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Parents! Tips to Make Decisions, Solve Problems

Guide your family
with strength, confidence
and less stress

by Julie Prescott

Book series
*Single Parent Wisdom: If only I knew then,
what I know now...*

Wynot Publications • Corning, Iowa

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This book is intended to provide helpful and informative material on the subjects addressed. It is sold with the understanding that the author and contributors are not engaged in rendering medical, legal, financial, psychiatric, or any other kind of professional services. The reader should consult competent professionals regarding serious problems.

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Part of the *Single Parent Wisdom* series

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Excerpts from SPRINGING THE TIME TRAP: TIME MANAGEMENT FOR TODAY'S BUSY HOMEMAKER by Deniece Schofield. Copyright 1987 by Deniece Schofield. Used by permission of Deniece Schofield. This and her other titles available at <http://www.denieceschofield.com/>.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: The use of "he" and "she" alternates. The name "Chris" substitutes for "child" representing both a male and female child from ages 2 to 18.

Many of the names of parents contributing comments have been changed to protect their children's identity.

Recommended Internet URL addresses are provided for continued research. If you find that a URL does not work, please e-mail us at info@singleparentwisdom.com so we may update our information.

Introduction

SO many decisions to make!

- ? Where to live to provide a safe home for my family
- ? Where to work to provide enough money for my family
- ? The right schools
- ? Clothes
- ? Transportation
- ? Dinner

As the parent or guardian, the daily pressures of all the decision-making can be exhausting. You are not alone. This book provides helpful suggestions, ideas, and real-life tips from men and women who have solved the problems and made the tough decisions you face now.

I was a single parent for 11 years. My three children and two step children are now adults. Still puzzled about questions I had while parenting, I sought out answers to help young parents today. From interviews with parents like me — single parents when their children were young, but now their children are grown — we discovered solutions that worked and reflected on what we would change if we could. From our experiences, we have learned when to listen to the experts and when to realize we actually do know best. We now know when to let the matter slide and when to seek help. We are wiser. We are your **SPWisdom** support group.

From the many interviews and questionnaires answered by our solo parents, key points stand out. Throughout this book, you'll find these icons to mark them:

Be Consistent

Be consistent about the BIG problems. Teach the values that are important to you. Consistency provides the stability and



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structure your children need. Have faith in your judgment. When you are in doubt, there are books for specific problem areas, workshops to attend, and people to talk to about parenting choices.

- ☞ You will naturally be inconsistent about the little stuff, depending on how much energy you have today.



Be Patient. Be Loving

Your child needs to know that you love her now and forever. Everyday, tell and show your child that she is important in your life.

Time is Short

- ✓ Choose your battles. Not all fights are worth the outcome.
- ✓ Be proactive. Take charge of your life. Take the steps to control what happens to your family.
- ✓ Do your best.
- ✓ Your child will be an adult before you know it.



Be Age-Appropriate with your Child

Expecting a child to handle challenges beyond her ability may frustrate, scare, upset, confuse, or harm her. As the parent or guardian, you need to be aware of what your child can handle at her current physical, social, emotional, and intellectual level.



The comments in this book are not designated for a certain age. You decide when a suggestion or tip is **Age-Appropriate** to apply to your child. Some advice is meant for preschoolers but not for teens, and vice versa.

For a better understanding of what to expect at what age, visit the Child Development page at the **SINGLE PARENT WISDOM** website, URL: singleparentwisdom.com/.

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Reduce the Chaos

Don't accept chaos as a natural part of your life. Change something. Aim for a calm household. Have structure in your days. Life gets better when you remove the chaos.



Be a Role Model

Your child watches everything you do and say. You are your child's first role model. Make her proud!



Live in the Present – Plan for the Future

**There will never be another NOW.
Learn from the past. Don't dwell on it.
Make tomorrow what you want it to be.
That is your choice in life.**

Children seldom can relate to their parents' issues:

- Your dysfunctional relationship with your own parents
- Dissatisfaction with your failure to achieve goals set when young
- Divorce or separation, lack of another parent in the home
- Lack of money to buy the perfect house or car

If you regret the past, then stop reliving it. Rather than wishing things were different, accept the life you have now and move forward. Your child lives for today with hopes for the future. Join her.



And one from me: Celebrate!

In the really old days, a birthday was a big celebration as people struggled to live each year. It's easy to take what we have for granted. Your small child does not.

Celebrate! Each morning a young child wakes filled with excitement for a new day. Enjoy her enthusiasm.

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Here are just a few possibilities to celebrate

- ☺ First day of the month
- ☺ First day of school this year
- ☺ Last day of school for the school year
- ☺ Child's first paying job
- ☺ Your new job
- ☺ Child's first attempt at fixing supper
- ☺ Your best attempt at fixing supper
- ☺ Child's first two-wheeled bicycle
- ☺ Teen's first car
- ☺ You or your child learning a new skill



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What other events can your child and you celebrate?

Introducing Chris

Chris is the name used to represent your child. A boy or a girl, he/she is sometimes a 2-year-old, other times 17, and everything in-between. He/she might attend preschool, elementary school, middle or high school.



Helpful tips are included for your role as Mom, Dad, Stepmom, Stepdad, guardian, grandparent, aunt, uncle, neighbor, concerned friend, teacher, counselor, or future parent. Anyone involved in the life of a child will find constructive information from this book.

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Our Chris is not a baby. This book concentrates on the ages of two and beyond. Babies require love, patience, and attentive care whether you are single or married. A listing of books and websites on baby care can be found in the resource section of the **SINGLE PARENT WISDOM** website, URL: singleparentwisdom.com/.

In this book...

As a parent, your time is limited so I've done the research for you. Inside you'll find tips from a large number of books, studies, newsletters, and magazines. Workshops, classes and seminars were attended. Interviews were

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conducted and surveys taken.

Some information stated is just plain common sense. Validation — having others agree that you are doing the right thing may be all the support you need. And there will be ideas new to you.

Conflicting advice is included. Since every family situation is unique, what works for one family may not work for another. Try different ideas. There is not one parenting method that works for every family.

Resources for specific problems or needs are listed on the **SINGLE PARENT WISDOM** website at singleparentwisdom.com/.

One final question asked of our experienced SPWisdom support group:



**If you knew then, what you know now,
what would you change?**

Please learn from our mistakes and our success. This is the wisdom we share.

There is a great future for your children and for you. Gather the advice you feel you need. Use it and then enjoy each day as it comes. Your children will be young for only a short while.

**In a moment of Decision, the best thing
you can do is the Right thing to do.
The worst thing you can do is
Nothing.**

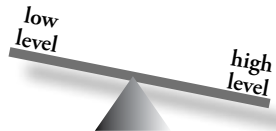
Theodore Roosevelt, 26th US President

Parents! Tips to Make Decisions, Solve Problems

“I can’t deal with this right now.”

How many times this week have you made this statement? When I was a single parent of three young children, my shoulders stooped from the weight of every decision I had to make. Now that my children are grown, I am wiser and eager to share with you some ways to make this task easier. First, look at some of the decisions you make every day.

Recognize Low-level versus High-level Decisions



When faced with making ALL the decisions, every issue becomes a challenge. It’s easy to get trapped spending your valuable time on the simple, low-level decisions, leaving less time and energy for the difficult, life-altering, high-level decisions. Take a breath, or several breaths, relax your shoulders, stand back, and survey the situation. Try to put your choices into perspective.

.....

Most low-level decisions are mundane. Right from the start of the day, should I get out of bed now, listen to the news on the radio for awhile, or hit the snooze? Try to spend less than a moment on each low-level decision you make today.

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The most overwhelming part was the sole decision making that was required: whether to have him join the Scouts, get braces, play the trombone, or stay at a friend's.

Patricia, mother of one boy

Low-level decisions

- ✓ Let children decide which park to play at today, when there is a choice.
- ✓ Should I buy the advertised brand of frozen vegetables or the store brand? Just add one to your cart. *Tip:* If brands matter to your taste buds, keep a master shopping list of the brands preferred. Then include the brand names on your weekly shopping list.
- ✓ Paper or plastic? Whatever the bagger has his hands on. *Tip:* Keep cloth tote bags handy for shopping by storing near your front door or in your car.
- ✓ McDonald's or Burger King? Your children will remember where you ate last. Let them take turns making that decision. Which has the better play room? Will you have time for the play room?
- ✓ What gift to buy. [I spend more time and energy on selecting the right gift. It is my creative release.]

High-level decisions

These are the ones impacting your life and your child's. They demand more thought. It helps to make a list of pros and cons before deciding.

- Where to live
- Where to work
- Whom to date/marry

When making big decisions:

- find someone who has had to make the same decision before,
- find an expert,
- find a support group to discuss it, or
- wait and the answer may become clear over time.

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Little steps

For problems that can only be solved over a long period of time, you may need to accomplish mini goals or smaller steps in order to reach the main goal. Make a list of the necessary steps to complete along the way to reach the finish.

