



Personal Trainer for Parents

Dear Parents, about your “Personal Trainer”

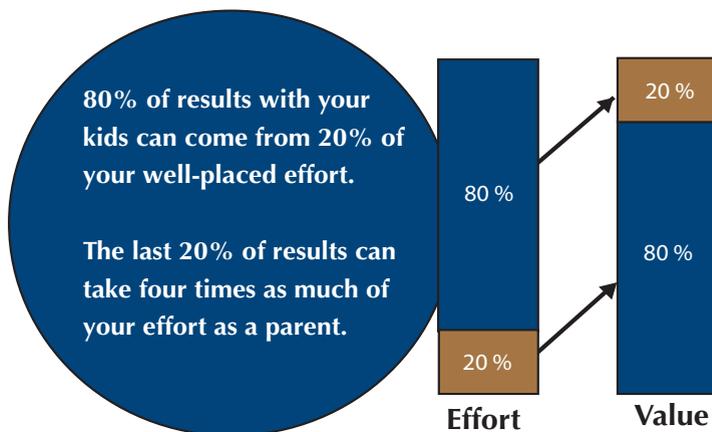
As a parent, you have a heavy load. You’re trying to juggle your own work, money issues, relationship issues and personal issues at the very same time you’re trying to prepare your children for a world you have never lived in. No wonder it feels like such a weight. As part of our school’s license with Ripple Effects, to help you do the lifting, we’d like you to have this Personal Trainer for Parents Booklet.

Here are a dozen ways you can be more effective. They are boiled down from lots of research.

Like many things, parenting often fits the 80/20 rule. You get 80% of the value in the first 20% of the effort. This booklet covers barely 20% of what might be in a comprehensive parent training course; but, following these tips may deliver 80% of the outcomes you want.

You have our great admiration and support as you strive to fulfill the awesome responsibility of parenting. We hope this booklet will be a resource to help you and your kids get the most out of your effort.

Leveraging your efforts



ps: If you like what’s in here, we encourage you to check out Ripple Effects computerized, behavior training programs for Students and Teachers and let us know if it’s something you’d like to see in your school.

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Work with your child's learning style

Learning styles are not about what people learn best, and not about how smart they are, but about how they learn most easily. There is no best learning style, but some ways work better in traditional classrooms, and some work better in other settings.

Each of your children has a preferred learning style, and so do you. Each of you is somewhere along a line between watching as a way of learning, and jumping in and doing things by experimenting. At the same time, you are each somewhere along the line of trusting your feelings and instincts, and trusting logical principles, to evaluate what you see. Learning styles are partly wired into the genes and partly learned, or enforced by others. When there is a good understanding of each other's learning styles, mutual adjustments can be made; then people can learn more easily and with less conflict.

1. Find out your child's learning style

The Ripple Effects software program at your child's school has an interactive "Learning Style Profile." Have them print the report for you.

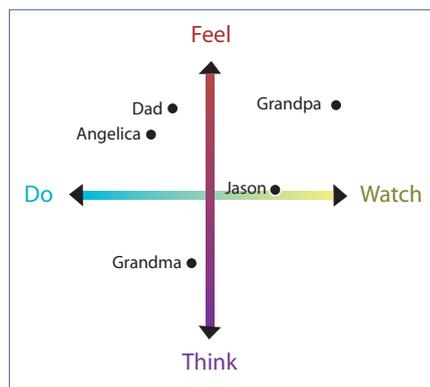


2. Find out your own learning style

Go to our website at www.rippleeffects.com/learningstyle, and complete the interactive survey and get your own report.

3. Make a collective learning style profile of your family as a whole

Put a big cross bar on the paper and have everyone in the family fill in the places where their learning style dots are located from their individual graphs. Do you tend to cluster in one area? Are you spread apart? Talk to your children about how the different ways you learn may account for differences in what you expect and understand of each other.



4. Ask your child's teachers how they try to accommodate your child's learning style, and how you might help them succeed.

Aim high without going over their heads

Expectations are a big predictor of performance. When kids are expected to be responsible and succeed, they most often are. Make sure your expectations are worthy of your kids:

1. Tell them they are capable

Telling individual kids, verbally and non-verbally, that they are capable of great achievement, and it is expected of them, helps set them up for success.

