

PARENTING
BOOT CAMP



CHAPTER 1

BE WHO YOU WANT YOUR CHILD TO BE

Every parent wants children who are self-disciplined, responsible, and kind. But it doesn't happen by chance. It takes effective parental leadership. The military's field manual has a list of skills necessary to lead, motivate, and inspire others. It is not that different from what is needed to be an effective parent.

- Know yourself and seek self-improvement.
- Be technically and tactically proficient (that is, learn success strategies for child rearing).
- Seek responsibility and take responsibility for your actions.
- Make sound and timely decisions.
- Set the example.
- Know your soldiers (children) and look out for their well-being.
- Keep your soldiers (children) informed.
- Develop a sense of responsibility in your subordinates (children).

You are the key to raising responsible children. The person you are is likely to be what they will become. That's why the development of responsible children must start with your self-development. In the army, it's referred to as BE, KNOW, and DO.

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- BE has to do with your character, morals, and ethical behavior.
- KNOW refers to the information necessary to reach end states (goals) about yourself, the people involved, and the situation.
- DO is the ability to provide leadership that directs, implements, and motivates.

And it all begins with what I call the ABCs of parenting: your Attitude, Behavior, and Commitment.

Attitude

How do you feel about being a parent? Loving a child and being excited about parenting don't come automatically to every parent when the umbilical cord is cut. Some start the parenting process with high hopes only to have discouragement set in with the reality of the overwhelming responsibility of 24/7/365 care that each child requires. Still others experience a roller-coaster attitude; up one minute and down the next, depending upon what's happening on the home front. But regardless of your current attitude, if you're like most parents, there's always room for improvement.

Your attitude will color how you behave. It will also affect your commitment to your family. So be honest as you choose one of the five options below that most closely represents how you feel about parenting.

My Attitude Toward Parenting

1. I feel optimistic and willing to learn. I enjoy the challenge of meeting my children's needs.
2. I feel kids are OK, but there's more to life than parenting.
3. I feel discouraged when I try so hard and my children don't respond as I want them to.
4. I sometimes feel like a failure and wish I'd never had children.
5. At times I've felt like all of the above.

If you chose answer number 1 and feel optimistic, you're on your way toward success. You'll enjoy the challenge of putting into practice the success strategies you'll be learning in boot camp.

If you chose answer number 2 and feel there's more to life than parenting, you're probably getting along fine. But why settle for just an average relationship with your child when you could have a dynamic one? With a little enthusiasm and a

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few creative ideas, you can turn your “ho-hum” family experience into a rich and meaningful one. Keep reading!

If you chose answer number 3 and become discouraged when things don’t work out, you may have unrealistic goals for yourself and your children. You need to realize that kids will be kids. But with the right skills, you can effectively teach children to become responsible adults.

If you chose answer number 4 and feel like a failure or wish you’d never had kids, you need encouragement and a network of friends and family who will help you when things seem overwhelming. Parenting is a tremendous responsibility, but you can increase your effectiveness and find answers to problems as you go through basic training.

If you chose answer number 5 and experience various attitudes, keep searching for new ideas that fit your parenting philosophy and put them into practice. Keep thinking positively. You can be a success!

Why Is Attitude Important?

If you find yourself discouraged and sometimes resent the overwhelming responsibility of caring for your child, your negative attitude will affect your behavior and at times cause you to be either harsh and critical or withdrawn and indecisive.

An optimistic attitude, capped with a touch of enthusiasm and humor, can help you over the rough spots. A positive attitude won’t alleviate problems, but it will help you face those problems and have the courage and determination to find solutions.

Liz, for example, described her children as being “constantly at each other’s throats.” Out of frustration she screamed and punished, but the fights continued. “It’s hopeless,” she lamented. “I just can’t stand it.”

Liz became discouraged and dreaded coming home from work. Before long her negative attitude and behavior were reflected in her children’s behavior—making them even more difficult to live with.