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Kerry Patterson, co-author of *Crucial Confrontations*, suggests when you need to make assignments, decide the following: Who? Does what? By when? How will you follow up?

An additional question to consider: Do you have the authority to delegate this decision? You can appoint your responsible child to feed the dog every day. But tell your ex or the other parent what you expect him to do seldom works.

Feel your Intuition

...that 6th sense, gut instinct, inner wisdom, and feeling of danger that tells you: **Don't walk down that deserted alley at night!**

On the positive side, it's the feeling that tells you now is the best time to change jobs.

Everyone has intuition — that immediate knowledge that tells you if it feels wrong, it's probably wrong.

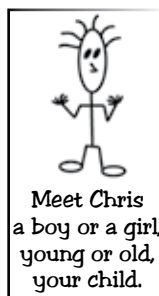
- ✓ If you don't like the new friend your child [Chris] brought home...
- ✓ If you don't want Chris to go to that party...
- ✓ If the story Chris tells you about why he came home late does not feel true, it probably isn't.

Does Chris yell at you so the loudness makes his story sound true?

Gather as many facts as you can. After analyzing all the details, if you still feel it is not right, then you are probably correct.

There is nothing wrong with saying no when you feel that is the best decision. For example, you agree for Chris to accompany neighbors to a

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swimming pool using your best judgment, because (if these are true)...

... you know the neighbors, more than just to say “Hi”

... know Chris is a good swimmer, and

... know there are lifeguards at the pool.

This satisfies you to say, “Yes, you can go swimming with our neighbor, Mrs. Rodriguez.”

.....

Second chance. *I would ask that you let parents know that if they make a bad decision in life, don't let it get them down. It happens. Learn from that decision and keep trying to make good ones.*
Carrie, mother of 2

Reduce the Decision Stoppers

Our thoughts and actions can actually slow down our decision-making process. Try to reduce or eliminate the decision stoppers of soft addictions, procrastination, stress, too much information, lack of self confidence, and conflict or fear of conflict.

First Decision Stopper: Soft addictions

In *There Must Be More Than This*, author Judith Wright defines soft addictions:

“ Those seemingly harmless habits like over-shopping, overeating, watching too much TV, endlessly surfing the internet, procrastinating — that actually keep us from the life we want. They cost us money, rob us of time, numb us from our feelings, mute our consciousness, and drain our energy. And we all have them.

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Jeff Davidson, *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Managing Your Time*, directs us to...

“ ...identify which activities in your work (and personal life) support you and bring you the best results. Have the strength to abandon activities that don't benefit you.

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Another soft addiction: Unhealthy friendships

In high school, my best friend Linda and I became friends with Martha. She was fun and different from us. She had her own car!

Unfortunately, Martha criticized everything. Soon, Linda and I became as negative. No memory of the final breaking point, but I do remember both Linda and I deciding we had had enough. We stopped associating with her. Our attitudes and our lives improved after that.

Stay clear of negative people, if possible. Strive for a more positive, I-can-do-it! attitude. If the people around you don't support you, find new people to have around you. Negative energy wastes time.

.....

As an adult, I became friends with a fellow single parent. We had fun together visiting dance clubs and just hanging out. Then her crazy side came out. On a cold, rainy night, she dragged me around town to find her boyfriend's car. We found it in front of his other girlfriend's home. She let the air out of the rear tires.

My self esteem was low, but not that low. I found better ways to spend my free time.

Decision Stopper: Procrastination

Procrastination is a choice you make and becomes a habit, much worse than just putting a decision off until next week. It wastes your valuable time, causes stress, lowers your self esteem and sabotages your success.

If something has to get done, do it now. If a bill has to be paid, do it now, or at the very least mark it on your calendar when you plan to pay the bill. When that day arrives, do it!

The task at hand may not take as much time as you think. For an average-sized family, washing the dishes takes about 10 minutes with help. So let's get washing. If you wait until you are in the mood, the kitchen will be overflowing with dirty dishes, smelly, and filled with bugs. *Yuck!*



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Don't procrastinate. Putting off an unpleasant task until tomorrow simply gives you more time for your imagination to make a mountain out of a possible molehill. More time for anxiety to sap your self-confidence. Do it now, Brother, do it now.

Author unknown

.....

A few ways to beat procrastination by Jim Estill

- ✓ Refuse to accept procrastination as an excuse.
- ✓ Start with the worst task.
- ✓ Break it down into smaller steps, and then do one step at a time.
- ✓ Tell someone what you need to accomplish, and by when, so your friend can help you get started with a little push.
- ✓ With large chores, do the best part first.
- ✓ Devote just 10 to 15 minutes. If it's going well, finish it. If it's not going well, then you've shortened the time to work on it next time.
- ✓ Keep a To-Do List. Mark off your accomplishments.
- ✓ Challenge yourself. If you're trying to exercise every day, keep track of how far you walked today, or how many sit-ups you did. Then try to beat your record tomorrow.
- ✓ Reward a job well done, or discipline yourself for not starting. The reward can be as simple as a few minutes to read a favorite book. Stay away from the donuts!

“Use mantras,” Estill shares. “One of my favorite is ‘successful people do tough things’. I want to be a success so this drives me to get started.”

And last, “Develop success habits. If something is a habit, it happens naturally.”

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Set a time limit to make the decision. An hour? Before bedtime? By tomorrow noon? Or do you need more time, like Scarlet O’Hara of *Gone with the Wind*, “I’ll think about that tomorrow.” Then add it to your To Do list. And most importantly, DO IT!

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Know yourself. How do you procrastinate? Do you need something to finish the job or more knowledge? Take care of such details.

Decision Stopper: Too much information

“ In this *Jetsonian Tomorrowland* we live in, facilitated by the Internet, we’re inundated with information....Information can lead to knowledge and knowledge to wisdom, but managing information requires some wisdom of its own.

Reid Goldsborough
“Battling Information Overload”
.....

We have been taught to overanalyze everything. Stop! Consider how much information you really need to make a wise decision. Yes, there are statistics, reports, and opinions galore on the Internet. If you collect all the data possible, what time is left to make the decision?
.....

The world is complex and so are its people, writes Jonah Lehrer, *How We Decide*:

“ Sometimes we need to reason through our options and carefully analyze the possibilities. And sometimes we need to listen to our emotions. The secret is knowing when to use these different styles of thought. We always need to be thinking about how we think.

Decision Stopper: Stress

How much bad stress do you feel in your day-to-day? Mishandling of good stress as well as bad stress can interfere with your decision-making skills.

Members of our SPWisdom support group comment
[The following includes excerpts from my book, *Parents! Take Care of Yourself*]

Handled it a day at a time. Tried to handle problems right away. John, father of 4

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I had friends to talk with. I had counselors for me alone. I had to find myself and know myself instead of running from me and that was the hardest. I had to learn to love me. Once I got to that point, it has been better. People weren't created equipped to do it all by themselves. It took two to make a kid; it takes two to raise them.

Realize you cannot change anyone but yourself! Learn it and get over the control thing!
Kat, mother of 2



I kept reminding myself the situation was only temporary and enjoyed my children.
Sarah, mother of 3

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Recognize signs of too much stress

Your body and mind tell you when your stress level is starting to rise. Do you bite your finger nails, chew on the ends of your hair, snap at your family or co-workers, or get headaches? Pay attention to the signs and take action. Do what you can to reduce the stress.

After a stressful day, I clench and grind my teeth while I sleep. In the morning, I wake with a headache, and sometimes a sore jaw. My dentist provided a teeth guard to protect my teeth and reduce the grinding. My stress will be reduced as soon as this book goes to the printer, I hope.



.....
Some typical consequences of too much stress, as listed in Aleta Koman's, *The Parenting Survival Kit*, are a noticeable change in weight, impatience, easily irritated, difficulty focusing, depression, and/or can't sleep.

Reduce bad stress

Laughter relieves tension, relates Stephen R. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Families*:

“ It's a producer of endorphins and other mood-altering chemicals in the brain that give a sense of pleasure and relief from pain.

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Laughter is the best medicine. I laughed at myself a lot. It really helps to inject humor into many situations.

Ann, mother of 4

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Deniece Schofield, *Springing the Time Trap*, encourages us to make a TO DO list and review how we use our time:

“ Plan ahead. Assign priorities. Keep track of your dates, deadlines, and appointments. Make a daily action plan.

Your best moments are when you feel in control... You will discover greater freedom and relaxation and develop a large measure of control over your time and your destiny... It's just common sense that planning can't help but bring you more of what you want in life.

.....

Take control of your life, TODAY!

.....

☞ *Tip:* Fill your gas tank at half full. This reduces that early morning stress when you're driving to work and see Empty on your dashboard. Plus, it is much easier on your engine and costs the same.

.....

Make a list of what needs to be done to improve your life. Answer the question posed by Schofield: “What is bothering me about my environment [my surroundings]?”

