



Parent **E**ffectiveness **T**raining

The proven program for raising responsible children



Part Three



How To Talk So



No One Loses

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HOW TO TALK SO NO ONE LOSES

All parents encounter situations when neither confrontations nor changes in the environment will change the behavior of the child; the child continues to behave in a way that interferes with the needs of the parent. These situations are inevitable in the parent-child relationship because the child "*needs*" to *behave in a certain way* even though he has been made aware that his behavior is interfering with the parent's needs.

Eric continues to play his video games even though his mother has repeatedly told him the family has to leave in a half-hour.

Molly had an agreement with her daughter to clean up the kitchen, yet when Molly arrives home from work, the sink is full of dirty dishes.

Madeline refuses to give in to her parents' feelings about going to the mountains with a group of her friends over the weekend. She desperately wants to go even though she hears how unacceptable this would be to her parents.

These conflicts between needs of the parent and needs of the child are not only *inevitable in every family* but are bound to *occur frequently*. They run all the way from rather unimportant differences to critical fights. They are *problems in the relationship* - not owned solely by the child nor solely by the parent. *Both parent and child are involved* in the problem - the needs of both are at stake. So **THE RELATIONSHIP OWNS THE PROBLEM.**

Few parents accept the fact that *conflict is part of life and not necessarily bad*. Most parents look on conflict as something to avoid at all costs, whether between themselves and their children or between children.

HOW conflicts are resolved is probably the most critical factor in any relationship. Conflict in a family, openly expressed and accepted as a natural phenomenon, is far healthier for children than most parents think. 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 later in life.* As necessary preparation for the inevitable conflicts the child will encounter outside of the home, family conflict may actually be *beneficial* to the child, always provided that the conflict in the home *gets resolved constructively.*

This is the *critical factor in any relationship: how conflicts are resolved*, not how many conflicts occur. This is the critical factor that determines whether a relationship is healthy or unhealthy, mutually satisfying or unsatisfying, friendly or unfriendly, deep or shallow, intimate or cold.

THE PARENT-CHILD STRUGGLE: WHO WINS, WHO LOSES?

By far most people think of conflict resolution in terms of someone being *right* and someone being *wrong*, someone *winning* and someone *losing*. This "right-wrong," or "win-lose" orientation is at the root of parent-child conflict - whether to be strict (parent wins) or to be lenient (child wins).

Because parents see the whole problem of discipline as a question of being *either strict or lenient*, they are locked into this *either-or approach* and they see their relationship with their children as a *power-struggle*, a contest of wills, a fight to see who wins - a *war*.

The mother of a teenager tells it in her words:

"I try to let my child do what he wants, but then usually I suffer. I get walked on. You give him an inch and he takes a mile"

Cathy, a bright fifteen-year-old, sees it this way:

"What's the use of arguing? They always win. I know that before we even get into an argument. They're always going to get their way. They always know what's right. So I just walk away and don't talk to them."

The Two Win-Lose Approaches

In P.E.T. the two "win-lose" approaches are referred to as *Method I* and *Method II*. Here's how *Method I* operates:

JANE: Bye. I'm off to school.

PARENT: Honey, its raining and you don't have your coat on.

JANE: I don't need it.

PARENT: You don't need it! You'll get wet and might catch a cold.

JANE: It not raining that hard.

PARENT: It is too.

JANE: Well, I don't want to wear that coat. I hate to wear a coat.

PARENT: Now, honey, you know you'll be much warmer and drier if you wear it. Please go get it.

JANE: I hate that coat - I won't wear it!

PARENT: You march right back to your room and get that coat! I will not let you go to school without it on a day like this.

JANE: But I don't like it...

PARENT: No "buts" - if you don't wear it I will have to ground you.

JANE (angrily): All right, you win! I'll wear that stupid coat!



The father got his way. His solution prevailed, although Jane was not happy at all with the solution, but she surrendered in the face of her parent's threat to *use power* (punishment).

Here's how *Method II* operates:

JANE: Bye. I'm off to school.

PARENT: Honey, its raining and you don't have your coat on.

JANE: I don't need it.

PARENT: You don't need it! You'll get wet and might catch a cold.

JANE: It not raining that hard.

PARENT: It is too.

JANE: Well, I don't want to wear that coat. I hate to wear a coat.

PARENT: I want you to.

JANE: I hate that coat - I won't wear it. You can't *make* me.

PARENT: Oh, I give up! Go to school without it, I don't want to argue with you anymore - you win.

Jan was able to get her own way - she won and her parent lost, but the parent was certainly not happy with the solution. He surrendered in the face of Jane's threat to use her *power* (in this case, being mad at her father).

Why Method I is Ineffective

Parents who rely on Method I to resolve conflicts pay a severe price for "winning." The outcomes of Method I are quite predictable - *low motivation for the child to carry out the solution, resentment toward the parents, difficulties for the parent in enforcement - needing to nag, remind, and prod - and no opportunity for the child to develop self-discipline.*

The fact that the parent has greater "psychological size" than the child gives the *parent power over the child*. Also, the parent's power comes from the fact that the child is so dependent upon the parent to satisfy her basic needs. Thus the parent has the power to *reward* the child for acceptable behavior, and to *withhold* what the child needs as *punishment* for unacceptable behavior. Often the child can be controlled merely by promising future reward or threatening future punishment.