Kristi, on the other hand, looked at her children’s rivalry as a challenge. She figured some bickering was normal, but she didn’t like the fighting. She became more involved; each time a fight broke out, she calmly said, “Fighting doesn’t work. Instead, say something nice about each other.” Then when emotions had cooled, she added, “Now tell each other what you want and figure out how you both can win. You’re better off solving it yourselves—because if I have to solve it, chances are neither one of you will be happy.” If they couldn’t come up with ideas

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for a compromise, she offered a few suggestions. She further motivated them to solve their conflicts by telling them what she planned to do, “If I solve it, I will put the toy away so neither of you can play with it.”

It didn’t take long for her boys to decide they were better off solving their own problems. Kristi’s positive attitude helped her to put in the extra time and energy necessary to teach her children the value of compromising.

Attitude Toward Self

Your attitude toward yourself and your life situation will be reflected in your attitude toward your children. If you like yourself and the choices you are making, if you’re content with your lifestyle, your spouse, and your responsibilities, and if those around you make you feel desirable, competent, and significant, then it will be easier for you to have a healthy attitude toward parenting.

Attitudes have a trickle-down effect. First, you must discover what makes you feel good, gives you energy, and makes your heart sing. Second, you need to be making daily choices to include these things in your life. Third, you need to be grateful and at peace with where you are. When you do these three things, you’ll find yourself feeling better about being a parent.

Here’s the problem: Many parents are just going through the motion of living. They are coping with one parenting challenge and then another, without getting in touch with their feelings. They are merely existing instead of really living. If this sounds like you, try the following:

1. *Discover your purpose in life.* What unique characteristics do you have that can make a difference in the world and in the lives of others? Here are some ideas:

- Make others feel safe, secure, confident, or capable.
- Encourage, motivate, and inspire others to reach their potential.
- Lift the spirits of others through encouragement and optimism.
- Brighten the room with a smile.
- Help others feel valuable by listening and spending time together.
- Make others laugh and be happy.
- Help others accept and feel good about themselves.
- Encourage others to experience optimum health.
- Meet your children’s needs and be a loving and supportive spouse.

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2. *Have a vision of what kind of parent you want to be.* How do you want your children to see you? Consider these possibilities:

- Fun to be with (happy, silly at times, enjoys life, spontaneous, upbeat, joyful, relaxed).
- A leader who runs an effective household (organized, keeper of routines and traditions, enforcer of rules).
- Always available when needed (dependable, good listener, willing to spend time together, does things with the children).
- A provider (makes good plans for the family; has resources to meet needs; is industrious; has money for meaningful events, vacations, and special perks).
- Talented (artistic, musical, skilled craftsman, good cook, athletic).
- Other (write ideas here) _____.

3. *Make choices that will allow you to be that kind of parent.* Don't try to be everything to your kids. You'll set yourself up for failure. There's no such thing as a perfect parent!

4. *Be kind to yourself.* Work toward your ideal, knowing that everyone makes mistakes and even the best-made plans sometimes are derailed. Figure out what makes you feel good—a shower, a soak in the tub, reading a good book, listening to music, playing the piano, painting a picture, eating healthful food—and do it!

5. *Discover what sets you off, and plan your life in such a way as to keep these things at a minimum.* Here are a few ideas of what might frustrate you:

- A dirty, cluttered, disorganized house that causes you to not be able to find things, keeps you from focusing on what you really want to do, or makes you feel guilty.
- Being rushed caused by overscheduling, unexpected interruptions, lack of planning, or feeling guilty when late.
- Being tired caused by not taking care of yourself, not getting enough sleep, not eating well, not exercising, trying to do too much, or feeling guilty when not meeting your own expectations.
- Noise and confusion caused by the children's bickering, the blaring TV or radio, not having a quiet time for devotions, the children not

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having a separate play space, or not being able to go outside because of the weather.

- Criticism triggering rejection, feelings of inadequacy, guilt, worthlessness, and failure.
- Lack of appreciation when people take you for granted, expect things from you without asking or respecting your rights, or fail to say thanks.
- Other things that set you off: _____.

6. *Teach your kids how you want to be treated.* Most parents want to be treated with respect, love, kindness, politeness, gentleness, openness, and honesty. Be honest with your children about your emotional needs without causing them to feel guilty or expecting them to “parent” you. Let them know what they can do to feed your soul. Teach them to fill your love cup—just as you fill theirs.