Take time to look around. Start with the environment in your bedroom. What would be better if it were changed? Room darkening shades? New blanket? Be able to see the top of your dresser? Come up with a plan to improve this area. Initiate the first step of your plan.

One step at a time. Once comfortable with your bedroom, do the same with the rest of your home. Then expand the list to the environment in the rest of your yard, street, neighborhood, town, county, state, region, country, and world. Just one change can make a difference in your life and how you feel about your life.

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Mad at the world? Realize your emotions will cloud any decision-making skills you possess. Work on your personal conflict before relying on your judgment that may be life-altering for your family and you.

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Feeling miserable and want everybody around you to feel as bad as you do? Don't take advantage of the emotional control you hold over your children. It's important for your children to feel good about themselves. Give up the misery. Life will improve.



.....

Nurture yourself. To relieve frustration, work out at the gym, punch a bag for awhile, run around the block or for a mile, do aerobics with a class or on your own with a DVD. This will give you some relief and you'll be in better shape to conquer your world.

How's your attitude? Stress brought to you by YOU

We create much of our own stress. Do you find irrational thoughts invade your brain, sometimes making a mountain out of a molehill? Do you feel everything that happens to you is a tragedy? Find ways to reduce this way of thinking. Dismiss the negative what-if's.

- Don't jump to conclusions.
- Don't exaggerate what happened, or the importance of it — it is seldom a real catastrophe.
- Curb your unrealistic expectations.
- Try to find some humor in the situation.
- Don't seek revenge. I understand how inviting it can be to let your mind play with such thoughts.
- Do you feel you've lost control? Is someone taking away your control? Get it back.

Again — Don't be a catastrophist

- ☞ The world won't end if the trash doesn't make it to the curb this week.
- ☞ Your child isn't condemned to a life in prison if she

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steals one piece of candy. Discuss the theft and have consequences for wrong choices of behavior.

- ☛ The roof won't fall in if your child disagrees with you about a House Rule. Say, "I can understand how you might feel that way." Consider her opinion and change the rule, or not.

Are you old enough to make this decision on your own?

You can be a parent of many children, but if you have not reached your 20's yet please seek guidance to make the wisest decision. Scientists have discovered the dorsal lateral prefrontal cortex of a teen's brain is not yet developed. According to *Allstate Insurance*, that part of the brain...

“...plays a critical role in teens' decision-making and understanding of future consequences. Problem is, it doesn't fully develop until their twenties. This is one of the reasons why 16-year-old drivers have crash rates three times higher than 17-year-olds and five times higher than 18-year-olds.

Accept wise guidance from those older than you for the really big decisions.

Decision Stopper: Lack of self confidence

Parents confide they fear making the wrong decision. Empower yourself. Go ahead and err, blunder, goof up. Our mistakes teach us. We become wiser. The memory of past acts adds to our decision-making process. Parenting is filled with attempts at getting it right. After all, you are only human.



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Raising a child solo and being forced to rely on one's own judgment and decisions, rather than depend on someone else, can be a very empowering thing in one's life.

Andrea Engber and Leah Klungness
The Complete Single Mother

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Boost your self esteem at the start of every day

The uplifting daily quotes on my perpetual calendar (no year) remind me that I'm capable of anything and everything — like writing this series of books. The comments are from others who have struggled before me to accomplish their goals. They inspire and challenge me. Find more self esteem tips in my book, *Be a Role Model, Teach your Values*.

I discovered I always have choices and sometimes it's only a choice of attitude.
Judith M. Knowlton
Author

“ ...self-esteem is your attitude or belief about yourself. People with healthy self-esteem respect themselves, control their behavior, and are confident about their decisions.

Sal Severe
How to Behave So Your Children Will, Too!

Uncover your “assertive self”

- ✓ Stop letting people treat you poorly
- ✓ Refuse to be a victim
- ✓ Regain control over your life
- ✓ Reduce stress and anxiety
- ✓ Stand up for yourself (and your family)
- ✓ Learn to say no
- ✓ Express your true feelings, while being considerate of others' feelings
- ✓ Use body language that gives a clear message: You are not meek. You mean what you say.
- ✓ Find ways to boost your self-esteem. Find success with your work, hobbies, friends, etc. Learn something new.
- ✓ You are the leader of your family. Accept that role. Do the best you can.



Be Creative. Refuse to rely on manipulation, whining or nagging to get your way. Avoid using intimidation to handle problems in your life, counsels Peter Davidson,

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Finesse 'Em: How to Get What You Want Without a Sledgehammer.

“ Oh, you might get your way, but all too often, you'll leave a trail of mistrust, hard feelings, and devastation in your wake.

.....

“Do not confuse aggression with assertion,” details Herbert Fensterheim and Jean Baer, *Don't Say YES When You Want To Say NO:*

“ Aggressiveness is an act against others. Assertion is appropriate standing up for yourself.

Decision Stopper: Conflict or fear of conflict

When there is conflict in the family: Too much conflict isn't good, but too calm of a household is unnatural. It's normal for family members to disagree. Such conflicts need to be stated and discussed without fighting or name-calling. Dr. Thomas Gordon, *Parent Effectiveness Training (P.E. T.)*, explains,

“ In such families, the child at least has an opportunity to experience conflict, learn how to cope with it, and be better prepared to deal with it in later life.

.....

Before confronting someone, study the situation to make sure you are confronting the right problem. For example, when a child does not complete his chores, the problem might be perceived as the child is lazy. Instead, he may be rebelling because he feels that he

- ⊗ always gets the gross, yucky chores, or
- ⊗ has more chores than his brother, or
- ⊗ doesn't feel or understand he is part of the family — the team it takes to care for the home.

Take the wise path by calmly sitting down with Chris. Explain how you need to rely on him to complete his tasks. If he can't follow through on a simple chore, when can you

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trust him with the bigger responsibilities?

If the discussion turns into a yelling match, you have lost more than you had when you began.

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Kerry Patterson and her colleagues in *Crucial Confrontations: Tools for resolving broken promises, violated expectations, and bad behavior* offer **CPR: Content -**

Pattern - Relationship as the areas to discuss with the conflicted person. Talk about what just happened — the **Content** of the problem. This may be the longest part of the discussion.

Next, discuss the **Pattern** of it happening too often and that you don't want to see it happen again. If repeated it will affect the respect and trust between the two of you. That directly affects your **Relationship**. You want or need to count on this person, but are concerned you cannot.

Conflict is normal and manageable

Barbara Coloroso, *Kids are Worth It!*, presents the following ideas for parents to teach kids how to resolve conflict in their lives.

- Lead by example.
- Handle conflict without a raised voice or fists.
- Aim to understand the other person's feelings about the disagreement.
- It is okay to differ.
- Say, "We can work this out."
- Say, "It's okay to be angry; it isn't okay to hit."
- Young children need choices, between this...and that...: "You can have time to calm yourself down, or play a board game with me."



.....

Kids, who shy from conflict and fights or give in easily, become passive adults, or suppressed with rage and hostility, warns Coloroso. This type of adult makes a lousy spouse, lousy employee and lousy parent. The hostility is seething below the surface, until he or she explodes.

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In need of further education on conflict resolution? Check with your local community college for a class or workshop to attend. If it is not offered, suggest it. Our area college requires only seven interested people to offer a class.

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Family members need to learn how to express their viewpoints, even disagreeable ones, without confrontation. They need to feel secure that they will still be loved. Phil McGraw, *Family First*, advises,

“ Children who never see an appropriate argument might become naive and vulnerable to the realities of relationships later in life.

.....

Dolores Curran, *Traits of a Healthy Family*, cautions us how to handle children who argue just to argue. Treat them as you do someone who had drunk too much alcohol. You know it is worthless to disagree with them. Just smile and move on or redirect. If you have the time to debate the issues then do it. Children learn from constructive discussion.

Be gracious. Not all parental decisions need to be announced or explained.

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You do not have to accept destructive behavior in your home, property or car. Tell Chris you will call the police if it doesn't stop. If that doesn't change anything, call the police.

If Chris is self-destructive by taking extremely high risks, using drugs and alcohol, slashing his arms, threatening suicide, you need to take him to a mental health professional NOW. Don't wait! He won't "grow" out of it. He's asking for help TODAY.



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Daily Decision: What's for Supper?

The best way to reduce the daily stress of this question: Plan meals at least one or more weeks in advance. Make the meals as routine as possible. There will be times when you feel particularly creative and make something spectacular. But for now, children just want to be fed. It does not have to be a gourmet delight.

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Schofield states, "Sit down and list 10 or 15 main dishes (or whole dinner menus, if you prefer) and jot down any needed ingredients on your shopping list."

This makes it easy to do a quick scan of cupboards and refrigerator to see what you need to buy for this week's or month's meals.

☞ I have several cookbooks. To save time, I include the name of the cookbook and page number of the recipe on the above menu.