A huge problem with Method I is of course that as a child becomes less helpless, less dependent on the parent for what she needs, *the parent inevitably loses power*. This usually occurs when children approach adolescence. Now they can acquire many rewards from their own activities (school, sports, friends). They also begin to figure out ways to avoid their parents' punishments. The parents inevitably come in for a rude shock when their power runs out and they are *left with little or no influence* when their child becomes *resistive, rebellious, negative, and hostile*. Other ways in which children react to Method I are:

1. Anger, resentment
2. Aggression, retaliation, striking back.
3. Lying, hiding feelings.
4. Blaming others, tattling, cheating.
5. Dominating, bossing, bullying.
6. Needing to win, hating to lose.
7. Forming alliances, organizing against parents.
8. Submission, obedience, compliance.
9. Apple-polishing, courting favor.
10. Conformity, lack of creativity, fear of trying something new, requiring prior assurance of success.
11. Withdrawing, escaping, fantasizing, regression.



The forms of *withdrawal and escape* may range from almost total to only occasional withdrawal from reality, including:

- Inactivity, passivity, and apathy.
- Excessive TV watching and video game playing.
- Getting sick.
- Running away.
- Joining gangs.
- Using drugs.
- Eating disorders.
- Depression.

Why Method II is Ineffective

When children grow up in a home where they *usually win and their parents lose*, they learn how to *throw temper tantrums to control others, how to make others feel guilty, how say nasty, deprecating things to others*. Such children are often *wild, uncontrolled, unmanageable*,

impulsive. They have learned that their needs are more important than anyone else's. They, too, *lack self-discipline and become self-centered, selfish, demanding*. They *disrespect other people's property or feelings*. Life for them is to get and take. "I" comes first.

They often have serious difficulties in their *peer relationships*. Other children dislike "spoiled kids." They frequently have difficulty *adjusting to school*.

Probably the most serious effect of Method II is that children often develop *deep feelings of insecurity about their parents' love*. The child often senses that the parents are frequently resentful, irritated, and angry with him. When he later gets similar messages from peers and other adults, it is no wonder he *feels unloved* - because, of course, so often he *is* unloved by others.



Additional Problems with Methods I and II

Few parents use either Method I or Method II exclusively. In many homes *one parent* will rely heavily on Method I while the *other parent* leans toward Method II. There is some evidence that children brought up in this type of home have an even greater chance of developing serious emotional problems. Perhaps the *inconsistency* is more harmful than the extreme of one approach or the other.

One of the most common patterns, particularly among parents who have been strongly influenced by the opponents of punishment, is for parents to *let a child win for long periods of time until his behavior becomes so obnoxious that the parents move in abruptly with Method I*. They then feel guilty and *gradually move back to Method II*, and then the cycle starts all over again. One parent expressed this clearly:

"I am permissive with my children until I can't stand them. Then I become strongly authoritarian until I can't stand myself."

The dilemma of almost all parents seems to be that they are locked into *either* Method I or Method II, or *oscillate* between the two, *because they know of no alternative to these two ineffective "win-lose" methods.*

THE "NO-LOSE METHOD OF RESOLVING CONFLICTS

The alternative is the no-lose method of resolving conflicts - *Method III.* This method is employed to resolve differences between individuals *who possess equal power or relatively equal power.* It is a *no-power method* - or more accurately a *"no-lose" method;* conflicts are resolved with no one winning and no one losing. *Both win* because the solution must be acceptable to both. It is conflict-resolution by mutual agreement on the ultimate solution.

Parent and child encounter a conflict-of-needs situation. The parent asks the child to participate with him in a joint search for some solution acceptable to both. One or both may offer possible solutions. They critically evaluate them and eventually make a decision on a final solution acceptable to them both. No selling of the other is required after the solution has been selected, because both have already accepted it. No power is required to force compliance, because neither is resisting the decision. Going back to our familiar coat problem, it might be worked out like this:

JANE: Bye, I'm off to school.

PARENT: Honey, its raining outside and you don't have your coat on.

JANE: I don't need it.

PARENT: I think its raining quite hard and I'm concerned that you'll catch a cold.

JANE: Well, I don't want to wear my coat.

PARENT: You sure sound like you definitely don't want to wear that coat.

JANE: That's right. I hate it.

PARENT: You really hate your coat.

JANE: Yeah, its really ugly. Nobody at school wears coats like that.

PARENT: You don't want to be the only one wearing something different.

JANE: I sure don't. Everybody wears those cool jackets.

PARENT: I see. Well, we really have a conflict here. You don't want to wear you coat cause its ugly, but I sure wouldn't want to risk catching your cold and then have to miss work. Can you think of a solution that we both could accept? How could we solve this so we're both happy?

JANE: (Pause) Maybe I could borrow Mom's old coat today.

PARENT: That old thing?

JANE: Yeah, its cool.

PARENT: Think she'll let you wear it today?

JANE: I'll ask her. (Comes back in a few minutes with Mom's coat on; sleeves are too long, but she rolls them back.) Its okay by Mom.

PARENT: You're happy with that thing?

JANE: Sure, its fine.

PARENT: Well, I'm convinced it will keep you dry. So if you're happy with that solution, I am too.

JANE: Well, I gotta go.

PARENT: So long. Have a good day at school.

What happened here? Obviously, Jane and her father resolved their conflict to the *mutual satisfaction of both*. It was resolved rather quickly too. The father did not have to waste time being an imploring salesman, trying to sell his solution, as is necessary in Method I. *No power was involved* - either on the part of the father or of Jane.

Below is another kind of conflict familiar to most parents, solved by using Method III:

MOTHER: Cindy, I'm sick and tired of nagging you about your room, and I'm sure you're tired of my getting on your back about it. Every once in a while you clean it up, but mostly its a mess and I'm mad. Let's try a new method. Let's see if we can find a solution we both will accept - one that will make us both happy. I don't want to make you clean your room and have you be unhappy with that, but I don't want to be embarrassed and uncomfortable and be mad at you either. How could we solve this problem once and for all?

