**9-1-15**

Attitude, Grades, Impulse Control & Nutrition: The One Way To Improve These

I know exactly what is going to happen in your home when all the pressure from school begins to mount. Your anxiety will cause you to pick unnecessary battles with your kids. You will lecture them about their hygiene, sleep, nutrition, manners, attitude, language, homework, procrastination, not biting/hitting, etc.

Why? Because you love your child more than life itself and want the best for them.

You will try to convince them to "live up your potential," "try your best at everything", and "apply yourself." And your kids will shut down, feel like they can never measure up, or become defiant.

You will lecture them endlessly. They'll say, "Got it, Mom and Dad" and you'll keep going. And they will tune you out. And parents will say kids aren't listening, but the truth is the parents aren't listening...and this is provoking your child.

You will get on them about everything. Why? Because you want to help them. But what happens? Your kids will do the opposite of what you want them to do--because they know they can't please you and they need some space. Space to fail. Space to do things a different way than you want them to. But this is hard for you, because you have control issues, and want--no, need--your kids to do things YOUR way.

And they simply won't. And endless power struggles will ensue. And we'll think we just have obstinate, strong-willed, ungrateful kids who don't listen. And yes, sometimes we do. But it's deeper than that.

And the truth is this. There is one person in life you can control: yourself. You can't control your kids or your spouse (you've learned that years ago). It always backfires. And if you will spend the next thirty days learning to control your own anxiety, fear, guilt, perfectionism, lecturing, and need for everything to be just so...

**September 3, 2015**

Your son refuses to eat anything healthy [go to sleep, do homework, brush his teeth, etc.]. Now you catch him sneaking ice cream at midnight. Oh, no, you have a defiant, rebellious, deceiving, sneaky child in your home! So here's what most parents do.

Our parental anxiety kicks in and assaults our conscience:

- We didn't teach him to lie. What did we do wrong? What if our son grows up to be dishonest? What will our parents think? Is this a sign of something deeply troubling in our child?

- Why is he being deceptive? That's disrespectful to us. What if it's ice cream now, but alcohol or drugs later on? Oh no, we have to do SOMETHING!

- Why won't he eat/sleep/apply himself? It must be a power struggle and control issue. He's refusing to eat on purpose. We can't allow that. If we give in, then he'll win and think he doesn't have to do chores, homework, or other hard things in life.

So we double down on consequences. We lecture, sometimes endlessly and with a sharp/harsh edge. We threaten, question his motives, and even make snide remarks. And the only thing that changes is that the behavior gets worse...and the child's confidence is destroyed.

Our anxiety makes everything worse. But your kids aren't rejecting you-they are rejecting your anxiety.

But let's say you spend just the next 30 days to finally conquer that anxiety that causes you to lecture, yell, micromanage, threaten and get on your kids. Guess what? Next time, you will slow down, step back, and get to the root of the issue.

When you conquer your anxiety, you change your child's behavior AND build a closer relationship with your child.

(1) When you slow down, you realize that the child who eats simple carbs and comfort foods (mac and cheese, PB&J, bagels/bread, chicken nuggets) most likely struggles with anxiety (hence the upset stomach that craves comfort foods) and/or digestive issues and an inability to process protein.

You've been fighting this kid, thinking he was being defiant or controlling, when all along he needed a doctor to help remedy his gut issues and practical ways to deal with his anxiety! And guess what? He's waking up at midnight because he's still hungry! And no smart kid is going to choose spinach over ice cream!

(2) Here's the best part. Using our secret phrase that guarantees kids will open up to you, you discover that your son likes getting up at midnight to sneak ice cream (or argue with you or any number of behaviors) simply because he likes the challenge. It's fun, exciting, adventurous. Though his actions are wrong, his motives aren't evil and he's not destined for jail.

Dad has this amazing talk with his son and they agree that sneaking things is a fun challenge, but wrong. So they problem solve three different (positive) ways to meet this same need. And guess what else they do? One night after Mom goes to bed early, Dad and son sneak downstairs, grab the ice cream from the freezer, and thrust their spoons directly into the carton for a late night snack together.