Suggestions from our SPWISDOM group

- > Pizza > Chicken > Beef > Meatloaf > Pork
- > Seafood: Fish sticks & french fries. Be sure to add a vegetable, like carrot sticks. Yum!
- > Lasagna > Goulash > Chicken & Dumplings
- > Spaghetti, sometimes with meatballs or meat sauce
- > Pasta without sauce, just butter or olive oil. For a different taste, add seeds such as caraway, poppy, or sunflower. Add freshly grated Parmesan cheese.
- > Kraft Macaroni & Cheese® preferred to my homemade mac and cheese
- > Tuna noodle casserole > Chicken & rice casserole
- > Chicken on the grill > Turkey with the trimmings
- > Roast beef, potatoes and gravy > Homemade bread
- > Potatoes & Pennies: Fry together sliced potatoes and sliced hot dogs
- > Dogs & Beans — cut up hot dogs, mix with baked beans, add a little catsup, mustard, some onion soup mix

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and bake for an hour

> Barley — boil it in chicken, beef or vegetable broth, add cut up celery, onions, and mushrooms. It's quick and makes a great nutritious fiber-filled side dish.

> Rice > Potatoes > Broccoli, cooked or raw

> Sweet potatoes or yams (full of vitamins and fiber and tasty even without marshmallows)

> Vegetables, fruit — include fresh, frozen or canned fruits and veggies at every meal

> Desserts: Tapioca, pudding, Jello®

> Instant sugar-free, fat-free pudding makes a great dessert. Comes in several different flavors. Easy to make in 5 minutes!

From our contributors Kathy, JC, Patricia, Carol, Diane, Susan, Rhonda, Marge, Sarah, Carol, Randy, and Ginny



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I always made sure each child had at least one thing they liked to eat at the meal. They may not like the meat, but liked the corn. I never made them eat anything they did not want. As long as they did not complain, it was not an issue. I would not allow, "Oh yuck, that looks or smells like..." comments. I never forced them to clean their plates, either.

Debra, mother of 3 boys

My boys ate anything and everything because my husband and I did not let our bias influence them. We made meal time fun with lots of talking about our day. They had to try at least one bite of everything. As the cook, I made sure I had something on the table for everyone (vegetables, especially).

Karen, mother of 2 boys

Offer variety

I fixed chicken so often in a Crock-pot® that one day when my son walked in from school (second grade) he burst into tears. When I asked him what was wrong, he said, "Not Crock-pot chicken again!" Lesson learned. Just because it is fast and easy, do not overdo it!

Meredith, mother of 2

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Refrain from becoming a short-order cook for your family.

At meal time, fix one entrée (main dish) with side dishes of vegetables, salad, and fruit. If you try to compete with a restaurant by making different meals for family members, you will become exhausted. If you insist on playing the restaurant game, you are being permissive and teaching Chris he can have whatever he wants and someone else will provide it. What kind of adult will he be?

“Real-Life Guide for Parents: Helping Your Kids Eat Right and Be Active,” from Kidnetic.com offers this warning:

“ Keep the following foods from children until 4 years of age: Hot dogs, nuts and seeds, chunks of meat or cheese, whole grapes, hard, gooey, or sticky candy, popcorn, chunks of peanut butter, raw vegetables, raisins, and chewing gum.

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Although I have over 20 cookbooks, I also use free recipe resources from the Internet. Try MEALS MATTER™ at www.mealsmatter.com and ALL RECIPES® at allrecipes.com. There are many more.

I bought Tilapia (fish) from my local grocer and didn't know how to prepare it. On my computer Internet browser, I typed: recipe tilapia, then pressed the Enter key. Before me were 230,000 recipes. I found a recipe that's easy to prepare and delicious. It's now a regular main course at our table.

.....

Fresh apple slices with a sandwich are tasty and healthier than chips. I keep one bag of tortilla chips for an occasional lunch when we want something salty and crunchy with our meal.

A washable whiteboard on the kitchen wall with the days of the week listed is handy to write the week's supper menu and if the family has plans to eat out on a certain

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night. This helps with grocery shopping and tells all household members what we will eat tonight. List simple chores, for example, whose turn it is to wash and dry the dishes, load/empty the dishwasher, or help prepare the meal.

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Once a month

- Plan a picnic to your backyard, neighborhood park, state park, or living room floor. Visit a different place each time or find a favorite spot to return each month. Pack a nutritious meal, buy meals-to-go at a local restaurant or plan to grill.
- Plan a night ordering in — Chinese, pizza or whatever is available in your town.
- Plan a night out at a local restaurant. If your children argue over which one, take turns, and make sure everyone gets a chance to visit their favorite place, including yours.



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Warning: Eating out too much can be dangerous for your child’s health, reports the *American Heart Association*:

- “ Compared with students who ate out less than 4 times a week, those who dined out often had...
- ⊗ significantly higher blood pressure,
 - ⊗ lower levels of high-density lipoprotein (“good” cholesterol),
 - ⊗ more blood particles associated with a build-up of artery-clogging plaque,
 - ⊗ lower insulin sensitivity (a sign of progression toward type 2 diabetes),
 - ⊗ significantly overall higher dietary intake of sugar, starch, sodium, fat, and cholesterol, and
 - ⊗ were less active than their peers.

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My child care provider spent one day every weekend making extra meals to freeze and lots of baked goods, like cookies and bars. There were always delicious snacks at her house for the children she babysat and her family. When

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she didn't feel like making supper from scratch, there was always a dinner in the freezer to heat up.

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Encourage children to help plan, shop for and prepare dinner one night a week or month," suggests the booklet, "How to help your children succeed in school":

“ The sight of the finished meal on the table will reward their planning and efforts. Serve extra helpings of praise.

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Home Economist Peggy Haafke, author of "Snacks for Little Folks (and Big Folks)," writes:

“ Involve children in food preparation as much as possible. Children enjoy doing things for themselves and being helpful. Many times a child will be more willing to taste a new food that he has helped prepare.

Tip: I've had some of the best, unguarded conversations with my child while working together to fix dinner and afterwards doing the cleanup.

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Fast food trick: *My son would eat his french fries first, and not have room for the hamburger. My remedy was to get each of us a hamburger, then order one large fries. I would shake out 1/3 of the fries for him, 1/3 for me, and leave 1/3 in the middle of the table for whoever finished his burger first. I made sure he always won and that it never became a situation where he ate too fast.*

Fruit cocktail dessert: *Mix fruit cocktail with cottage cheese. My kids loved it. I cannot imagine any other way to make cottage cheese a treat. Drain the fruit cocktail before adding it to the cottage cheese.* Jeff, father of 2

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Food fuels our body. Consistently eating at fast food places will not provide the necessary nutrients that we need to think and act properly. Daily multivitamins may help. Nutritious, well planned meals are the best.

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- Pizza should be a treat, not a mainstay.
- Munch on raw carrots while fixing dinner. Now they come in small packages already cleaned. Offer fruit as snacks instead of popcorn or crackers.
- Eat fewer “processed” foods: foods in a box, frozen meals, canned goods. Make your meals and snacks from scratch. That way you can control the amount of sodium (salt), fats and oils, colors and dyes, and chemicals your family consumes.
- Eating too much refined sugar (such as sweets and candy) will have your child bouncing off the walls.
- You’ve heard this before, and here it is again: Drink 8 to 10 glasses of water a day. It’s filling and good for your body. Of course, children require smaller glasses.

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Too many chemicals. Read the ingredients list on food you purchase. Try to reduce the amount of chemicals your family eats. MSG (monosodium glutamate) and aspartame give me headaches. What about you? What about Chris?

High-Level Decision: Latchkey Kids

[Excerpt from my free e-book, *Child Care: Know who is watching your child*, available at Smashwords.com.]

Stay home-alone concerns

The term, *Latchkey Kids*, was given to children in the 19th century who wore their keys around their neck while playing outside after school because their parents worked.

Once Chris reaches the age of nine or ten expect to hear this whine: “I don’t want to be with the babies anymore at the child care center.”

This is her first step to wear you down until you agree to let her go home after school. Be strong. Check out the following before making your final decision.



Laws, ordinances, policies

Does your town have rules concerning the minimum age a child can be home alone without adult supervision?

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Find out before you allow your child to stay home in case you are breaking the law. A surprise of a fine or a charge of Child Endangerment won't lessen your stress.

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Education. Some hospitals and agencies offer an educational class, such as “Home Safe Alone,” for children ages 9 to 11. It teaches a child how to be safe at home while her parent is away. The class discusses chores and responsibilities, meal preparation without using the stove, safety from strangers, and what to do during emergencies. The child receives a packet to list family safety rules, daily responsibilities, free time ideas, chart for important phone numbers, and first aid information.

Find out if such a class exists in your area for Chris to attend. This doesn't mean 9-year-olds should stay home alone. It's just preparing them for the possibility later.

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Alternatives. Before deciding Chris can go home after school, contact the nearest high school to find a reliable teenager who could stay with her a few hours after school, for a fee.

Lessons. Are there music, dance, sports, or art classes that Chris can attend after school? Arrange transportation.

Readiness Questions. Is Chris ready to stay home alone?