2. Involve them in setting goals that are a real stretch

but not impossible. These should be things they can actually measure and control, like becoming really good at at least one thing, but not having to win an award for it, which is something they can't control.

3. Communicate goals in positive – not negative – phrases

like, "You will be ready for college when you finish high school." Constantly reinforce your expectations.

4. Model what you want to see.

If you expect kids to control their impulses, control yours. If you want them to treat you with respect, offer them the same.

5. Couple high expectations with high support

If you expect kids to finish homework, sit with them when they are tempted to quit. If you don't have the skills to teach them something they need – from how to take a test, to how to get a date –help them find resources that can help. And tell them to use the Ripple Effects software program for private coaching in what they need.



6. Say "I told you so" – when they succeed, not when they fail

"I knew you could do it," can be the nicest thing a young person can hear.

Take your child's perspective

To get a better feel for how your child sees things:

1. Recognize that they don't just see with different eyes from you
they see with different hearts and minds and social contexts.

2. Ask where they're coming from

Find out as much as you can about the music, experiences, values, and expectations that is the cultural context for their generation. The greater the gap between your experience and theirs, the more important it is to try to bridge it.



3. Look at the situation as if you shared their experiences and expectations

It may not change what you do, but it may well change how you frame it.

4. Remember how you looked at things as a young person

Use that as a starting - not ending point - for seeing things from your children's perspective.

5. Don't lower your expectations

for your kids based on trying to take their perspective. Instead ask, "What extra support might they need, from this perspective, to succeed?"

Let body and words show you care

Almost all parents care deeply about their children, but sometimes kids don't know it.

To show you care, do these things:

1. Use their preferred name,

not a nickname they think they've outgrown, and never a put down expression, like "stupid." It seems obvious, but it's often overlooked.



2. Ask at least one open-ended question a day

about something important to them - sports, music, cars, a job, or personal relations.

3. Let your body show you care.

Lean forward and really pay attention to your child. Look at them - not at the TV - when they're talking. Nod when you understand, not just when you agree with what they say. Let your face show that you care.

4. Use your words and voice to show you care.

Paraphrase (repeat back) what they say to show you've heard. Like, if they say their team got beat 45-3, you say, "It sounds like you guys really got trounced." Telling kids you care doesn't work as well as just letting them hear their own concerns reflected back through you.

5. Be quick to listen, but slower to give advice.

It may be tempting to jump in and offer solutions before really hearing your child out. Resist that temptation; it almost never works. Kids feel more empowered when they can think through their own problems, than when you hand them a solution.



6. Ask "How can I help?"

After you have really listened, ask how you can help. Find out if your child want suggestions, solutions, brainstorming, reassurance or just a hug. Don't assume that what you would want is what they want, but do remind them that you are there for them..

Get respect – without aggression

To fully command the respect that you're due as a parent, use everything at your disposal.

1. Use your face and eyes

to consciously connect with and direct - but not intimidate – your children. You can communicate strength without being aggressive by keeping your face relaxed and making eye contact without getting into a staring contest.



2. Be in control of your voice

Use volume, inflection (what you stress), and pacing to command respect, without yelling or intimidating.

3. Keep your message simple and direct,

without being rude like, "Do your homework now."
If you create confusion, it will sound weak.

4. Use your posture, gestures, and physical closeness

to maintain power and stay in control, while still respecting your child's space.



5. Avoid threats.

Assertive parents don't make threats. They do state consequences and are consistent about following through with them.

Show respect and keep authority

Research has shown again and again that children respect those whom they feel respected by. It's a feedback loop that often begins and ends in the family. Wherever there is a big difference in power, like between children and parents, things are automatically unequal. Inequality can prompt disrespect - from either direction. Since you have the most power, you are the most important part of the equation. To show deep respect for your children, without compromising your position of authority:

1. Use the names they choose to be called,
not some pet label that you made up.

2. Treat them with no less courtesy than you would a stranger.

Observe and model basic courtesies, like really attending to them, being on time, not interrupting them, saying "please" and "thank you." Familiarity is not a license for rudeness.



3. Don't patronize them.

Assume they have reasons for what they do that make sense to them, even if they don't to you. Ask open-ended questions, like "what was your thinking on that?" rather than making statements about their ignorance.



4. Avoid embarrassing them or referring to personal matters in public.

Remember back to when you were a kid. Even having parents is a bit of an embarrassment. If parents tell teachers, coaches or their children's peers, about personal, potentially embarrassing things from home, kids can feel betrayed.