So rather than facing off AGAINST your child, thinking he's just being difficult, you actually come alongside and help your child.

How many times do simple behaviors turn into battles that destroy a child's confidence, leave you feeling guilty, and cause division between parents?

How would it be different if you could assume the best, get to the root, and give your kids tools to be successful?

Want this negative cycle to continue? Of course not! So make a change. Don't fix your kids. Control your own anxiety.

**September 17, 2015**

Q: Our son really doesn't care what his grades are. He has the ability to be a solid A/B student, but he just doesn't care. Taking away the phone or the computer has NO impact and we cannot motivate him. But the big question is do we impose ANY consequences for being lazy and pulling Cs and Ds on his report card? Please help. We are really struggling.

A: You are definitely not alone. This is very common. So here are 7 things to consider:

1) The most important thing you can do is absolutely nothing. You need to back off. Your anxiety over your son's future ("Who is going to hire this child? Who would possibly marry him?) is going to make everything worse. You fear that your son is lazy and that will continue throughout his life.

2) Throw yourself into YOUR own projects and goals. Your energy needs to be focused on yourself, not making sure your son lives up to your expectations. What old hobby or new passion have you been wanting to throw yourself into? Do that.

3) Give your child tools to succeed. No, you don't just give up. If your son isn't doing school work because he's bored or overwhelmed, then show him how to do homework differently-listening to music, lying upside down, chewing gum, at a coffee shop.

4) Allow your son to develop at his own pace, even if he's a late bloomer. Some kids just plod along, plod along. They resist their parents and teachers because there is too much pressure-so they simply stop trying. Relax. Your son will be motivated one day-just not in YOUR timing.

5) Let your son know he WILL be successful. This will cause you to pull out your hair and you'll resist it, but it's critical. I bet your son is scared. And when you push and fret, he picks up on your fear. So have this conversation with your son:

"I know this age is really tough. Everything's changing, there's more pressure, all these challenges, you're consumed with being popular or finding a girlfriend. So take your time. I know you have every quality necessary for success in life inside of you already. And when you find what motivates you, you'll do great in life!"

6) Let your son own his life. Stop controlling and micromanaging because it makes YOU uncomfortable to let your child make his own choices. See, if he graduates or gets good grades, it's because YOU were on him all the time. I want him to be responsible for himself. And he can't as long as you're being responsible for him.

7) Forget about consequences-they won't work. And why would you try to coerce him anyway? In this instance, that's you being responsible for his behavior. Let him get some bad grades, let him be accountable to his teachers.

8) Your son isn't lazy. He simply doesn't care. Why? Because what the adults are peddling isn't true or important to him. So please stop labeling him because it's making you uncomfortable. Instead, let's find what motivates him. It will NOT be "doing your best" or pleasing others.

I know this makes you uncomfortable and you are scared for your child. You may even be angry, embarrassed, resentful. But you cannot act on those emotions or feelings. Or you will cause your son to shut down even more.

9) Spark your child's vision. This would require about ten minutes to explain so definitely listen to the Motivating Kids CDs, but here's the strategy in a nutshell. Identify your child's natural gifts, talents, and passions. Your child will be successful to the degree he uses his gifts and passions to help others. Give your child opportunities to use his gifts outside the home-in the neighborhood, at church, at school.

Get your kids doing internships, volunteering at the animal shelter, helping older neighbors, starting their own little business...anything that uses their gifts and passions.

10) Get your child a mentor to encourage and hold him accountable. Your son isn't going to listen to you. So find another adult who can mentor your son. A mentor can both inspire your child and hold him accountable. Your daughter or son can also listen to Casey's Straight Talk For Kids Program.

If you want your child to care, you need to take a different approach. I know you're going to resist this and try instead just to coerce your child to care. But it will only make things worse. Use the process I just laid out. It does work, but you have to have the courage to control your own anxiety and believe your child can own it.

**September 24, 2015**

3 Small Things That Make a Big Difference

Your new television and kitchen gadget come with an instruction manual. Your kids don't. So you just do your best, react like your parents taught you, or just repeat the patterns you've known your entire life. Unfortunately, that often leads to needless power struggles. Things you just assumed were right or true turn out to be myths! And sometimes they even backfire and make things worse.