Is she afraid to be alone in the house for a few hours? If yes, then she isn't ready.

If you can honestly answer yes to the following questions, please still think long and hard before letting your child become a latchkey kid. If you are uncomfortable with the idea, then the answer is no. Tell her you will reconsider it again in three months, or six, or next year.

- ? Will she follow House Rules when you're not around?
- ? Does she do her chores without complaint?
- ? Can she find something to do that is safe when alone in the house?
- ? Can she resist inviting friends over when you're not home?

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- ? If someone knocks on the door, can she keep from answering it, and not be afraid?
- ? Does she know basic first aid? Is a first aid kit and supplies available to her?
- ? Does she have common sense?
- ? Can she freely call you at work?
- ? Is there someone close by she can call in case of an emergency, an adult friend, relative, or neighbor? Is there someone nearby who can keep a key in case she loses hers?
- ? Does she really want to be home alone or does she just want a change from the child care situation?

.....
 When you are comfortable with Chris staying home alone, a list of rules is necessary.

House Rules for Staying Home Alone After School

- ✓ Keep doors locked until a parent arrives home.
- ✓ Phone a parent or another selected adult when she first arrives home. Plus, she is to call if she has any fears or concerns.
- ✓ Will not tell anyone on the phone that she is alone.
 [Note: Don't expect your child to not answer the phone. For one thing, it could be you calling to check up on her. And, a ringing phone can create fear in a child.]
- ✓ Has a list of activities to entertain her in your absence.
- ✓ Will not share the code on the security system with anyone.
- ✓ Knows the fire escape plan. Working smoke detectors are on every floor.
- ✓ Emergency numbers are posted by the phone.
- ✓ Don't use the stove or toaster oven. Review safe use of the microwave.
- ✓ Absolutely no access to guns, alcohol, drugs, lighters, and matches.
- ✓ Knows how to turn the power back on in case of an electrical spike or outage.
- ✓ Knows where the flashlight and radio with batteries are kept in case the whole neighborhood loses power.

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Together, role play strangers coming to the door or calling on the phone so she knows how to respond with confidence.

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Try a few hours at first. It's such a big step to let Chris stay home alone after school. If you have to work all day on weekends or non-school days, please find arrangements for someone to watch her or for Chris to go somewhere. All day is too long for a child to amuse herself. There are just too many things that can go wrong.

Solve Problems with these Steps

- **Identify** the problem.
- **Brainstorm*** possible solutions to the problem. This is best done with everyone involved in the problem. Make sure any problems presented to your child are **Age-Appropriate** and are not a burden to him.
- Find a **solution** that is **agreeable** to all parties involved.
- **Apply** the solution as the decision.
- **Evaluate** whether the solution is working.
- If that idea doesn't fix the problem, **try again** with another solution. Be flexible. Have other options.

Is this solution the best answer for this problem?

Discuss the pros and cons, the good and the bad, the positive and the negative:

- ? What are the consequences of this decision?
- ? Illegal or legal?
- ? Moral or immoral?
- ? Right or wrong?
- ? Unhealthy or safe?
- ? Lose respect from friends?
- ? Lose trust from parents?
- ? May cause harm to another person?

*** HOW TO BRAINSTORM**
 Write down all suggestions. No suggestion is bad. Be positive. Negative comments on someone's suggestions are not allowed. When brainstorming is over, evaluate each suggestion eliminating the ones that won't work, are not practical, or too costly to implement.

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- ? Because everyone says you should?
- ? Because someone says you shouldn't?
.....

You cannot solve every problem that is set before you. Look over the problem. Research solutions. Do what you can to solve it. Then, be done with it.

Accept the things I cannot change.

Reinhold Niebuhr, *Serenity Prayer*

When the problem is between your child and you

It is natural as a parent to want to protect your child from problems and discontentment. Please realize Chris needs to take on the responsibility and have the experience to find workable solutions for problems he encounters.

First, you must decide — **Who owns this problem?**

When your older child misses school because he failed to get up when the alarm went off — child's problem. It becomes your problem when it happens 10 times and you are charged with truancy.

Will one of these solutions help?

Can you think of other ideas that can help this child?

- an alarm with no snooze button
- alarm clock placed on his dresser, far from his bed, so he has to get out of bed to turn the annoying blast off
- three alarm clocks set five minutes apart
- doesn't eat or drink something before bed interfering with a good night's sleep. Drinking soda pop or coffee, or eating chocolate or food high in sugar content within a few hours of bedtime can affect anyone's sleep, especially a child's.
- A simple bedtime routine — brush teeth, wash face, brush hair, close bedroom curtains, change into pajamas, climb into bed, and relax by reading a story. A simple routine sets the mood. Next item on the list — fall asleep.

What is the consequence for missing school, work or chores? Suggestion: Bedtime moved up a half hour earlier for each late day.

Is your child missing sleep due to stress or worries?

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Talk to him calmly about what is happening in his life.
Help him find a solution or understanding.

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Teenage Chris conflicts with your spouse, a friend, a sibling, a teacher — your child’s problem. We all have to learn to work together. If Chris or your spouse gets violent, then outside intervention is needed.

.....

Child not walking the puppy as agreed upon — child’s problem. Chris cleans up the mess caused by the dog. If the problem isn’t corrected soon enough it becomes the dog’s problem (health-wise) and problem of who pays the vet bills.

.....

“Try to get honest, open communication when discussing problems with your children or anyone else involved,” points out Jon Saphier, co-author of *How to Make Decisions That Stay Made*. “Be flexible. Monitor the decision and be willing to adjust your decision.”

.....

Don Dinkmeyer, Sr., *Parenting Teenagers (S.T.E.P.)*, outlines, “To decide who owns a problem, ask yourself these four questions:

1. Are my rights being disrespected?
2. Could anybody get hurt?
3. Is someone’s property threatened?
4. Is my [child] unable to take this responsibility?

If you answer yes to any of these questions, then you own the problem, or your child and you own it together. If you can truthfully answer no to every question, then it is your child’s problem.

By understanding who owns the problem, you will be able to “decide when to walk away, when to help, and when to feel responsible,” adds Dinkmeyer.

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To a child, child-size problems are just as big as adult-size problems are to you

Your child's problems are very real and important to him. You may not feel they compare to your problems of trying to balance the family budget, but his problems are just as important to him. Show respect.

Small children have not gained the experience to handle problems without your guidance. This is when to use discipline. Teach the child how to solve the problem. Offer appropriate choices and consequences for his decisions that cause more problems.

Teach your child

My parents stressed obeying them and their decisions, but that didn't help me make my own good decisions. I married at age 18. Became a parent by 21 and divorced by 22. Six months later, I married Husband #2. I spent the next decade trying to figure out who I was and how to make decisions. My children needed me to be the grown up. They had to wait.



When misbehavior is the problem

Your child behaves incorrectly so you apply a consequence. Then the child purposely misbehaves to punish you for applying a consequence. The problem is the fact the child intentionally did this. Review **CPR: Content - Pattern - Relationship**, page 20.

If you don't confront the problem shortly after it happens, the child will feel his misbehavior is within your "zone of acceptance." Patterson explains how all of us have this zone, from parents to teachers to bosses, even the police. How large is your zone? When you don't confront misbehavior, your child feels it is safe to repeat it at his will. Before you explode, discuss the misbehavior.

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- ☞ **Not my problem.** Pretend the problem belongs to a friend. I can always come up with the best advice for my friends.
- ☞ **Reverse who's who.** When your child and you continually argue about the same subject, switch places. Take your child's side and he interprets your view. Listening to your child explain how he sees the problem from your eyes can be enlightening. Work together to find the solution that makes everybody happy, or at least less angry.
- ☞ **Talk to an unconnected person.** Talk to a friend about the problem and ask for his advice or views on it. Or talk to a professional counselor for guidance.
- ☞ **Sleep on it.** The solution may come to you during the night or by morning. *Can't sleep?* Don't trust your judgment in the morning. We need sleep to see things clearly. Thoughts keep you up at night? Keep a notepad by your bed to write down the thoughts. Then try to forget and relax.

.....

According to psychologist Dr. Gordon, there are 3 ways of handling parent-child conflicts:

- **Win-Lose Method** when parents always win, usually by strict, authoritarian style.
- **Lose-Win Method** when parents give in to the child to "keep peace" in the family. It is common for a single parent to feel guilty with only one parent to raise the child as if the family is not "whole."
- **No-Lose Method** (Also known as **Win-Win**)

When the parent always wins (*Win-Lose*), there is...

- ☹• low motivation for the child to carry out the solution,
- no opportunity for the child to develop self-discipline
- resentment and hate replace love and affection
- parents...spend a lot of time enforcing the decision: nagging, reminding, prodding.