How to Be More Positive

1. *Watch your emotions.* You are like a container that holds emotions. When you keep yourself full of positive emotions, there isn’t much room for the negative ones. The more negative feelings you allow yourself to dwell upon, the more difficult it is to get them to go away!

You can’t control what emotions you automatically experience, like that first flush of anger or fear. But you can control how you will react. You don’t have to scream and slap your child just because you’re upset. You don’t have to panic when afraid.

A negative emotion is like a warning system, telling you that something is wrong. You must then decide what you are going to do about it so you don’t have to continue experiencing that emotion. For example, if you’re anxious because it’s late and your daughter isn’t home, you don’t have to continue feeling anxious every time she is away. You can prevent future anxiety if you establish a policy that she should either be home at a certain time or she should call if she will be late. Then if she is late, rehearse in your mind how you are going to respond so you can get your message across in a normal voice without making her feel rejected and shamed.

There may be times when you will need to raise your voice to get your children’s attention, but don’t do it in anger. And be sure to explain

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that you raised your voice so you could communicate a very important message and you couldn't figure out how else to get their attention. You don't want your children to feel guilty, but you do want them to listen. Then be sure to leave them feeling good about themselves and you.

Even though you generally feel good about yourself, there will still be times when you feel your spirits sagging. When that happens, take a deep breath, put a smile on your face, and try these suggestions:

Start your day by praising the Lord, giving your spouse a hug and a kiss, complimenting your kids, and thinking about something positive or something that makes you laugh. Keeping yourself full of positive emotions such as peace, joy, happiness, contentment, and love will help you to be better able to handle the negative emotions that you will occasionally experience.

- 2. Live a healthful lifestyle.* How you feel physically will affect how you feel emotionally. You can't eat unhealthful food, drink caffeinated beverages, binge on sugar, medicate yourself with sleeping pills and stimulants, and be a couch potato, and still expect to feel good. You owe it to yourself to learn all you can about how your body functions and the things that bring on a depressed mood. One of the best things you can do for your mental attitude is to take a thirty-minute brisk walk in the sunshine every day. You'll be amazed how much better you'll feel physically and emotionally. And when the kids are getting to you and you don't think you can cope, put on a fun aerobics DVD and encourage the kids to exercise with you. Exercise releases endorphins into your bloodstream and gives you a natural high.
- 3. Count your blessings.* Practice looking on the bright side of life. Blessings come in all sizes. If you search, you can find a positive even in what others might consider negative. For example, when your baby drops his dish of food on the floor, say, "At least it wasn't good china!" Be thankful for getting at least a five-minute nap, even though you wanted an hour. And praise the Lord for a husband who comes home, even if he's late. Thank the Lord for giving you the incredible gift of children and the awesome privilege of loving, protecting, and training them.
- 4. Notice the good in your child, and be quick to show appreciation.* Every child, no matter how difficult, has some positive characteristics. But it's usually the two or three negative traits that seem to get parent's attention.

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Notice the good. Reinforce it with a word of appreciation, and chances are you'll see more of that positive trait. Make it a bedtime routine to say, "This is what I loved best about you today." You've got to be looking for the good things in order to have something different to tell your child each day. And while you're at it, give yourself a pat on the back when you deserve it.

5. *Keep optimistic about the future.* Remember, children won't be wetting their pants or sucking their thumbs forever! They do grow up! Often the problems parents complain about are just typical behaviors for children during various stages of life. Don't give up. You can find answers. Believe that God places the answers within you to give you everything you need for what you will experience.

Stop feeling like a failure—it will only make you feel guilty and worthless. Change your attitude from dread and discouragement to anticipation and adventure. Try something; if it doesn't work, try something else. And if you still feel like a failure, be optimistic. Remember Thomas Edison, who tried more than ten thousand experiments before he successfully created the lightbulb. When he was asked how he felt after ten thousand failures, he replied, "I have not failed. I just found ten thousand ways that didn't work." Let that be your attitude. When things don't go as you expected, say, "I just found something that didn't work." Then try another approach.

6. *Let God's promises encourage you.* Believe God has a plan for your life and that your children are a vital part of it. When you experience a trying day and wonder if you have the energy to cope, remember that God said in Jeremiah 29:11 that He has good plans for you—to give you a future and a hope.
7. *Give yourself a positive script.* Tell yourself, "God is using my children in an amazing way to mold and change me into a better person." Then look forward with anticipation rather than backward with regret.