For simplicity, let's explore three recent Daily Calm messages and how you can apply them in everyday situations.

(1) "Tell me more." Sometimes when kids open up to us, we immediately respond with a lecture. I know you're tired, but try this today. Just say, "Tell me more." The truth is that much of the time, you don't want to hear more! You just want quiet. But try it anyway.

"Kirk, my husband used this today. But not with the kids. He used it with me!! This is a man who if I bring up something unpleasant, retreats. He just can't deal with it. Well, today I brought up an issue that's been bothering me for weeks. He looked at me and said, 'Tell me more. I want to understand.' This is a man who has NEVER listened like that. I can't tell you how much that meant to me. There IS hope."

Okay, so it works with husbands and wives. And political adversaries. It's called how not to be an overbearing jerk who needs to prove your point. Just try it.

(2) Change your body posture. When you get upset or are tempted to react to your kids/spouse, change your body posture. Sit. Lie down on the living room floor. Stand on one leg. Adopt a yoga pose. Yeah, it feels silly, but it will change your response!

"Kirk, one day my daughter was up in my business, all full of attitude, and I wanted to yell at her, but instead I went for it. I got on the floor and said in an even tone, 'I'd love to hear more, but only if you do Child's Pose with me.' And darn if she didn't stop. It worked!'

Yeah, this stuff is weird and it works, but you have to do it. The Daily Calm messages are extremely helpful because you get a quick daily reminder in the midst of your hectic life.

(3) Don't worry about eye contact. Kids often think and listen best when NOT looking you in the eyes. So don't make a big deal out of it. Instead, when correcting your kids, give them some Legos or something tactile to play with. It helps process information and makes them more receptive. Works for husbands, too!

"Kirk, I used to get in my child's face and demand, 'Look at me when I'm talking to you!' I didn't realize my son was beating himself up inside and my demands were overwhelming. So yesterday after I read this message, I decided to try it. My son was misbehaving and getting upset. So I sat on the floor, started building with Legos and casually asked him to help me build a catapult. He settled down immediately and we talked about his choices. It's the best talk we've had and he actually took responsibility for his behavior...ironically when I wasn't demanding that he do so! Thanks for the strategies that are easy and work in real life!"

**October 6, 2015**

You just fought over morning routine, homework, attitude or bedtime.

Of the 65,000 people reading this, I bet about 38,757 just had a power struggle with their child over morning routine, clothes, attitude, homework, dinner, bath/shower or bedtime. A few thousand lucky parents had the pleasure of fighting over 3 or 4 events. Aren't you glad you are a parent?!

My message to you today is simple. Sure, I can give you very specific strategies to help you overcome those power struggles:

• So homework isn't a continual time of crying and pleading, "If you would just focus, you could be done with your homework in 45 minutes instead of it taking 3 hours!"

• So dinner doesn't involve bribery to "take another bite" or result in resentment over cooking three different meals every night or devolve into dad yelling, "Jacob, you need to sit down right now so we can enjoy dinner together as a family!"

• So you don't end up just saying, "Forget your stupid bath, I'll spray you down with Febreeze!"

But what if you changed YOUR tone and attitude during the morning, afternoon and evening interactions?

You will be tempted to ask, "Why do you have to make everything so difficult?" Yes, I know your kids are challenging. I had 1,500 of them in my home-little attorneys, judges and cops all rolled into one! But the truth is that your anxiety makes everything more difficult. Why do YOU have to make everything so difficult?

Why? Because you love your kids. You want so badly for them to succeed. Their behavior worries you-are they going to be able to be self-sufficient one day? Their behavior embarrasses you-what will the other parents or teachers think of you? And you have places to go and things to do!!

So you snap and bark out consequences. You lecture, your tone gets short. You get irritated because it just doesn't make sense. You may even threaten, question your child's motives, and even yell. And then your child moves slower and shuts down!

Our anxiety makes morning, homework, and attitudes worse. But your kids aren't rejecting you-they are rejecting your anxiety.