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When the child always wins (*Lose-Win*)

- ⊖ You don't want your child to be mad at you, so you give in to his demands. STOP! It's normal for children to disagree with us, sometimes. When it is every time, then you need to look at the situation, and discuss it.
- ⊖ By giving into the child's demands, the child relishes power over his parent. Does your child have temper tantrums, make you feel guilty, say terrible, nasty words to you?
- ⊖ A child who always gets his way seldom respects the property or rights of others, rarely cooperates or helps around the house, and has few friends since other children are jealous and don't like "spoiled kids."
- ⊖ Then the child has no loving feelings from parents and no friends. This child is in trouble heading for serious mental health problems as an adult or teen.

☞ **Warning:** Few people like change, no matter their age or size. When you decide to stop letting your child always win, it takes several attempts to convince her that this is a new method for the family to solve problems. Keep at it.

When no one loses (*No-Lose method aka Win-Win method*)

- ⊕ Together, the parent and child work to find an acceptable solution. This method has been found to be successful by couples, business partners, supervisors and employers.

By working on a solution together, Chris can proudly say, "Hey, Dad listened to me!"

Children are taught to respect authority, your authority

Parent: No!

Child: Why?

Parent: Because it just doesn't feel right.

It is okay to say this to answer your child. You are using your intuition and years of experience to know there could be a problem if you said yes.

Parent: Because I said so.

As a child, I vowed to never say this favorite phrase of

We have to teach children that “No” is a complete sentence.

Gavin de Becker
“The Gift of Fear”

my parents. Imagine my surprise when I heard it come out of my mouth. Children need to understand and respect your authority. You are in charge.

As the parent, you have the final say on everything. This can be overwhelming. When you make a decision, your children will whine.

They love to debate. It is actually how they learn. Simple explanations teach Chris how to make his own choices.

With some decisions, there will be no need for further discussion. Do not defend every decision you make. After all, you are in charge.

Do you say, “No, you can’t do that,” too many times?

Be prepared for Chris to figure out ways to go around your rules to still get what he wants. Why do you say no so often? With some children, if you say no all the time to their requests they stop asking and do it anyway. Children only give us a few chances before they decide we don’t know what we’re doing. Then they stop letting us parent them.



Tone of voice. Do you bark orders at your children, especially teens, in an attempt to establish control in your own life? This creates resentment and rebellion, giving you even less control. Reconsider the tone and decibel level of your voice.

Remember the **Decision Stopper: Lack of self confidence** on page 17? Children also need to feel confident to make their own decisions. Severe asserts,

“Children who believe in themselves expect success from life. They feel good about themselves. They are confident. They can take constructive criticism.

Let your child learn from mistakes by helping him find solutions not by being the one that has all the answers.

Vicki Lansky, *Practical Parenting Tips*

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When a child is solving a problem, be there for guidance, support, and encouragement, suggests Coloroso. Avoid solutions that are unkind, hurtful, unfair, or dishonest.

I think I was fair and honest. I let them make many of their own decisions.

Kathy, mother of 2 boys

I tell my kids,
I'm an assistant
in your life.
I'm here to help
you do the things
you want to do.
I'm here to help
you grow.'

Will Smith, an American actor, producer, rapper

Make choices

When it is **age appropriate**, children learn by providing input on decisions directly affecting them:

- Friends to play with
- What to do with free time
- Clothes to wear
- Choice of music
- Classes to take in high school
- What to do after high school: career, military, college, marriage



Let children have mutual input on family decisions, such as

- ✓ Family vacations — within family budget
- ✓ Household chores
- ✓ Allowance — within family budget

☞ *Tip:* The parent maintains the final say on most decisions.



Think about experiences with your own parents or your boss. When you were forced to do something that you didn't want to do or have any input on, you might have avoided doing it or *hated* them for making you do it. When you have a say, even if you disagree with the final outcome, you feel better about going along with the decided rules.

Use Family Meetings to divide up household chores. See “Set Family Goals Together,” in my book, *Strong Family, Strong Child*.

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I made so many wrong decisions in my young life I worried my children would also. I feared everything they did as teenagers affected their future. For children, the “future” is just too far off to take seriously. My children chose to learn by experience.

My son, Austin, ignored school until his grades dropped dramatically. He could have been a contender for Valedictorian and earned college scholarships. Instead he realized towards the very end of his K-12 school life the importance of grades towards achieving financial help with college, much to his detriment, but he did learn.



I should have saved my frustration and worrying. I could have challenged him to do better. Everybody loves a game.

Offer suggestions, not advice. A child interprets advice as a command of what he should do. By simply stating a suggestion or idea, you can save your feelings from getting hurt if Chris doesn’t use your recommendation. He may need to make this decision for himself.

Ask questions, avoid interrogation. If you ask too many questions, Chris will feel like he is on trial. Then he won’t talk to you, or worse yet, will yell and storm off.

“*I’m curious...*” — try these words. For example, say, “I read a magazine article that told about kids cheating on tests by texting each other the answers. Does that happen at your school?”

It’s not a challenging question. It can open a dialogue.

Be aware: Chris may erupt with anger and storm off. This behavior indicates either he has done what you are asking or is close to others who have and doesn’t want to be a snitch. Give him some time. If you are open, he will talk to you about it later now that he knows you know.

Children get confused when they see people do wrong. They don’t expect their parents to understand the situation. After all, if the concept is new to your child, Chris assumes it is new to you, also.

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- ☞ As a parent, I disagree with the experts who say a parent doesn't need to know the whereabouts of his child when he is away from home. In my opinion, it is your responsibility to know your minor child is safe and not causing harm to anyone or anything.

.....

Dinkmeyer suggests that when you need to question your child, especially your teen, be sure to think about the answer you are seeking as you create your question. Do you want a simple yes or no, or are you hoping for more discussion?

Ask Open-ended questions

When in search of more information from your child, avoid asking questions easily answered with a yes or no, known as **Closed** questions.

Children may feel closed questions blame, accuse, or criticize them, especially the word why. Closed questions are recognizable as they typically begin with Do you, Don't you, Is, Are, and Were.

Use **Open** questions beginning with Where, When, What, Who, Which, or How. They ask for more information.

Ask questions that request a longer answer. Instead of asking, "How was school today?" ask "What are you studying now in history class?" With an **Open** question, the conversation doesn't stop, but continues with the answer.

- ☞ Prevent judgment appearing in your voice and maintain friendly body language.
- ☞ For more communication tips, including body language and tone of voice, see my book, *Listen More, Talk Less*.

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Negotiate

“The most important skill you can help kids master is negotiation,” states “Dr. Drew” Pinsky. “They need to be able to assert themselves to get where they need to go, not where someone else wants them to go.”

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Bill O’Reilly offers guidance to children in his book, *The O’Reilly Factor for Kids*, which is also good advice for adults: Recognize “that other people in your life have just as much right to their ways of doing things as you do.” Learn “to choose which disagreements are important and which can be settled by compromise.”

.....

Dr. Phil comments, “You teach people how to treat you, and this includes the way you relate to your children. If you don’t like your relationship with a child, you need to renegotiate it.”

Six steps for a successful negotiation

1. Identify what it is that each side seeks out of the negotiation. For example: Teen Chris wants a later curfew. You want to know he is safe and behaving responsibly.
2. Avoid the use of manipulation from either side.
3. Wait to negotiate when emotions are calm and all parties are thinking clearly, rationally.
4. Seek a solution that both sides can agree upon.
5. Be specific in the agreement reached and what each of you expects to happen.
6. Write the negotiated agreement, such as a new curfew for 2 weeks. Once that plan is successful, try a longer time period. If the agreement is not kept, then renegotiate — start over with Step #1.

Agree to try a solution

Contract. Once an agreed solution has been found, write it down. Include the consequences to be applied if Chris

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does not follow through on the agreement. Have Chris sign the paper with the agreement on it, and you sign it — your child’s first contract. Try it for a few weeks and then revisit the issue to see if the contract is working.

Set and Maintain Guidelines

I explained the rules before if he was going to a friend’s or to an event with someone, such as time to be home.

Stacy, mother of a boy

We had very few formal household rules. Exceptions would be bedtime or being home for dinner. The children knew I had high expectations. The idea was to encourage independent thinking. I was there to guide them rather than to set hard and fast rules.

Sometimes they made good decisions — sometimes they learned from their mistakes — sometimes they didn’t learn from their mistakes. Over all, I think the result was good.

Jeff, father of 2

.....

Children expect you to set the guidelines, no matter how much they argue. Your child feels secure when there is some structure in his day. Set meal times, curfews and bedtimes.

Guidelines for acceptable behavior define what is okay and not okay to do, such as, a 5-year-old is not allowed to cross the street alone; a teen follows the House Rule — No underage drinking.

Be reasonable and stand by your rules. To keep consistent, write down the House Rules. Post these rules on a wall in the kitchen. Or keep the list in your “Our Family” notebook (see page 51).



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If I could change things, I would have been much stricter and not so worried about their emotions all the time. I wouldn’t have let them manipulate me the way they did.