CINDY: Well, I'll try but I know I'll just end up having to keep it clean.

MOTHER: No. I'm suggesting we find a solution that would definitely be acceptable to us both, not just to me.

CINDY: Well, I've got an idea. You hate to cook but like cleaning and I hate cleaning but love to cook. And besides I want to learn more about cooking. What if I cook two dinners a week for you and Dad and me if you clean up my room once or twice a week.

MOTHER: Do you think that would work out - really?

CINDY: Yes, I'd really love it.

MOTHER: Okay, then let's give it a try. Are you also offering to do the dishes?

CINDY: Sure.

MOTHER: Okay. Maybe now your room will get cleaned according to my standards. After all, I'll be doing it myself.



"If you make me clean my room, won't it encourage the stereotype of the female as subservient housemaid?"

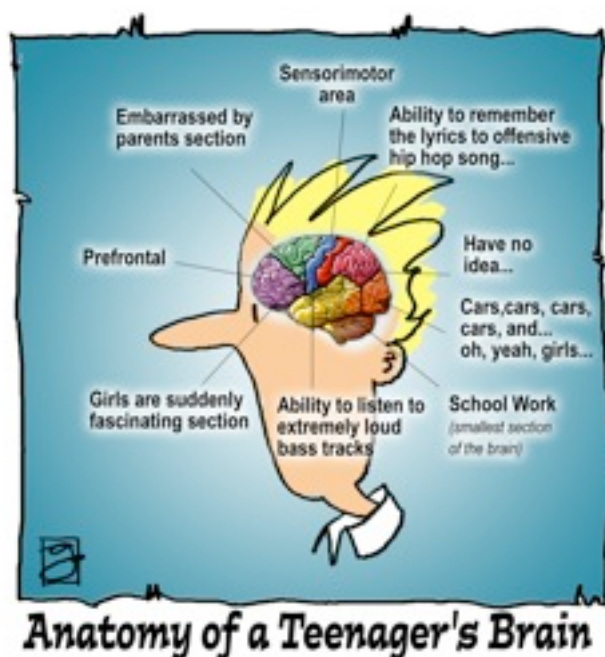
These two examples of conflict-resolution by Method III demonstrate a very important aspect: different families will come up with different solutions to the same problem. *It is a way of arriving at some solution acceptable to both parent and child, not a method for obtaining a single stock solution "best" for all families.* In trying to resolve the coat problem another family using Method III might have come up with the idea for Jane to take an umbrella. In still another family they might have agreed that the father would drive Jane to school that day. In a fourth family, they might have agreed that Jane wear the "ugly" coat that day and that a new one would be bought later.

Method III, then, is a method by which each unique parent and each unique child can solve each of their unique conflicts by finding their own unique solutions acceptable to both.

WHY METHOD III IS SO EFFECTIVE

The Child Is Motivated to Carry Out the Solution

Method III brings about a *higher degree of motivation on the part of the child* to carry out the decision because it utilizes the *principle of participation*. A person is more motivated to carry out a decision that he has participated in making than he is a decision that has been *imposed on him* by another. Therefore, the solution requires less enforcement.



More Chance of Finding a High-Quality Solution

An example of a high-quality solution emerged from a family using Method III to solve a conflict between parents and their two small daughters about the noise of the TV, which the girls liked to watch around dinnertime. One of the daughters suggested that they would enjoy the program just as much with the sound off - just seeing the picture. All

agreed to this solution - a novel one, indeed, although perhaps unacceptable to children in another family.

Method III Develops Children's Thinking Skills

This method *encourages - actually requires - children to think*. The parent is signaling the child: "We have a conflict, let's put our heads together and think - let's figure out a good solution." Its an *intellectual exercise in reasoning* for both parent and child. Its almost like a challenging puzzle and requires the same kind of "thinking through" and "figuring out."

Less Hostility - More Love

Many parents have reported that immediately following a resolution of a conflict, *everyone feels a special kind of joy*. They often laugh, express warm feelings toward other members of the family, and often hug and kiss each other.

Method III Eliminates the Need for Power

A sixteen-year-old girl came home one night and told her parents:

"You know, I really feel funny with my friends when they all talk and gripe about how unfair their parents are. They talk all the time about getting mad at them and hating them. Somebody asked me why I didn't feel bad toward my parents. I said that in our family you always know that you won't be made to do something. There's no fear of them punishing you. You always feel like you've got a chance."

Method III Gets to the Real Problem

Nathan, aged five, began balking about going to school several months after he started. His mother at first pushed him out of the house against his will a couple of mornings. Then she went into problem-solving. It only took her ten minutes to get to *the real cause*: Nathan was afraid his mother might not pick him up and the time between the cleanup at school and Mother's arrival seemed interminable to him. He also wondered if Mother was trying to get rid of him by sending him off to school.

Mother told Nathan her feelings: she wasn't trying to get rid of him and she enjoyed having him at home. But she also valued his school. Several solutions emerged from their discussion and they chose one: his mother would be there to pick him up before cleanup time. The mother reported that Nathan thereafter departed happily for school and that he mentioned the arrangement frequently, indicating how important it was to him.

Treating Kids Like Adults

Method III communicates to kids that parents think *their needs are important, too*, and that the kids can be *trusted to be considerate of parental needs* in return. This is treating kids much

as we treat friends or a spouse. The method feels so good to children because they like so much to feel trusted and to be treated as equal. Method I treats kids as if they are *immature, irresponsible, and without a brain in their heads!*



Method III as “Therapy” for the Child

Frequently, Method III brings about changes in children’s behavior not unlike the changes that take place *when children are seen in therapy by a professional therapist*. A father reported the results of a Method III discussion with his five-year-old son:

“He had developed a strong interest in money and frequently would take loose change from my dresser. We had a conflict-resolution session that resulted in our agreeing to give him a dime a day for an allowance. As a result, he has ceased taking money from the dresser, and has been very consistent in saving money to buy special things he wants.”