But let's say you spend just the next 30 days to finally conquer that anxiety that causes you to lecture, yell, micromanage, threaten and get on your kids. Guess what? Next time, you slow down, step back, and get to the root of the issue.

When you conquer your anxiety, you change your child's behavior AND build a closer relationship with your child.

Because when you are irritated or in a hurry, you can't think straight. But when you slow your own brain and pace down, you can implement tools to get your kids to move more quickly, you defuse power struggles, and your kids actually choose to be more responsible. But it doesn't begin with them-change begins with you.

How many times do simple behaviors turn into battles that destroy a child's confidence, leave you feeling guilty, and cause division between parents?

How would it be different if you could assume the best, get to the root, and give your kids tools to be successful?

Do you want this negative cycle to continue? Of course not! So make a change. Don't fix your kids. Control your own anxiety.

For the next 30 days, don't even focus on your child's behavior. Instead, be honest about your own. Do you lecture, micromanage, yell? Are you always on your kids about something? Does it feel like they can never really please you? Then take the next 30 days and break this pattern so that this school year isn't a repeat of the constant power struggles.

**October 9, 2015**

Do Your Kids Correct YOU?! How Rude!

You have a bright child who may at times be controlling, demanding, and dominate conversations. Some kids are even insecure/confident enough to correct their parents! Can you relate to this Mom?

"When my daughter asked for a snack, I said we can't because it's 5:45 and dinner is ready. After a quick glance at our oven clock, she said, 'Mommy, it's actually 5:42.' I told her it was rude to correct an adult and then explained how I was simply rounding. Then she replied, 'Well, actually, Mommy, if you are going to round, you should round down to 5:40, not up to 5:45.' I wanted to wring her neck. How should I respond to the constant correcting?"

I understand your frustration. I get that it sounds so demeaning coming from a child. Before we address your response, a quick reminder. When you say no to your kids, don't explain or try to reason with them. The anxiety parents are feeling when they ask their kids to do things, brings out this response and causes pushback. If you are feeling pressured or anxious already and your child corrects you, you'll snap. And that has nothing to do with your child. It has to do with anxiety. Just like we talked about Tuesday, kids don't reject your authority, they reject your anxiety.

I know this may sound like an innocuous example, but there are two big dangers I see whenever we get into these power struggles. Watch how this unfolds. You're not expecting a child to say this. You get anxious and worry-how will this child ever keep a job or spouse or friends? How embarrassing will she be if she does this to teachers or other adults? So you react and it can actually have two devastating consequences:

(1) You actually guarantee that the behavior will get worse...and you miss an opportunity to teach life-long skills and build confidence.

See, our anxiety as parents causes us to only see how the negative aspect of the child's behavior and how it affects us. But that's short-sighted. Instead of reacting, think how powerful it would be to respond in an affirming and teaching manner:

"Honey, you know what I love about you? You are very precise. You like things to be just so, you like to be very specific. I bet it feels good and orderly inside your brain when people are very specific about dates and times and measurements and such. We need people like that because many things in life (like Fedex and watches and electronics) all require painstaking precision. And you have a gift for that!

"I, on the other hand, don't have that gift. I tend to see the larger picture and I'm perfectly okay just rounding up or down, or being imprecise. So why don't we both work on something together? I need to respect the fact that you are different than I am and have different needs. So at times, I will try to remember to be more precise. But it will help you in life to recognize that other people, like me, are different. So you need to respect the fact that sometimes I won't be precise. Can you live with that? Can we both work on that?"

Instead of facing off AGAINST your child, you can come along and show her a different way.Your other option is to react and allow her to push your buttons. And if you do so, that's YOUR issue!!

(2) You will destroy your relationship with your child. That always happens when you impugn the child's motives.

Here's the thing. I don't think she is intentionally being rude-I think she's just being factual and precise, because she has a high need for order and structure. And that's okay. Let's just notice and affirm that gift inside of her, and give her a goal of learning how to control HERSELF, not you and others.

But here is the big danger. If you continue to see your child as a defiant, disrespectful, lazy, unmotivated, or rude child, it will taint every interaction with him or her. No one likes to have their motives impugned.

