
Good Parent

*A Guidebook for Raising Successful
Children Ages 4 - 12*

Steven A. Szykula, Ph.D.

“Dr. Steve”

**GOOD PARENT: A GUIDEBOOK FOR RAISING
SUCCESSFUL CHILDREN AGES 4 - 12**

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Thanks to all the children and parents whom I've met through my practice. I have learned so much from you and I hope this book can return, in small part, the knowledge you have given me.

I also wish to thank the many friends and family members, especially my now adult children Laura Szykula and Sam Szykula who have supported and inspired this book.

Steven A Szykula, Ph.D.

Dr. Szykula's work has spanned across three decades during which he has provided psychological counseling and evaluation services to thousands of parents and children. Dr. Szykula has also conducted research and published articles, chapters, and books on family therapy, counseling and parenting. His sense of humor and wisdom make him a sought after speaker. His books and presentations are designed to enable his audiences to apply new practical knowledge and skill in order to reduce problems and to achieve a more meaningful life.

Dr. Szykula's research and career in family therapy has included his service at the Family Teaching Center in Helena, Montana, the Primary Children's Medical Center and the University of Utah's School of Medicine, Psychiatry Department and at his own clinic, Comprehensive Psychological Services in Salt Lake City, where "Dr. Steve" continues to serve parents and children of all ages.

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Introduction

Have other parenting books you have read been too vague? Too theoretical? Too difficult to follow? Not very practical? Well, here is a parenting book that is exceptionally practical, easy to follow, and simple to use in your time of need. You will find clear-cut guidelines, understandable techniques, and solution options from which to choose. Not only does this book offer specific solutions for specific problems, it also advises how to develop the foundation necessary to raise successful children. It will increase your confidence to face the problems in parenting your child.

As a psychologist, I am frequently asked for guidance on how to parent and how to successfully help children overcome behavioral and emotional problems. The problems written about in this book are similar to those that parents frequently discuss with me. Hopefully, the information provided here will save you a step and help you resolve many of these problems on your own.

Part One is about the basics—the foundation for effective parenting. Part One details core parenting elements including effective family communication, essential discipline strategies, how to negotiate and compromise, steps for problem solving, and how to enhance the self-esteem of family members.

In Part Two, brief chapters of common child and family problems and solutions are presented. These chapters illustrate the possible causes of each problem and gives one or more workable solutions for you to try.

Part Three guides you on what to consider when your child needs professional help

Part One

The Basics

Have you ever thought how odd it is that you must study, practice and pass a test to get a driver's license, but nothing is required to be a parent?

Raising a child is a daunting responsibility. Children depend on their parents for so much.

Knowing the basic skills required to raise a child effectively is important. When parents practice the basics, a foundation from which your child develops is established, making both of your lives much more confident and satisfying

This section of the book details what you need to know to establish basic parenting skills that work with children aged four to twelve. These basics include:

- Zensational Parenting
- How to Communicate Effectively
- How to Motivate and Teach

- Essential Discipline Strategies
- Solitary Play Agreements
- Problem Solving

Zensational Parenting

Are you missing out on what's important and meaningful? Are you stressed out and always in a hurry? Very often parents are in such a rush to get kids from place to place they forget to enjoy the moment. This results in lost opportunity for you to teach and your child to learn.

Our worry and quest to be perfect parents often takes us away from *mindful* parenting. For example, a child could be examining a bug and really focusing on what the bug is doing on the ground. The way it shuffles to the side when it walks onto a leaf. The parent, completely oblivious to this beautiful teaching moment, whisks the child away and into the car to go to the store. In this situation, the parent loses that moment as well as the teaching/learning opportunity with their child. Parents don't need to be perfect and we all realize that life can be stressful and complicated. However, your child will only be four, six or ten years old once. It's important to become aware, slow down and fully experience your child and parenting. This is the Zen of parenting.

Many parents brag about how they are so good at multitasking. However reality is, you can only do one thing at a time. Sorry. You might have five plates spinning on a lazy Susan but you can only eat off of one plate at a time. The Zen of parenting requires you to be less distracted and more focused. It requires you to become an astute observer of your child. Become more aware of how your child learns about the world. In addition to becoming an astute observer, demonstrate your full engagement with your child through actions and by providing a good example. Interact with your child frequently. Take your time. Make eye contact. Really focus on what your child communicates. Developing and practicing good listening skills is part of the Zen and can help you focus more intently on your child. This will enhance your parenting experience and it will help your child develop socially and emotionally. Peace, satisfaction and joy will follow as you become a zensational parent.

How to Communicate Effectively

When you and your children are communicating well things run more smoothly and problems are addressed and resolved more efficiently. However, when you and your children are not communicating well, things break down: cooperation is compromised, hurt feelings, anger and misunderstandings occur and problems tend to pile up. Good communication can be broken down into several distinct skills. These skills include using body language, paraphrasing, showing empathy, asking questions, and making requests

Using Body Language

Regardless of what we say to our children, our body language is a very powerful communicator. Children are extremely good at reading and interpreting their parents' non-verbal communications. Because of this sensitivity, parents must pay particular attention to what their bodies are saying to their children.