Other parents have reported *improved grades in school, better relationships with peers, more openness in expressing feelings, fewer temper tantrums, less hostility toward school, more responsibility about homework, more independence, greater self-confidence, happier disposition, better eating habits,* and other improvements.

PARENTS’ FEARS AND CONCERNS ABOUT THE NO-LOSE METHOD

“METHOD III TAKES TOO MUCH TIME”

Many conflicts are “*quickies*” or “*stand-up*” problems requiring from a few minutes to ten minutes. Some problems *take longer* - such as allowances, chores, use of the TV set, bedtime hours. However, once they are solved by Method III, they generally *stay solved*. These

high-quality decisions don't continually come up again and again. Parents save time in the long run because they don't have to spend countless hours *reminding, enforcing, checking up, hassling*.

"AREN'T PARENTS JUSTIFIED IN USING METHOD I BECAUSE THEY ARE WISER?"

"We know best from our experience," "We're denying you only for your own good," "When you're older, you'll thank us for making you do these things," "We just want to prevent you from making the same mistakes we made," "We just can't let you do something that we know you'll be sorry for later," etc. These are some of the *rationalizations* parents use to justify themselves in *using power over their children*.

How easy it is for parents to forget that *their own parents made unwise Method I decisions*. How easy to forget that *children sometimes know better* than parents when they are sleepy or hungry; know better the qualities of their friends, their own aspirations and goals, how their various teachers treat them; know better the urges and needs within their bodies, whom they love and whom they don't, what they value and what they don't.

The *wisdom of both the parent and the child is mobilized* by the no-lose method. Neither is left out of problem-solving using Method III, in contrast to Method I which ignores the child's wisdom, or Method II, which ignores the wisdom of parents.

"AREN'T THERE TIMES WHEN METHOD I HAS TO BE USED?"

"But what if your kid runs into the street in front of a car? Don't you *have* to use Method I?"

"But what if your kid gets severe appendicitis? Don't you have to use Method I to make her go to the hospital?"

Yes, of course. These are crisis situations that demand immediate and firm action. Yet, *prior to the crisis* of a child's running in front of a car or needing to be taken to hospital, nonpower methods can be used.

Here's an example of a conversation between a mother and nine-year-old who were driving to the clinic to start a regimen of twice-weekly injections for her hay fever. The mother used only Active Listening.

LINDSAY (In a lengthy monologue): I don't want to take those shots - who wants shots? ... Shots hurt... I suppose I'll have to have them forever... Twice a week... I'd rather sniffle and sneeze.... What did you get me into this for?

MOTHER: Hm-mmmmm.

LINDSAY: Mommy, do you remember when I had a whole lot of splinters in my knee and I had a shot afterward?

MOTHER: Yes, I remember. You had a tetanus shot after the doctor removed the splinters.

LINDSAY: That nurse talked to me and told me to look at a picture on the wall, so I didn't even know it when the needle went in.

MOTHER: Some nurses can give shots so you don't even know you're getting them.

LINDSAY (upon arriving): I'm not going in there.

MOTHER (over her shoulder while walking in): you would really rather not come.

LINDSAY (Walks in with exaggerated slowness).

PUTTING THE "NO-LOSE" METHOD TO WORK

Setting the Stage for Method III

This is the *critical phase* when parents want the child to become involved. You have to *get the child's attention and then secure his willingness* to enter into problem-solving. Your chances of doing this are much greater if you remember to:

1. Tell the child clearly and concisely that there is a problem that must be solved. Don't be tentative.
2. Be very clear that you want the child to join with you in finding a solution acceptable to you both, a solution "we can both live with," in which nobody loses and both of your needs will be met.
3. Agree on a time to start - when the child is not too busy or occupied or going somewhere else.

Step 1: Identifying and Defining the Conflict

This is *the most critical step* in Method III because this is when *the needs of both the parties are defined*. Often what appears to be a problem turns out to be a "presenting problem," and not the real one. Parents unconsciously come in with preconceived solutions that will meet their need rather than express the need itself. *Separating needs from solutions* can be very difficult because even when people use the word *need*, what they are saying is often a *solution* that would meet the need.

While Active Listening is the most important skill to use in *separating needs from solutions*, the questions "What will that do for me?" or "What will that do for you?" can also be extremely helpful. For example, if you say, "I need a new car," is that a need or a solution? Ask the question "What will that do for me?" Possible answers might be: "I'll get to work safely," "I'll feel good about my image / myself," "I'll save money since my old car uses too much gas and requires lots of repairs." These answers are the needs; a new car is the solution.

Your child might say, "I need my own room," which is really a solution. What will having his own room do for the child? It would provide privacy, or a feeling of having his own space or quiet, etc. These are the underlying needs; a room of his own is the solution.

If the underlying needs of both parent and child are not clearly understood and expressed, the *process will bog down*. The subsequent steps will be misdirected and the conflict won't be resolved.

1. Tell the child clearly, and as strongly as you feel, exactly what feelings you have or what needs of yours are not being met or what is bothering you. Here it is critical to send I-Messages: "I am worried about my car getting smashed up and your getting hurt if you continue to drive faster than the speed limits," or "I'm upset that I'm doing most of the chores around here. I literally have not time to relax." Avoid messages that put-down or blame the child, such as "You're being reckless with my car," "You kids are a bunch of freeloaders around this house."
2. Do a lot of Active Listening so that the needs of the child are clear.
3. Then state the conflict or problem, so both you and the child agree on the problem to be solved.