And if this continues because you react or dad can't handle a child being different, she will sense that, develop a defensive response, and eventually adopt an attitude of, "Screw you! You just think I'm being rude when I'm really just being honest and precise." This is exactly what you DO NOT want!

**October 20, 2015**

When I was younger, I didn't like myself much. I always felt different, like everyone was trying to fix me or change me. I had anxiety, ADHD, Sensory-processing issues, was defiant and had a lot of quirks. Focusing in school was an ongoing challenge for me and I found myself struggling socially. I hated transitions and seemed to have a meltdown every day over something--homework, the 3-minute transition between classes, dinner, or my dad coming home tense.

I didn't know why I behaved the way I did and I didn't know why my stomach churned every morning before school. I didn't know why I couldn't sit still at homework time and my frustration ended in me throwing my textbook across the room. What I did know is that this was an inconvenience to everyone around me and that I was a difficult child who was constantly labeled.

I began to feel as if my dad didn't like me. When I talked to a counselor, the focus was primarily on the negative things in my life. We talked about my feelings some and why my behavior was not appropriate. I already knew my behavior wasn't appropriate and I already knew it had a negative impact on those around me. But knowing isn't enough. Alcoholics know that their behavior isn't appropriate, but simply knowing doesn't give them the power or tools to change the behavior and it doesn't address the root of why they are behaving the way they are.

This is how your kids feel.

**October 22, 2015**

**Why Misbehaving Is Good**

When kids misbehave, don't freak out. It's a huge opportunity. To teach them lifelong skills...and to grow up ourselves. Sometimes we freak out about kids making bad choices and miss these opportunities. It causes friction between parents and even siblings. So next time your kids struggle with an issue (which means sometime today), instead of dreading it, lecturing them, or punishing first, step back and think:

(1) What can my child learn from this situation?

(2) What skills, tools, and thought processes can I teach my child so he doesn't keep repeating these mistakes?

**November 3, 2015**

You are in a hurry, getting ready to leave your house. Your child is struggling to put on his shoes, the same hoody sweatshirt he wears every day, or the jacket you are forcing him to wear because it's chilly outside. But he's frustrated. He's muttering and saying his jacket is stupid.

And you begin to allow his frustration to frustrate you. So your tone gets shorter, and your body posture changes. You either think or say the following:

- "It's cold out. This doesn't have to be such a big deal. Just put the jacket on," you snap.

- "Why do you have to make everything so difficult?"

- "I don't have time for this. We're running late!"

- "Stop thrashing your jacket around. I paid $75 for that and if you rip it, you're going to pay for a new one!"

- "If you are not ready in the next ten seconds, you are going to lose your video games!"

You lean in and try to help, but it just makes it worse. And now two frustrated people are inches apart. This never works well.

I know you've heard me say this, but it's true. About 90% of issues with our kids are not even really behavior issues-they are our anxiety issues. We try to control the child's mood and behavior-and it backfires. Every single time.

But the real issue is that anxiety and pressure coming from within YOU. And, by the way, that is the only thing you can change or control in this situation. So what if we spent time trying to fix THAT instead of your child?!

So let me show you a different way to make this work. This is a real-life situation. Mom is with her daughter at the horse barn. Her daughter is struggling to put her expensive boots on and starts kind of digging her feet into them. Mom reacts the way most of us do:

"Honey, stop being so childish. You have put your boots on a thousand times. If you would just do it the way I taught you, it wouldn't be so hard. You make things so difficult, I swear! If you can't do this with a good attitude, then we're just going to go home and you can forget riding the horse today..." Needless to say, that doesn't help. But we do it again and again. It ends in meltdowns.

But what if Mom controlled herself and gave her daughter some space? What if Mom picked up her cell phone, began walking away, and said in a confident tone, "Honey, I need to make a call. I know you can handle this yourself." I guarantee that when you step away and infuse the moment with confidence, instead of your own anxiety and frustration, your daughter will figure it out herself. Will she do it perfectly? No, but she doesn't have to. That's your issue.