Positive Discipline

Your attitude about parenting your children will most likely be reflected in the way you treat them, especially when you are trying to train them in the way you want them to go (Proverbs 22:6). You can use either negative words and methods—or positive. Here's an example: Let's say your kids are yelling in the car, and you want them to stop. Without thinking, most parents use a negative

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tone of voice and give a negative command, such as “Don’t yell in the car.” How much better to say in a positive tone something positive that tells the children what behavior is appropriate: “Use your soft voices in the car and your loud voices outside.” Or “Please talk a little softer so I can hear the radio. Thanks.” Or simply say, “When you’re being kind to each other, I’ll continue driving, but until then I’m going to stop.”

When your child interrupts, you may be tempted to say, “Don’t interrupt,” but that doesn’t tell the child what to do—only what *not* to do. Try saying kindly, “I am talking now. You may talk when I’m finished.” This is a much more positive statement. Or say, “When you want my attention, instead of interrupting, if you put your hand on my arm letting me know you want to say something, as soon as I can, I’ll give you a turn.”

If you’re like most parents, when your children ask for something you will use the word *no* more often than *yes*. When kids grow up with too many *nos*, it dampens their spirits and home ends up being a fairly negative environment. How much better to say, Yes . . . *but!* “Yes you may get the paint set out, *but* you need to put away the puzzle first.”

Using positive teaching methods and discipline is an important part of being an effective parent. To *discipline* means *to teach*.

You Know Your Discipline Is Positive If . . .

- It gets the message across without causing the child pain either physically or emotionally. In other words, the child doesn’t feel guilty, inadequate, shamed, or worthless.
- It teaches a child for the long term and doesn’t just stop unwanted behavior for the moment.
- It encourages self-discipline.
- It helps a child feel better about himself—not worse.
- It decreases conflict and alienation and increases parent-child understanding.
- It leaves the child with the feeling that he was dealt with fairly.

Retrain Your Brain

Thinking negatively can become a habit. It’s like the default option on your computer. If you do nothing to change your thinking, your mind defaults to the negative—and you worry, fret, and stew about your life, your children, and your situation. Default thinking is dead-end thinking. “It’s impossible; why try?” More

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than likely the parents who allow their brains to default to negativity will complain, blame, and make everyone around them miserable. Misery may like company—but seldom do children enjoy the company of the miserable! Instead misery breeds misery.

By visualizing what you want and how you should respond, you can be a successful parent who can train your brain to override negative thoughts and go into an option-thinking mode. You must believe that every problem has a solution and be willing to search until one is found.

The more you practice positive-option thinking, the more automatic it will become. And when you think positively—you'll be more likely to act positively. In addition to your attitude, your behavior will influence who your children become.

Behavior

Throughout boot camp you will be learning how to improve your parenting skills. Knowledge is important, but how you apply this knowledge will determine your effectiveness. Setting realistic goals that are as specific as possible is a good way to make sure you put knowledge (what you KNOW) into practice (what you DO). In the military, it's called determining the end state. In other words, *what do you want to end up doing?*

If your goals are too idealistic, it's easy to become discouraged and give up trying. And if you're too general, you won't know whether or not you have reached them. It's better to have the goal of spending fifteen minutes a day reading to your child than merely to say, "I want to spend more time reading to my child." The more specific your goals, the easier it is to know whether you've reached them.

Suggestions of Parental Behavior Goals

1. *Each day spend fifteen minutes of uninterrupted time with each child doing what that child chooses.*
2. *At least three times a day, let your child know he or she is loved. Give a kiss, a wink, a smile, a hug, a back rub, a compliment, or just say, "I love you." Send love notes in lunch boxes; call from the office to say, "I was just thinking about how special you are."*
3. *Surprise your child with a kind deed at least once a day. Say often, "It's my pleasure because you're my treasure."*
4. *Search out your child and just hang out. When a child is involved in an activity, too many parents seize the opportunity to do something themselves rather than share the time with their child.*