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I wanted so bad to make sure they wouldn't have 'childhood issues' as adults. Now I know they have them no matter what. I should have demanded respect. The older two reassure me I did a 'good job' being a mom and that feels good. I know I did the best I could at the time. Debra, mother of 3 boys

Our children need to understand and follow directions, respect us (adults), follow the schedules set for them, and act reasonably intelligent in public, submits Dr. Phil.

School psychologist Severe divulges:

“ Rules are expectations, and expectations guide children's decision making. There are three factors to consider when developing expectations or rules. Expectations must be **specific, reasonable, and enforceable.**



Specific. By Saturday noon, the child's bedroom will be clean.

Checklist:

- “ All dirty clothes put in the laundry basket.
- All furniture dusted and polished.
- Carpet vacuumed.
- Sheets changed.
- All toys in toy box.
- All clean clothes put away.

Reasonable. Is this something your child can do at her age?

Enforceable. You can tell by looking if the tasks are completed. If one or two of the items on the checklist haven't been completed, the child must work on that before she continues with her day. If you have time, help Chris to complete the task. Working together can be fun and make the task less of a chore.



Explain the rules. Be brief. No lectures. Be a parent, not a friend. Your children will not like all the decisions you

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make. That's normal. Have rules to guide them. Share mutual respect.

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If Chris can't do anything right to please you and follow the simplest rules, revisit your list of rules. Make sure they are age-appropriate. A toddler cannot be expected to clean her room. Your teen may be taller than you, but does not have the judgment of an adult. Eliminate some rules, put the remaining rules in order of importance, and then encourage Chris to follow just one rule. When she does, compliment her. Children really do want to please parents.

This is just a test!

Children constantly test us to see if the boundaries or rules have changed. It's their job. If you haven't set any rules, then you are in for even more testing. They need to know that you care so much about them that you want to keep them out of harm's way. You set guidelines to help them make the right choices. Then they expect you to be the enforcer to prove that they are good rules.

.....

The first time I take a small child in my van, the child often runs between the seats escaping to the back. Besides being fun to be so small that you can run inside a vehicle, the child is testing me to see how I react.

Calmly, I say, "Get into the car seat, please. We have to leave, now."

If that doesn't get immediate results, I add with a cheery voice, "We can play later."

A child understands that. He learns I don't yell easily, and I like to play, too. To get mad at the child for not climbing into his seat would be a waste of my energy and does not benefit the child, except to tell him that I get mad easily. (Although I admit my patience is better now than when I was a busy, young parent.)

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☞ With every household member together for a Family Meeting, you can discuss guidelines and House Rules. For more information on holding Family Meetings, see my book, *Strong Family, Strong Child*.

Provide safety and security

Children feel safer when you set limits for them, relates psychologist James Dobson, *Focus on the Family* founder. They feel secure when they know someone is going to enforce those limits. If Mom or Dad changes the rules after reading the latest “fad” behavioral technique, then expect rebellion, or the opposite, loss of respect. Children are comforted when they feel their parent is truly wise and in control.

.....

Elaine St. James, *Simplify Your Life with Kids*, clarifies:

“ This sense of security comes from consistency. If kids aren’t wary of the mood you’re in, they can confide in you. If they know you won’t yell, they can confess their mistakes. If they know you’ll sympathize, they’ll cry on your shoulder. If they know you’ll listen, they’ll tell you about their hopes and dreams (and maybe even tell you what they did in school today).



.....

Tell Chris that he can come to you when he needs help finding a solution to a problem. If Chris hears that you are willing to help him, he will be more willing to ask for it. He may not ask, but will feel less alone knowing you are in his corner.

.....

When Chris has a problem, ask him how he thinks it should be solved. If his idea sounds possible, encourage him to go for it. If he needs a little help on finding a solution, then gently offer a suggestion.

A great skill to master: Make the suggestion sound as if Chris thought of it. When he takes ownership of the

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idea, don't remind him that it was your idea first. Let him have it. Solving his own problems empowers him and encourages a sense of responsibility.

Let go

If Chris comes up with a solution, but you say, "Oh that's alright, I'll take care of it," you both are headed for trouble. He needs to solve his own problems and know he can find a solution that works.

Don't know the answer?

It's not possible to know everything, but it is possible to find answers. Show your child how to search for information. Libraries and the internet are good sources.

.....

Encourage your child to form opinions and make decisions based on her own judgment.

"Raising Kids Who Don't Smoke"

Philip Morris USA

Involve the Other Parent

My ex and I would talk several times a week. And if problems arose when he had our kids, they would call me and we would try to figure it out.

Diane, mother of 2

When I divorced in 1980, the courts told you what to do about visitation, and pretty much everything else. Today's single parents are more likely to work together to create a **Parenting Plan**. After researching this concept, I highly recommend it. If you have difficulty agreeing on a plan with the other parent, find a third party to help mediate.

Separately or together work on a plan "that takes into consideration your child's needs and also reflects what you believe to be in the overall best interest of your child," advises child custody coach, Steven Carlson.

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When there is open, respectful communication between parents, everyone benefits for years to come.

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Define your Goals; Set Priorities

Our day to day lives are so busy that we forget to take the time to understand what is important to us. When you can write it down on paper, it will be easier to know how to handle the problems and decisions that come day to day, week to week, year to year.

What or who is most important to you?

In each section below, write number 1 in front of the most important priority. Be honest. When finished, return to each section and continue numbering that section by order of importance.

Family #1-6 Who should have your top focus?

- Me, myself
- My children
- My parents
- Significant other/spouse/boyfriend/girlfriend
- Children's other parent
- My need to find a spouse or partner

Health & Well-Being #1-8

- My health
- My children's health
- My mental health
- My children's mental health
- To provide a safe home for my family
- To keep living where I am now
- To move to a better place
- To move to a different town/city/country

Wealth #1-3

- My personal finances. To be able to pay current bills.
- My future finances. To be able to save money.
- Financial security for the rest of my life.

Career Growth #1-3

- My job
- Get a new job
- My need for education/training for a better job

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Intellectual Growth What is your #1 goal?

- Need to complete my high school education
- Get a GED
- Need/want to attend college or get vocational training
- Need/want to graduate from college
- Or _____

Spiritual Growth #1-4

- Include spirituality in my life
- Increase spirituality in my life
- Include family in my spiritual beliefs
- Introduce others to my spiritual beliefs

Material Security #1-7

- A home for my family
- A clean house
- The cleanest house in the neighborhood
- Maintain the furniture I have now
- Buy more and better furniture
- Maintain the car I have
- Purchase a car or other transportation
- Purchase a better car

Where did you place #1? How much time do you spend on the #1's, your top priority? What is the lowest priority on your list? How much time is spent on this? Do you spend more time on low priority items than high? How will you ever accomplish your goals when you waste time on stuff that doesn't matter? Are you surprised by the order of priorities you listed compared to the life you are living?

By knowing your priorities and goals, it is also easier to define low-level and high-level decisions.

What do you want to accomplish tomorrow? Write it down. Make a list. What do you want to accomplish this week? This month? This year? Within a few years? In your lifetime? What do you need to do to accomplish each goal? Make a plan. I finally achieved my lifelong dream of a

The key is in having a destination, a flight plan, and a compass.

Stephen R. Covey

college degree. It didn't happen until my own children completed college, but it happened. That accomplishment has helped me focus on writing this series of books to help others.

Set your financial goals

When you are aware of your financial goals, it is easier to make decisions regarding spending or saving money. Are the items on the following list important in your culture?

- Is your current income high enough to provide for your family?
- Do you have life insurance, health insurance on you or your child, and insurance on your home and possessions in case of fire, flood, tornado, theft?
- Car insurance. Is it a legal requirement to be able to drive where you live?
- A college fund for your child
- A retirement fund for yourself

How can you attain your financial goals?

.....

A vision without action is just a dream.

Action without vision merely passes time.

But vision with action can change the world.

Joel Barker, business futurist

How to be S.M.A.R.T. to accomplish your goals

In *Top Achievement*, Gene Donohue instructs us that to set **Specific** goals you need to ask yourself the same questions a journalist asks for every story, the 5 Ws:

Who, What, Where, When, Why, plus a 6th -- Which

Donohue provides this example, "A general goal would be, 'Get in shape.' But a specific goal would say, 'Join a health club and workout 3 days a week.'"

Have a **Measurable** goal... "How will I know when it is accomplished?"

Choose **Attainable** goals... If your mind knows the goal is possible, then you will "develop the attitudes,

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SPECIFIC
MEASURABLE
ATTAINABLE
REALISTIC
TIMELY

abilities, skills, and financial capacity to reach them....see yourself as worthy of these goals, and develop the traits and personality that allow you to possess them.”

To set **Realistic** goals... You must be willing to work to achieve it and able to achieve it. Setbacks and failure is a normal part of life. Keep at it.

Set **Timely** goals... You need a “sense of urgency.... anchor it within a timeframe, ‘by May 1st’, then you’ve set your unconscious mind into motion to begin working on the goal.”