When you step away, you give her space to go through her frustration without being embarrassed or micromanaged. And we all need that.

Why do you have to control people's moods? Why can't your child be frustrated? Why can't he deal with it on his own? Why do you have to fix it? Do you like it when your spouse tries to fix your mood? Or do you want some space?

There's no guilt or blame here, but the simple truth is this. If you REALLY want to stop the power struggles in your home, you have to change your own reactions. And I promise if you do that, both YOU and YOUR FAMILY with be changed for generations to come.

**December 9, 2015**

3 Alternatives to Punishing Defiant Children

You have kids who don't respond to consequences or threats. You have kids who can be defiant one moment, then make you cry with their sweetness the next. It's not easy. I love the challenge of discovering very practical, even odd, strategies for the toughest situations with strong-willed kids.

No consequences will work if you don't understand this about your kids.

(1) "I always thought our son was a defiant kid. Now I know he's a frustrated kid. I used to focus on how difficult he makes life for us, but I never understood how difficult life is for him." Read that again. How would your life be different if you, your spouse and teachers understood this one insight?

I guarantee you that kids who shut down, refuse to do work, pick on siblings, or lash out at you have this in common: they are bright, purposeful kids who feel like they are swimming upstream in life. Instead of reacting to the outward defiance or resistance, teach them how to deal with their frustration.

(2) "All along my focus has been on punishing him when he fails instead of giving him tools to succeed."

Think about this. Consequences are merely a reaction to a child making a bad choice. If a child has made the same poor choice 10 times and lost everything he owns--and it still isn't changing his behavior--then you must shift your thinking. I guarantee behavior will change when you spend your energy giving your child tools to make good choices.

(3) "All of my lecturing is making things worse. I need to stop or I'm going to alienate him." Begin doing the opposite of what you normally do. Sit, ask questions, and praise instead of standing over your child, lecturing, and criticizing. You know this, don't you? The more you care about something, the less your child cares and the more he resists. The irony is that our lecturing and yelling actually reinforces failure and even creates it!

Worse yet, this constant tension in the home between siblings, parents and kids messes with your kids' nervous systems, causing issues with sleep, focus, attention, short-term memory, behavior and more.

**December 11, 2015**

Should You Ever Ask Your Kids For Help?

(1) Want to really freak your kids out and exhibit parental leadership. Call the dreaded family meeting tonight and say this in a somber tone. "Kids, we need to talk. Use of screens in this home has gotten out of control." Your kids' shoulders will slump. They will groan. They will fear you are going Amish on them and cutting off electricity to the house so they can't get on an iPad, iPhone, video game, DS, or TV.

Then lower the boom. "So Mom/Dad and I wanted to ask you if you would help US to limit our screen time. I think our heads are in our phones and the computer too much. So would you guys help us problem solve and come up with creative ways to limit our screen time? And to develop some alternatives? We could use the help."

Then watch your kids' mouths fall open. I guarantee THIS will have an impact, eventually, on their screen time. You have been vulnerable, you have modeled, you have lead. And they will follow. Try it.

(2) I almost destroyed my family with the "my way or highway" approach. I forced everyone to walk on eggshells to manage my emotions for me. This week in Texas, several people asked me how I changed so quickly.

I asked my family to help me. It was embarrassing to admit to my own son and wife that I was immature and needed help. But vulnerability, authenticity and leadership will inspire others to change. Besides, they knew that I needed help. Digging in and insisting that everyone else change only creates more resistance.

Accountability to and encouragement from other people is powerful and necessary. You can't do it alone. So take a stand once and for all and do this

- Ask your kids for help. Go ask your kids, "Would you like it if I stopped yelling, lecturing and micromanaging you?" You know the answer. Ask them to help you do the opposite of what you normally do? Affirm instead of lecture. Sit instead of pace. Speak softly instead of yell. You can even ask them to say a code word as a reminder every time you begin to lecture or yell.

- But here's where it gets even better. Along the way, your kids are going to have to confront their own issues--whining, complaining, lying, stealing, backtalk, defiance, rolling their eyes, refusing to help you, not being motivated. And because YOU have LED them and shown them how to change, they will have nowhere to hide. And now you can help them change.