For example, parents are frequently in too much of a hurry to accomplish other things when they should be demonstrating their interest and attention to a child who is having difficulty communicating a concern. We have all had times when our children were trying to tell us something of concern to them, but we were so preoccupied with something else, we didn't even turn towards them to acknowledge they were speaking to us. Remember to regularly take time to sit down, face your child, and talk to her without permitting outside interruptions. To effectively communicate, and to demonstrate your concern, it's important to have times when conversation with your child is the only thing happening. During these times face your child, and assume a body position that communicates interest, caring and concern. Fixing dinner or repairing your car while talking to your youngster can often interfere with effective communication.

To communicate effectively you should physically get on an eye-to-eye level with your child. When speaking with a four-year-old, this may mean that the adult needs to get on the floor or kneel down to effectively communicate. Being able to maintain eye contact is critical; if the child is unable to see the parent's eyes while speaking and listening, there is much room for doubt about whether the message communicated is being heard and considered.

As you approach to speak with your child about his troubles or concerns, it's important that you can reflect that you recognize and acknowledge your child's feelings through your body language. For example, if one of your children is down in the dumps, you should refrain from approaching your child in a bubbly, cheerful way; a more subdued and more serious posture on your part should be taken in order to effectively engage your child in communication and to demonstrate your empathy.

Parents' facial expressions are also vital to effective communication with their children. Facial expressions should be consistent with the message the parent is intending to communicate. When parents want to communicate sincerity and caring, they must show it. Even if you think your child's concerns are silly or adorable, a smile on your face may communicate a lack of understanding or the absence of empathy.

Paraphrasing and Showing Empathy

Paraphrasing is a communication skill that is easily neglected. Yet, it is perhaps the most important communication skill. Often when we sit down with our children to communicate, we have an agenda and a certain set of values that we wish to communicate. These intentions to push our own thoughts and feelings forward interfere with our being able to really listen to our children. These intentions also interfere with our ability to effectively communicate to our children that we are

concerned about what they think and what they have to say and that we really care about their feelings and want to understand them.

An effective means of demonstrating concern and understanding is to put into your own words what you have just heard or observed your child communicating to you. This is called paraphrasing.

Paraphrasing is a skill that adult professionals use to communicate that they understand the content of what is spoken. When you paraphrase, your child will feel heard and respected. If you misheard, then paraphrasing allows your child to correct your misunderstanding.

Even air traffic controllers and pilots use paraphrasing. We are so glad they do! The skill of paraphrasing also works the other way around. Sometimes you will want to ask your children to repeat back to you what they think you intended to communicate. This way you can always be sure that what you were communicating is being accurately heard and understood by your children.

Empathy communicates to children that you understand their feelings. This increases trust. Empathy, however, doesn't mean sympathy. That is, we don't mean that parents should feel sorry for their children when they see their children are in problem situations.

Empathy shows that you care and understand. Remember, no one, whether a child or an adult, likes to be told how she should be feeling. To be told, "You shouldn't be feeling bad" is not only irritating; it is a sign that the other person simply wants you to see things her way. An empathetic response is one that reflects your understanding at what the other feels; it is not an expression of your judgment about the appropriateness of how the other feels. One of the best ways of doing this (as we have just reviewed) is to paraphrase back to the children what you think was communicated to you.

In addition to paraphrasing, you can also express to your children your perceptions about what your children may be feeling. To acknowledge how another is feeling demonstrates caring and understanding.

For example, at a most basic level, a parent might say to a youngster, "I noticed that you have been pretty quiet lately. It seems that you are a little bit sad." This statement paraphrases the nonverbal communication of the child to the parent. In other circumstances where the child actually speaks out their concern, parents are advised to paraphrase in their own words what they believe the child meant to communicate.

Chad: "I'm going to claw Annie's eyes out!"

Dad: "You're upset with your sister again, aren't you?"

This paraphrasing can actually slow down the communication process to a calmer level that sets the stage for effective problem solving.

Tom: "My school is stupid and I hate my teacher!"

Mom: "Things have been going kind of bad for you at school lately, haven't they?"

After your child's team loses a ball game, your child may come home acting sullen and depressed. You might show empathy by telling your child that you understand how important the sport is to her- how disappointed she must feel after experiencing the loss of the game. Your child might even reply that it wasn't all that important, but her body language is telling you something different. Just this simple communication alone from you may help your child feel freer about talking to you about her feelings, if not at that time, then at times in the future. However, keep in mind that your children may require some silence to deal and cope with some of their everyday problems and emotions. Don't push too hard- but let them know you are there, and that you understand, when they want to talk.