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5. *Plan to do something special together.* It's fun to look forward to a weekly date. Do something "crazy" together that you don't ordinarily do. Make a why-not list of fun activities and plan them into your schedule.
6. *Listen carefully to your child's verbal and body language.* Resist the temptation to lecture. Just pay attention.
7. *Laugh together and laugh a lot.* Humor has a way of smoothing over the rough places in family relationships. It adds a sparkle to life and a lift to the soul!
8. *Before reacting to misbehavior, search for the reason.* Put your energy into trying to alleviate the cause rather than just disciplining the offender.
9. *Never discipline in anger.* If you do, you'll likely say or do something that you wish you wouldn't have. Cool down first, and you'll think more clearly so your words and actions won't cause pain or shame.
10. *Admit when you've made a mistake and say, "I'm sorry."* Your child will respect your honesty.
11. *Use encouragement ten times more often than consequences.* It's usually the discouraged child who becomes the misbehaving child.
12. *Daily dedicate yourself and your child to the Lord.* And believe the promise in the Bible, "In everything you do, put God first, and he will direct you and crown your efforts with success" (Proverbs 3:6, TLB).

The above are only suggestions. What parenting goals do you want to reach? Remember, make them realistic and specific. At the end of the day, read over your list of goals and ask yourself, "How well did I do? What could I do tomorrow to be more successful?"

If you have too many goals, you'll never remember them. To help you, choose the most important and write them on 3×5 cards, and place the cards in places where you'll see them often, such as on your bathroom mirror or on the car's visor. When they have become habits, add more goals to your list.

If you aren't as successful as you wish, it may be because you need to do more "backward planning" to determine what you have to do to reach your desired end state. For example, if you want to successfully meet your goal to read to your child fifteen minutes a day, it will help if you set a time, find what you want to read, turn off your phone, ignore your computer when you hear "You've got mail," and sit down with your child. Get the idea?

Positive parents don't wallow in guilt when they misjudge a situation and come down a little too hard on their children. Instead they ask, "How can I better teach

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(discipline) so my children can more successfully handle this problem in the future?” Or they might say to their children, “I’m learning how to be a mommy (daddy), just like you’re learning to be responsible kids. So I need your help in teaching me how.”

Positive parents are constantly looking for new and more effective techniques to use with each of their children. That’s one of the challenges and delights of parenting. Because children are unique, they must be dealt with differently in order to reach the end state of being responsible. Learning to be a positive disciplinarian is a process. That’s why positive parents are constantly looking for ways to improve and seeking solutions to problems. There’s truth in the jingle “The definition of perfect parenting is easy to express, just err and err and err again, but less and less and less.”

Remember, mistakes are opportunities to learn, so forgive yourself when you make them. Modeling this will teach your children to forgive themselves and others more easily.

Commitment

Commitment means “keeping promises.” What are you committed to? It’s easy to make promises—or commitments—but it’s not always easy to keep them. It all has to do with your priorities.

If a commitment has a high priority in your life, you’ll likely keep it. If not, even though you say you’re committed, you may not act like it.

If you are married with children, here’s a healthy way to order your priorities: God, spouse, children, parents, and then work relationships and everyone else. It may surprise you, but in a healthy marriage, the kids shouldn’t come first! Kids feel secure when they know their parents love them so much that for the kids’ sake, they will put each other first in order to provide a healthy and secure foundation for their children.

Exceptions to Putting Your Spouse First in Your Life

1. *If one parent is abusive, the kids must be protected.* Even though you are committed to your spouse, you must put your children’s welfare first.
2. *If you are single, any dating relationship should be second priority to your children.* Don’t marry if your children are against it unless you seek family counseling and work out their objections first. Otherwise, you’ll be in for a bumpy ride! (For more on single parenting, see appendix A.)

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Why Kids May Object to Remarriage

- Sometimes children’s concerns are irrational. They may not want their parent to remarry because they hope their mom and dad will get back together.
- They may feel that if their parent remarries, the stepdad or stepmom will take time and attention away from them.
- If a single parent has established the habit of sleeping with a young child, getting married means the child gets pushed out of the parent’s bed—and that can cause feelings of rejection. The parent should establish a new sleeping arrangement that is emotionally satisfying to the child before a new marriage partner is brought into the family.