Instead of simply identifying kids personalities as anxious, defiant, angry, irritating, and unfocused, perhaps we should identify the behaviors and their root causes and give them tools to deal with them. Here are the two steps I want to begin taking with kids:

1) Identify and teach your kids why they are behaving the way they are. “As soon as I figured out WHY I procrastinated, liked to fidget, listen to music while studying, needed things to be just so, and struggled with transitions, I realized I wasn't defective. There was nothing wrong with me. The more I understood how my brain worked and what motivated other kids didn't necessarily motivate me, the more I was at peace with being different.

Beyond being at peace, I learned how to embrace the differences. My parents began to embrace my differences. That's when my attitude changed and when my Dad and I became really close. I finally felt like my parents were on my side, that I could be myself AND be successful at the same time. If you want to influence and help your kids, get to know and like who they are...not just who you want and envision them to be.”

**December 18, 2015**

Here are 7 weird tips to help during the stressful morning, homework and bedtime parts of the day.

(1) Let your kids sleep in the clothes they are going to wear to school the following day. It relieves the anxiety for sensory kids who need things (their clothes) to feel just right. You just need to control YOUR OWN anxiety because your kids embarrass you. Spray them down with Febreze if they smell. Your children will sleep better and that's one less fight in the morning.

(2) Many anxious, sensory-seekers sleep better in a sleeping bag. Try it. Pile blankets and stuffed animals (if not allergic) on top. Put them in a closet. The confined space feels safe and comforting. And guess what? No fight over making their bed!

(3) Let kids do classwork and take tests sitting underneath their desk. I'll bet you $100 your kids' test scores and performance improves.

(4) Let your kids eat their breakfast outside in the morning, or alone. Why does everything have to be together? Maybe they don't want to talk first thing in the morning. Neither do you! Want to freak your kids out? Wake your child up and say, "Guess where you are eating your breakfast today? Outside, out of the dog's bowl!" Okay, so you don't have to do that. But I guarantee nasty little kids will jump out of bed and brag about that to their friends all day!

(5) Wake your kids up to a treasure hunt. Hide their favorite Legos outside in the yard or in the basement. Who cares if they go outside in their underwear or shorts when it's cold? It will wake them up, plus fresh air changes moods. You've got their brains focused on completing a specific task, and you start the day by praising them for doing something well...instead of lecturing them about getting dressed, eating, brushing their hair and teeth, etc.

(6) Lie down. Please just try this once. When your kids are arguing or fighting or getting upset, simply lie down in the middle of the floor. I promise you it will change the entire dynamic without saying one word.

(7) Put on music to get your kids moving more quickly. The rhythm in the music helps pace kids during chore time. It's easier to pick up toys and do work to energetic music. By the way, turning the lights down low can help calm things down as well. Use these non-verbals to signal that it's time for dinner or bedtime.

BONUS TIP: Why can't your kids do their homework sitting on an exercise ball, listening to music, chewing on a snack or gum, or hanging upside down off the sofa? It may bug you, but the rhythm and brain stimulation help them process information better. Experiment with doing homework in different places.

**December 8, 2016**

So How Do You Teach the Child Who Reacts? Stop Being A Victim.

One child provokes, the other reacts. It's a vicious cycle. You end up yelling at the provoking child to stop, but the truth is the reacting child is 50% of the problem...and therefore 50% of the solution. He is an equal and willing partner in this relationship. Relationships always take two people, but it takes one person to break a negative cycle. So how do we deal with the child who reacts?

(1) Speak to kids as adults and tell them the hard truth.

When we baby the reacting child, we create a victim. "I'm so sorry your brother is irritating. Listen, your childhood is going to be awful until your brother goes off to college. Sorry." I just created a victim. Instead, speak honestly:

• YOU have a choice in this situation. You have a choice in how you respond. No matter what your brother does or says.

• You are going to be around annoying people your entire life. If all you ever do is react to irritating people, or react to disappointing situations, you will be a miserable, powerless person. That's your choice.