Step 2: Generating Possible Solutions

In this phase, the key is to *generate a variety of solutions*. The parent might suggest: "Let's think of possible solutions," or "There must be a lot of different ways we can solve this problem." These additional points will help:

1. Try first to get the kids' solutions - you can add your own later.
2. Most important, do not evaluate, judge, or belittle any of the solutions offered. There will be time for that in the next phase. Accept *all* ideas for solutions. You might want to write them down.
3. Keep pressing for alternative solutions until it looks like no more are going to be suggested.

Step 3: Evaluating the Alternative Solutions

In this phase, it is legitimate to start evaluating the various solutions. The parent may say, "Now let's see which solution we feel is the one we want" or "What do we think of these solutions we have come up with?"

The solutions get *narrowed down to one or two* that seem best by *eliminating those that are not acceptable* to parent or child. Parents must remember to be *honest* in stating their own feelings - "I wouldn't be happy with that," or "That wouldn't meet my need," or "I don't think that one would seem fair to me."

Step 4: Deciding on the Best Solution

This step is not as difficult as parents often anticipate. When the other steps have been followed and the exchange of ideas and reactions has been open and honest, a *clearly superior solution often emerges naturally*.

Some tips for arriving at a final decision are:

1. Keep testing the remaining solutions against the feelings of the kids with such questions as, "Would this solution be okay?" "Are we all satisfied with this solution?" "Is it going to work?"
2. Don't think a decision is necessarily final and impossible to change. You might say, "Okay, let's try this one out and see if it works."
3. If the solution involves a number of points, it's a good idea to write them down.
4. Make certain it's clearly understood that each one is making a commitment to carry out the decision: "Okay, this is what we are agreeing to do," or "So we're saying that we're going to keep to our part of the bargain."

Step 5: Implementing the Decision

Frequently, after a decision is reached there is a need to *spell out in some detail exactly* how the decision will be implemented: "Who is to do *what*, by *when*?" or "Now what do we need to do to carry this out?" or "When do we start?"

In conflicts about chores and work duties, for example, "How often?" "On what days?" and "What are to be the standards of performance required?" are questions that often must be discussed.

Step 6: Following Up to Evaluate How It Worked

Kids often commit themselves to a decision that later proves to be *difficult to carry out*. Or a parent might find it difficult to keep his bargain. Parents may want to check back after a while with, "How is our decision working out?" or "Are you still satisfied with our decision?" Sometimes the follow-up turns up information that requires the initial decision to be modified.

The Need for Active Listening and I-Messages

Because the no-lose method requires involved parties to join together in problem-solving, *effective communication is the prerequisite*. Consequently, parents must do *a great deal of Active Listening, and must send clear I-Messages*. Parents who have not learned these skills seldom have success with the no-lose method.

Active Listening is required, first, because parents *need to understand the feelings and needs of the kids*. What do they want? Why do they persist in wanting to do something even after they know it is not acceptable to their parents? What needs are causing them to behave in a certain way?

Why is Bonnie resisting going to nursery school? Why does Jane not want to wear that "ugly coat?" Why does Nathan cry and fight his mother when she drops him off at the

baby-sitters? What are my daughter's needs that it so important for her to go to the beach during the Easter vacation?

I-Messages must also be used to *let kids know that parents have needs and are serious about seeing that those needs are not going to be ignored* just because the youngster has his needs. I-Messages communicate the parent's own limits - what he cannot tolerate and what he does not want to sacrifice. I-Messages convey, "I am a person with needs and feelings," "I have a right to enjoy life," "I have rights in our home."

PROBLEMS PARENTS WILL ENCOUNTER

Initial Distrust and Resistance

Resistance may be encountered especially when kids are teenagers who have been *accustomed to years of continuous power struggles* with parents. The best way to handle such distrust and resistance is for the parents temporarily to set aside the problem-solving and try to *understand with empathy what the child is really saying*. Active Listening is the best tool for finding out.



When children have been *accustomed to winning*, previously permissive parents will have to display much more *strength and firmness* than they have been accustomed to with their children. These parents need somehow to find a new source of strength in order to move away from their previous "peace at any price" posture. They have to be reminded of the terrible price they will pay in the future if their kids always win. They have to be convinced that they as parents have rights, too.

Reverting to Method I When Method III Bogs Down

Some parents are tempted to revert to Method I. Usually this has *severe consequences*. The kids are angry; they feel they have been duped into believing that their parents trying a new method; and the next time the no-lose method is tried they will be even more distrustful and resistant.

Also, it is *just as disastrous* to revert to Method II and let the kids win, for the next time the no-lose method is tried, they'll be primed to keep fighting until they again get their way.

Should Punishment Be Built Into the Decision?

Even if kids suggest that penalties or punishment are administered if they don't keep to the agreement, it is far better to avoid this. In the no-lose method, parents should simply *assume that the kids will carry out the decision*. This is part of the new method - *trust in each other, trust in keeping to commitments, sticking to promises, holding up on's end of the bargain*. Any talk about penalties or punishment is bound to communicate distrust, doubt, suspicion, pessimism.

When Agreements Are Broken

It is almost inevitable that kids sometimes will not keep their commitment. Here are some of the *reasons*:

1. They may discover they committed themselves to something too hard to carry out.
2. They simply have not had much experience in being self-disciplined and self-directed.
3. They previously depended on parental power for their discipline and control.
4. They may forget.
5. They may be testing the no-lose method - whether parents really mean what they say, whether kids can get by with breaking their promises
6. They may have expressed acceptance of a decision at the time just because they got tired of the uncomfortable problem-solving session.