5. Use humor with sensitivity.

Ridiculing anyone under the guise of humor, including your own children, is always a sign of disrespect.

Remember, it's not just what you say, but how and when and where, that can make it respectful or not.

Make rules that make things easier

For family rules that will make your life easier instead of more difficult:

1. Keep them few, short, simple, and concrete

Like: "Get to school everyday." "No drinking or drugs." "Never lie to me." Not generalities like, "Do well in school," nor "Be a good person."



2. Explain the "why" behind the rules and give an example

Like, "Missing school puts you at a disadvantage for learning, and can cause teachers to expect less, and see less of what you do well." The right time to find out what needs better explaining is before you impose consequences, not after.

3. Involve your children in the process of making the rules

or changing rules that aren't working. It will increase their buy-in, but only if you're really open to their input.



4. Have clear, consistent, but not harsh consequences

for breaking rules. Be utterly consistent, and evenhanded in imposing consequences, or they'll seem unfair. Every child in the family gets the same consequence for the same action.

5. Model the respect for rules you want your children to show

If they see you treating the law lightly, without consequences, it's only natural for them to expect to do the same.

Correct the course of wrong behavior

To be most effective in confronting inappropriate behavior, and to reduce the downside risks, act out of a concern for safety, respect or valid authority - not just to bolster your ego. These things can help:

1. Find a private place to do it.

Of course not in a train station, but not at the dinner table either. No one likes to be called down in front of others.

2. Identify the specific behavior that is troublesome and start with a question

like, "I saw you ridiculing your brother, what were you thinking?"



3. Label the action, not your child,

like: "That kind of behavior is hurtful and a sign of weakness, not strength."

4. Make the consequence their choice.

Identify a realistic consequence of failing to change the behavior and make it clear that choosing a behavior is choosing the consequence for it. Put it in an "if/then" sentence. Like, "If you choose to hurt family members, then you choose to spend some time working on skills to prevent that, instead of surfing the web tonight."



5. Offer a resource.

For example, say, "Look up "ridicule" in the Ripple Effects program, and let me know when you've figured out a more constructive way to say what you mean."

Impose consequences that teach, not punish

The point of consequences is not to punish, but to teach. Having consequences is one of the best ways to help kids learn the behavior that can aid their success. Without consistent consequences, at best, children learn that expectations about behavior are invitations, not requirements. At worst, they learn that rules don't mean anything. To make sure your system of consequences works for you and your children:

1. Impose consequences immediately and consistently

Kids can have a short attention span, but a long memory for fairness. Don't play favorites, don't make exceptions when it suits your schedule. Consistency, not harshness, is what makes consequences work. Inconsistent discipline teaches kids that cause is not linked to effect, and the system is not fair.

2. Assume the first wrong behavior happened because they didn't know better

Don't try to guess motive. Instead, make skill training an option for first offense misbehavior. Use Ripple Effects software (available through school licenses) for an "instant" skill-building disciplinary action.

3. Ward off wrong behavior before it happens

Use support and encouragement, as well as body language (like moving closer or raising an eyebrow), before resorting to penalties.

4. Make the consequences "fit the crime"

For instance, being late for school results in giving up an equal amount of personal time on the phone or computer, but not being grounded for a month.

5. Present consequences as a choice that empowers your children

Be respectful and matter of fact. Don't mix it up with anger. Like, "Jerome, you have a choice. You can put in 15 minutes in the morning to get to school on time, or you can take it out of your computer or phone time any evening you've been late."

6. Balance negative consequences with positive recognition – try for a 10 to 1 ratio

weighted to the positive. Pounce on good behavior when it happens. Connect it with a natural, positive consequence: your kids' success at learning, enjoying greater respect from peers, having time to go on-line because they stayed focused and completed homework.

Be the model – manage your anger

It's only natural to get angry at kids when they break family rules, act recklessly, or defy your authority. It's even more natural to displace onto the safe target (children) anger toward another person like a boss that you've had to stuff all day because it isn't safe to let it out. Having angry feelings isn't wrong. Disrespecting children, (or other adults) because of those feelings is. Handling anger and other difficult emotions in ways that don't hurt yourself or others is one of the best gifts you can give your children. For both your sakes, do these things:

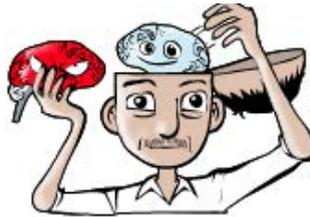
1. Check your body for signs of anger

Look for tight muscles, especially in your jaw, but also your face, hands, arms and legs. Look for hot hands, feet, or face (that's where "hot under the collar" came from), and red or blotchy skin.