Organize your Home to Better Organize your Life

In the preceding pages, you found your goals and set priorities. The goal of organizing your household will reap benefits:

- ☺ less cluttered room
- ☺ less cluttered house
- ☺ easier to find what you need
- ☺ everyone has their own space for their stuff
- ☺ less cluttered brain

First, reduce clutter

Decisions are easier to make with less clutter surrounding you. As a writer, I have a home office which becomes the household’s catch-all for old mail, research papers, books and magazines to read, items to mail, including gifts for my grandkids. Business and household receipts lay in a pile before I log them into my computer.

Occasionally, I seriously tackle the stuff to find better placement for it. With the space cleared and my office appearing more organized, I amaze myself on the amount of work I can then accomplish. Less clutter clears the mind to concentrate on the important issues.

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Pretend you're moving. Get rid of the items in your home that no longer fill a need. Simplify. I kept extra bedding just in case visiting relatives and friends were caught at our Iowa home during a snowstorm. There were several snowstorms over the years, but no one was stranded at our home. It took an actual move to a smaller place, before I was willing to part with them. Be strong.

Stop storing extra stuff.

Pack it away. If you don't need it after one year, consider giving it away. I finally parted with my when-I-lose-weight clothes. Now, I realize I will be so excited when that happens I will enjoy buying new clothes.

Calendars keep us on schedule

In the kitchen, a wall calendar with large spaces provides a place for each family member to write their school activities, appointments, babysitting jobs, Boy Scout meeting dates, and so on. Use a specific colored marker or pen for each person. Use black for activities involving the whole family. Write the menu for supper (or at least the main dish, Meatloaf). This helps when it's time to grocery shop. Plus, by planning meals for the week the question, "What's for supper?" is answered.

Schedule certain household chores. For example, Saturday, rent rug cleaner. Schedule personal chores. After a haircut, I find 6 weeks out and write: Need haircut.

.....

Before supper, look over tomorrow's calendar to discuss with everybody at dinner. Hopefully, this will decrease the announcement made at bedtime: "Mom, I need 2 dozen cookies for tomorrow's party at school."

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Create an “Our Family” notebook

Organize your household with information in one place.

First, get a 3-ring binder. Find a place to keep it, possibly in your kitchen. Store the following family information:

- **Contact Information:** Phone numbers of your work, relatives, friends, neighbors, emergency contacts
- Your **child’s school calendar**
- **Schedules of any other activities** for your child or you, such as music or art classes
- Your **child’s sports team calendar** and phone numbers of teammates for carpools
- **Food:** Menus for dinner, Freezer contents, Grocery Shopping List*
- **Household Chores Task List***
- **Financial Management:** Budget Tables*, Bills due list [You may want to keep this information in a place where others do not see it.]
- **Health Information:** Allergy information, medicines they take, prescription information, immunization records, blood types
- **Medical Authorization Form*** one completed for each child
- **Discipline Guidelines, House Rules, and consequences*** for misbehavior
- **Babysitter Notes:** Your home address, phone numbers of fire and police, child’s fears, and what you want the babysitter to do in your absence, such as wash dishes, bedtime routine (bedtimes and how many stories to read, snacks, bath tonight?)
- **Auto Care Records:** Date of last oil change, repairs made, tires replaced
- **Safety:** Fire evacuation plan for each room of the house
- **Budget Information** [Only if your child will not be looking at this notebook.] Maintain a calendar of what bills to pay when.

Plus whatever else you want to have in one easy access location.

A 3-hole punch makes it easy to add papers to the notebook.

* These forms are available free to download at the **SINGLE PARENT WISDOM** website, URL: singleparentwisdom.com/ and add to your “Our Family” notebook.

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Expert advice: Handle mail once and only once

My personal library of how-to-organize-your-stuff books all state the same advice regarding mail: When you first receive it, place mail in the proper file folders, trays or toss it. Label the trays/folders:

A — Take care of it now (like bills due, don't want to misplace them and have the lights turn off).

B — Take care of soon.

C — Keep for a resource.

D — Deal with later for mail or catalogs.

Toss anything that doesn't belong in A through D.

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Good advice, but some days I just don't want to make any more decisions. I often toss the mail on my desk to deal with later, except for the bills due. It's amazing how easily I can toss out mail with the passage of a few days.

When I have a spare moment, on the phone on hold, waiting for the computer printer, or bored, I look at the items in the D box. I decide what to do with each piece: place an order, file or toss into the trash or recyclable bin.

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Reduce junk-mail that clutters your home. See our Less Junk Mail list at our website, **SINGLE PARENT WISDOM**, URL: singleparentwisdom.com/.

Opt Out. Call this phone number 1-888-567-8688 and state your name and address. This phone call removes your contact information from mailings for credit card and insurance offers for ever.

Do-Not-Call list. To add your home phone number and cell phone number to the national Do-Not-Call list via the Internet, visit the website <http://www.donotcall.gov/>. To register by phone, call 1-888-382-1222 (voice) or 1-866-290-4236 (TTY). You must call from the phone number you wish to register.

Federal Communications Commission

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Members of our SPWisdom support group share additional helpful organizational tips

Delegate, delegate, delegate! Listing jobs on frig worked for awhile. Always write things down you want done by your children. They cannot 'forget' that way. Meredith, mother of 2

The best was everyone chipping in to help. The work was done much more quickly. Everyone had their job to do.
Susan, mother of 3

I never let things pile up. I cleaned house, did laundry, and dishes daily or at least several times a week. Dishes were done after every meal before we left the house.
Kathy, mother of 2 boys

Organization was the key to keeping things going and staying sane at the same time. School bags for all of us would be set by the door at night so that everything was ready to go in the morning. The boys made their own lunches if they chose not to eat the hot lunch at school. They learned to cook dinner and still enjoy cooking as married men.
Carolyn, mother of 2 boys

Get the children to help you! "Flow Chart" posted so they know their duties. Cathleen, mother of 9

[It's difficult for a child to use an excuse when it is in print in front of him. Download and print my FREE **Household Chores Flow Chart**, who is to do which task by when, at the **SINGLE PARENT WISDOM** website, URL: [singleparentwisdom.com/.](http://singleparentwisdom.com/)]

Made it a priority to pick up after ourselves. Made sure beds were made. Kept current on washing and cleaning. If you let things pile up then it becomes overwhelming.

John, father of 4

[Another option: Instead of making the bed, remove all the blankets to let the bed air out during the day.]

We used a timer to help; for example, when it goes off we need to get in the car. Used lots of wet ones in the car to

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clean up! I don't know how many times we would be heading somewhere and someone forgot to wash face and hands.

Debra, mother of 3 boys

Everything got done without much problem. A friend in PWP gave me one tip: "The house doesn't need to be spotless all the time."

Clyde, father of 2

It seems like in those years we (both kids and I) were very busy but by working together, we always kept a good house, made a nice garden and had or made time to do many fun things.

Tom, father of 3

I tried to always work with my kids in all the jobs, even their rooms. Cooking and cleaning the kitchen with your kids opens the door for easy talking. Just being together is good!

Vicki, mother of 6

All children were shown how to wash and dry clothes. Some liked to cook, so they could make what they wanted. One thing that worked, I always helped with the chores. They weren't alone so they didn't feel imposed upon.

Hester, mother of 5

Unclutter your car

A car should not look or smell like the city dump. A few toys and a box of tissues are okay. Last week's laundry, fast food trash, and soda pop cans all have a better place to be than your car. Teach Chris, and yourself, to remove the trash and "stuff" every time you leave the car.

.....

Karen Levine, *Keeping Life Simple*, suggests stuffing an empty tissue box with those plastic bags from the grocery store:

“ Keep it in the trunk of your car. You'll be surprised how often those bags come in handy as a place to put muddy boots, dirty rags, etc.

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Prioritize

I am a great list maker and rule writer. The most important thing is to be organized, be on time and get rid of the clutter in your life. Debi, mother of a boy

As far as time, there was never enough, but I learned to prioritize. Some things just had to be put off and some things that were too much of a problem went bye-bye. We had lots of fish and tanks, but I sold them because the children refused to help and I couldn't do it. Kat, mother of 2



I would have had more rules, set up some more structure (chores, limits). Diane, mother of 2

Every night before you go to bed, make a TO DO list for tomorrow. List tasks you can actually accomplish the next day. What a feeling of success when you cross out completed tasks!

Have a routine to your day, a structure to how and when things happen, such as Breakfast at 7 a.m.; Lunch at noon; Supper by 6 p.m.; and established bedtimes. Routine isn't boring, it's security.

Always a second chance. Schofield reminds us, "Thank goodness you can keep starting over until you get it right! It's never too late. If you mess up, just start over."

And a reminder from one of our solo parents:

I would ask that you let parents know that if they make a bad decision in life, don't let it get them down. It happens. Learn from that decision and keep trying to make good ones.

Carrie, mother of 2

To summarize...

You have the power to make all the decisions set before you. Seek and accept outside guidance when needed. Don't let the Decision Stoppers delay you from a successful, happy life. You can do this.

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