A parent should *confront, directly and honestly, any child who has not stuck to an agreement*. The key is again to *send I-Messages - no blame, no put-down, no threat*. Also the confrontation should come *as soon as possible*, perhaps like this:

"I'm disappointed that you didn't keep our agreement."

"I'm surprised that you didn't keep your end of the bargain."

Hey, Jimmy, I don't feel it's fair to me that I stuck to my end of the bargain but you didn't."

The parent must make it clear that in the no-lose method each person is *expected* to be self-responsible and trustworthy. *The commitments are expected to be met*: "This is no game we're playing - we're seriously trying to consider the needs of one another."

This may take real discipline, real integrity, real *work*. Depending on the reasons why a child did not keep his word, the parents may (1) *find the I-Messages are effective*; (2) *find they need to reopen the problem and find better solutions*; or (3) *want to help the child look for ways to help him remember*.

If a youngster forgets, parents can raise the problem of what he might do to remember the next time. Does he need a clock, a timer, a note to himself, a message on the bulletin board, a string around his finger, a calendar, a sign in his room?

Should the parents remind the youngster? Should they take on the responsibility of telling him when he is to do what he agreed to do? In P.E.T. the answer is *definitely not*. Apart from the inconvenience to the parent, it has the effect of keeping the child dependent, slowing down the development of his self-discipline and self-responsibility. Reminding children to do what they committed themselves to do is coddling them - it treats them as if they are immature and irresponsible. And that is what they will continue to be, unless parents start right away to *shift the seat of responsibility to the child, where it belongs*. Then, if the child slips, send him an I-Message.



THE NO-LOSE METHOD FOR CHILD-CHILD CONFLICTS

- "Mommy, Jimmy is teasing me - make him stop."
- "Dad, Maggie won't let me have my turn on the computer."
- "I want to sleep but Frankie keeps talking. Tell him to be quiet."
- "He hit me first, its his fault. I didn't do anything to him."

Such "*appeals to authority*" are common in most families because parents allow themselves to be sucked into *their children's fights*. Parents sometimes need some convincing that *the kids own the problem*. If parents can remember to locate the problem where it belongs, they can handle a fight between the children with appropriate methods:

1. Staying out of the conflict completely.
2. Door-openers, invitations to talk.
3. Active Listening.



Max and Brian, who are brothers, are both tugging on a toy truck. Both are shouting and screaming; one is crying. *Each is trying to use his power to get his way.* If parents stay out of the conflict, the boys may find some way of resolving it themselves. If so, well and good; they have been given a chance to learn how to solve their problems independently. *By staying out of the conflict, the parents have helped both boys to grow up a little.*

If the boys continue to fight and the parent feels it would be helpful to move in to facilitate their problem-solving, a *door-opener or invitation is often helpful.* Here is how:

MAX: I want the truck! Gimme the truck! Let it go! Let it go!

BRIAN: I had it first! He came and took it away. I want it back!

PARENT: I see you really have a conflict about the truck. Do you want to come here and talk about it? I'd like to help if you want to discuss it.

Sometimes, just such a door-opener brings an *end to the conflict immediately.* It is as if children sometimes would rather find some solution themselves rather than go through the process of working it out through discussion in the presence of a parent.

Some conflicts may *require a more active role on the part of the parent.* The parent can encourage problem-solving by Active Listening and turning into a *transmission belt, not a referee.* It works like this:

MAX: I want the truck! Gimme the truck! Let it go! Let it go!

BRIAN: I had it first! He came and took it away. I want it back!

PARENT: Brian, you feel you should have the truck because you had it first. You're mad at Max because he took it away from you. I can see you really have a conflict here. Is there any way you can see of solving this problem? Got any ideas?

BRIAN: He should let me have it.

PARENT: Max, Brian is suggesting that solution.

MAX: Yeah, he would, cause then he'd get his way.

PARENT: Brian, Max is saying he doesn't like that solution cause you'd win and he'd lose.

BRIAN: Well, I'd let him play with my cars until I get through with the truck.

PARENT: Max, Brian is suggesting another solution - you can play with his cars while he plays with the truck.

MAX: Do I get to play with the truck when he's through, Mom?

PARENT: Brian, Max wants to make sure you'll let him play with the truck when you're through.

BRIAN: Okay. I'll be through pretty soon.

PARENT: Max, Brian is saying that's okay with him.

MAX: Okay, then.

PARENT: I guess you've both solved this problem then, right?



An outcome of getting kids to solve their own conflicts with the no-lose method is that they gradually *stop bringing their fights and disagreements to their parents*. They learn after a while that going to the parent only means that they are going to end up finding their own solution anyway.

WHEN BOTH PARENTS ARE INVOLVED IN PARENT-CHILD CONFLICTS

Everyone on His Own

When both parents have a stake in a conflict with their kids, it is essential that *each parent enters into no-lose problem-solving as a "free agent."* They should not expect to have a "united front" or to be on the same side of every conflict, although on occasion this might happen. The essential ingredient of no-lose problem-solving is that *each parent be real - each must represent accurately his or her own feelings and needs*. Each parent is a separate and unique participant, and should think of problem-solving as a process involving three or more separate persons, not parents aligned against children.

Mother and father typically have different approaches:

1. Fathers most frequently side with kids on conflicts involving possible physical injury to kids. Fathers seem to accept more than mothers the inevitability of kids getting hurt sometimes.
2. Mothers more frequently than fathers seem to side with their daughter's readiness to move into boy-girl relationships and all that goes with that: makeup, dates, style of dress, phone calls, and so on. Fathers frequently resist seeing their daughters move into dating young men.
3. Fathers and mothers often disagree on issues involving bedtime.
4. Mothers usually have higher standards than fathers about neatness and cleanliness of the home.