Before Remarriage, Talk to Your Children About Commitment

1. *If you’re considering marriage, talk to your kids about possible situations when you will need to stand firmly together as parent and stepparent even though the kids won’t like it.* Let them know before this happens that it has nothing to do with how much you love your children, and *everything* to do with establishing a safe, secure home where Dad and Mom are the respected leaders. In time, if the relationship with the stepparent is satisfying and the children feel loved, kids will accept that person and not resent the time their own parent spends with the “new” one.
2. *In blended marriages with children on both sides, the kids must be convinced that their own parent loves them supremely and will not take sides against them.* But at the same time, they must know that their parent will not allow them to treat the stepparent disrespectfully. Sometimes it means walking a fine line.
3. *The kids must know that neither parent will allow their kids to drive them apart.* If you find yourself having to choose spouse over kids or kids over spouse, get counseling immediately.
4. *If you marry into a blended situation, don’t try to “parent” your spouse’s kids too quickly.* It sets up a sticky situation. The kids resent the new parent. Their own parent tries to defend the new spouse. The kids feel their parent is taking sides against them. And the testing begins! (For more on blended families, see appendix B.)

Use of Time Reflects Commitment

One of the best ways to show how committed you are to your kids is to spend

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time with them. A major challenge for most parents is making sure that the best of their time and energy is dedicated to their children. That means choosing to do something with your kids over keeping a spotless house, cooking from scratch, or spending hours shopping for bargains. Another option is to creatively involve them in the activities that you have to do.

Most parents are kept so busy with all the things they have to do around the home, yard, or office that they tend to tackle those activities first rather than spend time with their kids. When a project is completed, parents have something they can look at and say, “I did that!” You baked a cake—you have something to admire. You washed the windows—they sparkle. That sense of accomplishment may not be as easy to experience when spending time with children. You don’t usually see what you’ve accomplished when you push a child in a swing or jump on the trampoline together, or when you chauffeur your kids to ball practice or horseback riding lessons. Yet the messages you are giving your children are priceless: “You’re important! You’re special! You’re valuable! You’re loved!”

Think long term. The sense of accomplishment you feel from completing a project or finishing a task will never compare to the accomplishment of raising your child into a capable, healthy, responsible adult.

When it comes to kids, don’t wait until you have time to spend with them. That will never happen! Instead, make good use of every minute: a kind word here, a little help there, and in between, a lot of smiles and love pats are what gets the message across to your kids that you’re committed to them.

Prioritize Your Commitments

Here’s a truth to remember. *It is impossible to have enough time to do everything you would like to do.* That’s why it’s essential to prioritize your commitments.

An Object Lesson on the Importance of Prioritizing

Take a glass jar and fill it with golf balls. Then pour in as much rice as the container will hold. Now pour out the contents. If you refill the jar by adding the rice (the little things) first, you’ll never have enough room for the golf balls (the big things). That’s the way it is in life. If you try to put all the little things in your life first, you’ll never have time to fit in the big things, such as your commitment to God and family.

You may say your kids come first, but do they see you spending a lot more time with work or church commitments than with them? You say God is first in

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your life, but do your children ever see you spending time having personal devotions? And is your behavior toward them truly Christlike?

If you want to get an accurate reading of whether your kids perceive that you're committed to them, ask them. Based on their answer, you may want to make some changes in your attitude and behavior.

Are You Afraid to Make a Marriage Commitment?

Here's another consideration: you and your "significant other" may be parenting a child without having made a marriage commitment. This troubles children. They ask, Why can't Mom and Dad promise each other to live together for a lifetime? Why can't they get married like other parents do? Even though your decision may have nothing to do with them, they often interpret it as a lack of commitment to them. When a child's home is unstable, when life is lived on shaky ground, it is often reflected in his or her negative behavior. For your children's sake, rethink "living together," even though marriage might mean getting less government subsidy or finding yourself in a higher tax bracket!

Why Commitment Is Important

So many children today are living in single-parent homes or have experienced their parents' breakup and remarriage that it makes children, even in stable homes, question whether their own folks will divorce, especially when they hear angry words or see disgusted looks. Living under the threat of a parent walking out is like living with a ticking time bomb. Kids feel they have to be careful not to say or do something that they think might cause one or the other parent to explode and leave. Even though it is rarely the kids who drive parents apart, almost all children entertain the idea that it's their fault if they can't hold their parents together.