2. Monitor and change your self-talk

Don't let this "internal trigger" make anger worse. If you hear yourself saying, "James is driving me NUTS," stop that message and say, "I'm upset, but I can stay calm and handle this."



3. Avoid situations that make you mad

and try to change the things outside you that are making you so angry. Learn to stand up to people (from your boss to your children) in an assertive way, without being aggressive.

4. Finally, find safe and constructive ways to get your anger out

Tell an understanding friend, write it, run it off, paint, scream, or cry. Never try to dull or smother feelings of anger with alcohol or drugs. It doesn't work for your children and it won't work for you.

Stay in control – start with your impulses

Impulses are instinctive reactions that a person gives into without thinking. How impulsive a parent is can have a lot to do with how their kids do in school. Kids with more impulsive parents have more risk of failure.

Four things are common triggers

Four things are tied to impulsive behavior: fatigue, stress, threat and opportunity. It's a fact of life that most parents are tired much of the time. Almost all are under some stress: financial, social, physical, or emotional. Although they are older and more powerful, parents can feel threatened by their kids problems, failures, and even successes. And any parent can find some opportunity for a remark that sounds clever, but really hurts. So all parents need the skills to control impulsive reactions when these triggers come up. Fortunately, you can master those skills in just four steps.

Four steps to impulse control

1. Stop – before you start

Whatever your impulse is, just make it wait, seven full seconds. Count them out “one thousand one,” etc.

2. Slow your breathing, focus OUT

DON'T focus on breathing in – that's likely to make you tighten. DO let a deep breath out; in fact, three really long ones.

3. Consider the possible consequences

Make an “if/then” sentence, with “if” being the action you're tempted to do, and “then” the possible negative consequence. Like, “If I really blow up at my daughter over her room, then she may be less likely to confide in me about something else that she's confused or ashamed of.”

4. Identify what triggers your impulse to ridicule, label, or lash out at your child

Are your triggers your own fear? Need to be one up? Other stresses in your life? Watch for those triggers and have your breathing exercises ready to buy you time, until you can consider consequences and come up with an alternative.

Maintain your child's trust

Children begin by trusting their parents. Most continue trusting in their parents through the period from 7-10 years, but some questions of trust may begin to arise. Substance abuse, with the broken promises that often result from it, physical injury, sexual abuse and emotional battery, as well as trauma related to natural disasters or neighborhood violence can all impair younger children's trust. Even without any of those things, as part of the normal developmental process, by about age 11, adolescents may begin testing – and often withdrawing - some trust of their parents. Parents can do five things to improve their chance of maintaining their children's trust:

1. Be honest

Make your word count. Don't embellish things to impress your kids. It will backfire.

2. Be reliable

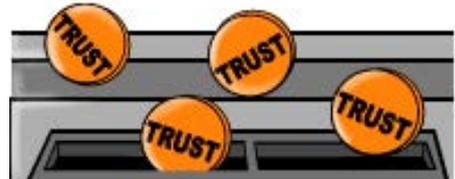
Do what you say you'll do, when you say you're going to do it. This sounds so simple, but it has a huge impact on whether kids will attach a "discount factor" to what you say. Your goal is to be as reliable as mail delivery.

3. Don't put others down behind their back

Kids can't help but believe that you may do the same hurtful thing to them.

4. Maintain their confidentiality

Never break their trust or tell a secret, unless safety is involved. When you tell close friends things your children intended only for you, you break a precious trust. If they find out, it will be hard to recover it.



5. Choose how open to be

Everything you say needs to be true; but not everything that's ever been true about you needs to be shared with your children. If your kids ask questions about things you don't want them to know, a good and honest answer is "That's something I'm not ready to talk to you about until you're older." If they ask "why?" a simple, honest answer is "I don't know, but it's not open for discussion."

These five things sound simple, but they can be difficult to hold to in the face of pressure. A strong relationship with your kids makes them worth it.



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