The point is that mothers and fathers are different, and *these differences, if each parent is to be real and honest, will inevitably emerge in conflicts between them and their kids*. By airing honest differences between mother and father in conflict-resolution - allowing their *humanness* to

show and be seen by their kids - parents discover that they receive a new kind of respect and affection. In this respect, kids are no different from adults - they, too, grow to *love those who are human and they learn to distrust those who are not*. They want their parents to be real, not playing the role of "parents," always voicing agreement with each other whether in agreement or not.



One Parent Using Method III, the Other Not

In some cases where only one parent is committed to change to the no-lose method, perhaps a mother, she simply starts resolving all her conflicts with the kids by using the no-lose method and the father continues using Method I. This *should not cause too many problems*, except that the children, fully aware of the difference, often complains to the father that they no longer like his approach and wish he would solve problems the way their mother does.

"CAN WE USE ALL THREE METHODS?"

"Won't a good parent use a judicious mixture of all three methods, depending on the nature of the problem?" This is a question often asked by parents.

Experience has taught that *a mixed approach simply does not work*. Children, once they get a taste of how good it feels to resolve conflicts without losing, resent it when the parents revert back to Method I. Or they may lose all interest in entering into Method III on *unimportant issues*, because they feel so resentful of losing on the *more important problems*.

Children may come to distrust their parents, because they have learned that when the chips are down and the parent has strong feelings on a problem, he will end up winning anyway. So, why should they enter into problem-solving?

Some parents muddle through by occasionally using Method I for problems where the kids do not have strong feelings - the less critical problems - but *Method III should always be used when a conflict is critical, involving strong feelings and convictions on the part of the kids*. Perhaps it is a principle of human relationships that *when one doesn't care much about the*

outcome of a conflict, one may be willing to give in to another's power; but when one has a real stake in the outcome one wants to make sure to have a voice in the decision-making.

HOW TO AVOID BEING FIRED AS A PARENT

More and more often, *children fire their parents*. As they move into adolescence kids dismiss their mothers and fathers, write them off, sever their relationship with them. Adolescents dismiss their parents when they feel they are being denied their basic civil rights.

When family conflicts occur over issues involving *cherished values, beliefs, and personal tastes*, parents may have to these differently, because frequently kids are not willing to put these issues on the bargaining table. This does *not* mean parents need to give up trying to influence their children by teaching them values. But to be effective, they will have to use *a different approach*.



A Question of Values

Take *hairstyles* as an example of *values*. For a lot of kids, hairstyles have important symbolic meaning. It is not necessary for a parent to understand all components of the symbolic meaning of hairstyle; it is essential to recognize how important it is for a child to have a certain hairstyle. He *values* it. It means something very important to him. He *prefers* it - in a sense, he *needs* to wear his hair in a certain way; he doesn't just *want* to.

His hairstyle is an expression of the youngster *doing his own thing, living his own life, acting out his own values and beliefs*. Try to influence you son to cut his hair your way, and he will most likely tell you:

"Its my hair."

"I like it this way."

"Get off my back."

"I have a right to wear *my* hair the way *I* want it."

"Its not affecting you in any way."

"I don't tell you how to wear you hair, so don't tell me how to wear mine."

These messages, properly decoded, communicate to the parent, "*I feel I have a right to my value as long as I cannot see how it affects you in any tangible or concrete way.*" Indeed he is right. How he wears his hair *in no way interferes with your ability to meet your needs*: it won't get you fired, it won't reduce your income, it won't stop you from having friends, it won't make you a worse golfer, it won't prevent you from wearing your hair in any way you prefer.

Yet, many similar behaviors are taken over by most parents and made into problems they feel they "*own.*" Here's an example of how this worked out for one parent:

PARENT: I simply cannot stand your hair. You look terrible.

SON: I like the way I look.

PARENT: You can't be serious. You can't be serious. You look like a loser.

SON: What are you talking about?

PARENT: We've got to resolve this conflict some way. I can't accept your hair this way! What can we do?

SON: Its my hair and I'll wear it the way I want.

PARENT: Can't you at least do something to make it look decent?

SON: I don't tell you how to wear your hair, do I?

PARENT: No. But then I don't look like a loser.

SON: Stop calling me that. My friends like it - particularly the girls.

PARENT: I don't care, it disgusts me.

SON: Well then don't look at me.

Adults as well as children will fight vigorously to *maintain their freedom* when they feel someone is pushing them to change behavior that is not interfering with the other person. This is one of the most serious mistakes parents make and one of the most frequent reasons for their ineffectiveness. If they would limit their attempts to modify behavior to what interferes with parents' rights and needs, there would be far *less rebellion, fewer conflicts, and fewer parent-child relationships that go sour.*

Most parents unwisely criticize, cajole, and harass their children about behaviors that have no tangible or concrete effect on the parent. Children do not so much rebel against *adults* - they rebel against adults' attempt to *take away their freedom*. They rebel against efforts to change them or *mold them in the adults' image*, against adults' harassment, against adults forcing them to act according to what the adults think is right or wrong.

Tragically, when parents use their influence to try to modify behavior that does *not* interfere with the parents' own lives, they *lose their influence to modify behavior that does interfere*. Kids have an innate sense of *fairness and justice*, and are usually quite willing to change behavior when it is clear to them that what they are doing is in fact interfering with someone else's legitimate needs. When parents limit their confrontations to the latter

kinds of issues, they generally find children quite open to change, willing to respect their parents' needs, and agreeable to "problem-solve."

Here are other behaviors that kids are not convinced infringe their parents' rights:

Teenage daughter liking tattoos.

Teenage son wearing oversized jeans and beat-up shoes.

Adolescent who prefers a group of friends his parents don't like.

A child who dawdles when he does his homework.