• Every time your brother pokes you, calls you a name, takes something from your room or looks at you...and you react to him...you are giving your brother POWER over your moods, attitude and actions. Do you like being your brother's puppet? Because he is controlling you, he becomes the boss of you.

(By the way, the child who provokes is also a victim--he needs his sibling to react in order to stimulate his brain. Get him using his brain in purposeful ways--starting a business, making money, doing service projects--and he no longer needs his sibling to react.)

• "I know you are going to tell me all the awful things your brother said. But I can't control that. When you're ready to stop being his puppet, I will be thrilled to show you three different ways to respond next time." And then you walk away and give your kids space to own it.

• Want a fun visual prompt I used with 1,500 kids in my home? When kids are squabbling, hold up a Kleenex as a reminder that your child is "surrendering" his power. "Why are you surrendering power over your choice to your brother?"

Once you begin practicing these strategies, this will happen fairly quickly:

- You will stop having to be the referee who jumps in all the time. Whew.

- Your provoking child will put that energy to good use and be confident.

- The reacting child will learn how to control himself and show self-respect.

- Your kids will learn skills that you and your spouse probably struggle with--they will learn how to handle conflict. That's priceless.

**March 20, 2017**

What To Say When Kids Defy or Ignore You

Defiance comes in many forms. Some kids simply ignore you, others just flat out refuse to do things or roll their eyes. I prefer kids like my son, who just did both!

I love and teach tough discipline, but it's not about intimidating your kids into submission. Discipline means to teach. The best leadership by a military general or any authority figure is through humility and leading, not demanding and coercing. You and I are leaders in the home. So let's lead.

I had several mentors who are psychologists and therapists--great people who do great work. But they frequently lacked specifics. My goal has been to give parents actual words to use in tough situations, actual physical actions to take. And that's why I want people listening to THE BAG because it's filled with practical scripts you can use. So here are a few among 50 examples you'll hear from the Stop Defiance and Discipline: Get Kids to Listen the First Time CDs in THE BAG:

(1) When your teenage daughter rolls her eyes, do not react. Instead, put it back in her court so she owns her choices.

"I don't need you to respect me. You need to respect me for your own good. I have something called self-respect. If you think you're going to talk to me that way and expect me to drive you all over the place or fix you meals, you're mistaken." Some of you allow people to walk all over you. And you're partially responsible because you keep allowing the negative cycle to continue.

"When you roll your eyes or talk back to me, it tells me you are immature and can't handle the freedom you want. Your behavior affects your life, not mine. When you act this way, it tells me you're frustrated or anxious about something. So why don't you take some time and think about a different way to handle this, then come talk to me?"

(2) Teach your kids how to disagree respectfully using an appropriate tone and language. My son was always permitted to say, "Mom, I disagree with you. Could we discuss this?" It didn't mean he got his way, but it led to problem solving and responsibility on his part. It isn't about you. It's about your child. Ask, "What can YOU do to earn what you are demanding from me?"

(3) Demonstrate self-respect when your kids defy or ignore you.

Your daughter won't give you the password to her cell phone? No drama! One phone call to Verizon and there is no need for a password anymore! Stop being afraid of your kids, their reactions, and how they feel about you.

If your child is silently defiant, sit down next to him. Speak softly, but firmly, "I know that you know the right thing to do. I cannot tell you what you are going to do, but I can always tell you what I am going to do. Here's my next step. Why don't you think about yours?" No lecturing, no explaining. Act quietly and decisively.

"That doesn't sound like you. Sounds like you're frustrated to me. When you're ready, I'd love to listen to what's really going on and help you problem solve, but you yelling at me doesn't impress me. Come grab me when you're ready to talk."

I can teach you dozens of variations of these for the kids who relentlessly argue and follow you around ("I'd love to listen to you, but I'm going to clean the bathroom so grab some towels and follow me if you want to talk..."), but your response should always:

- Establish your quiet authority as a leader by controlling yourself.

- Give kids ownership and the responsibility to change their approach.

- Show the child a better way, saying in effect, "I'm not going to react. But I trust you enough to believe that you know the right way to handle this."