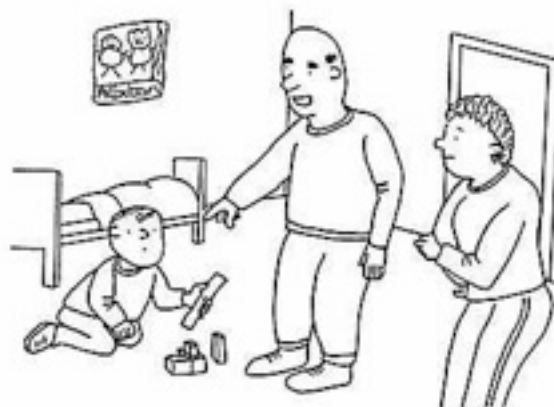
Child wanting to quit college and become a rap artist.

Four-year-old who still carries around her blanket.

Daughter who wants to get her nose or navel pierced.

Daughter who likes low-cut shirts and very short skirts.

Youngsters who refuse to go to church.



"...And this is our spare son in case the first one doesn't live up to expectations"

Method III is obviously *not a method for molding children to suit their parents*. If parents try to use the method for this purpose, it is a sure bet that children will see through it and resist. Parents then run the risk of *killing any chance to use it on problems that do affect them* - such as the children not doing chores, making excessive noise, destroying property, driving the car too fast, leaving their clothes around the house, not wiping their dirty feet before coming into the house, monopolizing the TV set or the computer, not cleaning up the kitchen after making snacks, not putting tools back in the tool box, trampling through the flower garden, and countless other behaviors.

"CAN'T I TEACH MY VALUES?"

Most parents have a strong need to transmit their most cherished values to their offspring. The answer is: "Of course - not only *can* you teach your values but inevitably you *will*."

The Parent as Model

Parents are *continuously modeling for their offspring* - demonstrating by their actions, even louder than by their words, what they value and believe. Parents *can* teach their values by actually *living* them. If they want their children to value honesty, they must daily demonstrate honesty. If they want their children to value generosity, they must behave generously. If they want their children to adopt “Christian” values, they must behave like Christians themselves. This is the best way, perhaps the *only* way, for parents to “teach” their children values.



“Do as I say, not as I do” is not an effective approach in teaching kids values. “Do as I do,” however, may have a high probability of modifying or influencing a child. Parents teach children values by *living their own lives accordingly, not by pressuring kids to live by certain rules.*

What troubles parents is that their kids *might not buy their values.* That is true - *they may not.* They may not like some of their parents’ values, or they may correctly see that some of their parent’s values produce results that kids don’t like - as in the case of some of today’s youth, who reject the fast-paced, high stress jobs their parents have because they see them as “values” that produce heart disease and burnout.

Is it even *possible to impose values on another person by power and authority?* I think not. More likely, the result is that those whose minds one wishes to influence will resist even more strongly such domination, often defending their beliefs and values all the more tenaciously. Power and authority may control the *actions* of others; they seldom control their *thoughts, ideas, and beliefs.*

The Parent as Consultant

What works better is when parents share their ideas, their knowledge, and their experience, much as a consultant does when her services are requested by a client. There is a catch here. The successful consultant *shares* rather than preaches, *offers* rather than imposes, *suggests* rather than demands. Even more critically, she shares, offers, and suggests usually not more than *once.* The successful consultant offer her clients the benefits

of her knowledge, but does not hassle them week after week, does not shame them if they don't buy her ideas, does not keep pushing her point when she detects resistance on the part of her client. She offers her ideas, *then leaves the responsibility with the client* for buying or rejecting them. If she were to behave as most parents do, her client would fire her. Most parents *lecture, cajole, threaten, warn, persuade, implore, preach, moralize, and shame* their kids, all in an effort to force them to do what they feel is right. They go back to their kids day after day with their instructional or moralizing messages.

Parents are guilty of the "hard sell." No wonder that in most families kids are desperately saying to their parents, "Get off my back," "Stop hassling me," "I know what you think, you don't need to keep telling me every day," "Stop lecturing me," "Too much." "Goodbye."



YOU KNOW ALL THOSE THINGS I'M TRYING REALLY HARD NOT TO SAY? GOOD.

"To Accept What I Cannot Change"

*God, grant me the courage to change what I can change;
The serenity to accept what I cannot change;
And the wisdom to know the difference.*

This famous prayer is relevant. There are many behaviors of children that parents *simply may not be able to change*. Many parents strongly resist the idea of being just consultants to their children. They say:

"But I have a responsibility to see to it that my child doesn't smoke cigarettes."
"I must use my authority to prevent my child from having premarital sex."
"I'm not willing to act only as a consultant on smoking pot."
"I will not satisfied letting my child not do her homework."

The problem with for example smoking is that the parent *can't accompany a child everywhere*. Theoretically, parents might *threaten expulsion* from the family, but few parents will actually follow through on such a threat. As one parent said, "The only way I could stop my daughter from smoking would be to chain her to the bedpost." Homework is another example. The point is, you just cannot make someone study or learn. "*You can lead a horse to the water but you can't make him drink*" applies here. The same pertains to premarital sex. You can't ride shotgun in the backseat of the car every time she goes out on a date.

All a parent can realistically do is to try to influence by being a model, being an effective consultant, and developing a "therapeutic" relationship with their kids. After that, what else? As I see it, a parent can only accept the fact that she ultimately has no power to prevent such behaviors, if the child is bent on doing them.

Maybe this is one of the prices for being a parent. *You can do your best, the hope for the best, but in the long run the risk that your best efforts might not be good enough.* Ultimately you, too, may then ask, "Lord, grant me ... the serenity to accept what I cannot change."