If your kids question your commitment, make it clear to them: "I promised your mom that I would love her all my life, and although we may get mad at each other and say angry things, I want you to know that I will say, 'I'm sorry' and I will *never* leave her."

They need to see Mom treat Dad with respect even though she doesn't agree with him. They need to hear her say, "Your Dad and I will never get a divorce. When we got married we promised to love, honor, and respect each other, and even though I might not agree with your dad, I will always keep my promise to him."

If kids hear their folks arguing, it's extremely important that they see how they solve their problems and make up. They learn the valuable lesson that in a committed love relationship, there can be conflict without alienation. Children feel secure

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and can concentrate on achieving their own developmental milestones when they don't have to worry about the stability of their family.

Dealing With Broken Commitments

If two people are truly committed to each other, nothing can split them up. But if one finds greener pastures or begins thinking, *Maybe I married the wrong person*, and wants out of the marriage, there is very little the other can do to hold things together. Abuse also destroys commitment. No one should stay in a relationship in which they or the children are verbally, physically, emotionally, or sexually abused.

Almost half of all marriages in North America fall apart. Divorce does happen. Commitments are broken. When there are “irreconcilable differences” and parents divorce, you owe it to your children to make it clear that even though you divorce each other, *you will never “divorce” the kids*. You will always be there for them. You will never use them as a pawn to try to get back at your ex. And because of the kids, you will choose to have the best possible relationship you can have with their mom or their dad.

Divorce is *always* devastating to kids—regardless of how old they are. There is no such thing as a “good” divorce. It may be necessary, but there will always be negative fallout when commitments are broken.

Are You Trustworthy?

If you promise your kids something, do you come through? If you say you'll be there at a certain time, are you? If you plan an event, does it happen? If you say you'll call back, do you? Trust is a key component to a healthy family relationship. Don't abuse it!

Facts About Reliability

1. When parents keep their word, their children are better able to trust the promises of God.
2. When children know their parents keep their promises, they have a sense of security and freedom to develop into vibrant, confident persons.
3. When parents are habitually unreliable and break their promises, kids tend to question their own importance.

How to Be More Trustworthy

- Don't make promises you can't keep.

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- Make sure you are responsible in the little things. For example, getting the kids to school and picking them up on time may seem like a small thing to you, but it's a huge thing to your children.
- Be honest if something your children want is impossible to get. Admitting that you can't purchase something or go someplace is better than stringing children along and then disappointing them.
- Guard against giving "hopeful" answers, such as, "if we have time" or "maybe next week" or "we'll see how it works out." Young children take these as promises.
- If you find yourself making promises and then forgetting them, ask your children if there is anything you've promised that you haven't delivered on yet. If so, make it right.

Keeping promises is so meaningful to children that they may remember a broken promise for years. For example, one father bragged to his son about his reliability. "Have I ever let you down? Has your dad ever not kept his word to you?" His forty-year-old son replied, "Only once, Dad. You promised to take me fishing one Sunday, but you went to the office instead." Thirty years later the son still remembered the broken promise.

Commit yourself to your family. Promise only what you can deliver. God keeps promises. Make sure you do. With a positive Attitude, effective Behavior, and Commitment, you can be who you want your child to be.

PARENTING BOOT CAMP DRILL 1:

You are the KEY to your kid's future.

SELF-STUDY QUESTIONS FOR CHAPTER 1

Fill out the answers and discuss them with your spouse or with someone who knows you and your children and whose insight can help you become a more effective parent.

1. Mark the following statements true or false (T or F):

What is a successful parent to you?

- One who turns out perfect children.
- One who enjoys his or her children.
- One who realistically understands that regardless of how great a parent he or she is, kids will be kids.
- One who never makes mistakes.
- One who finds effective ways to solve problems.
- One who has a good relationship with his or her children.
- Other ideas: _____

2. Fill in the missing words:

In order to be a successful parent you need the ABCs of parenting:

A positive A _____, effective B _____,
and C _____.

**3. Which of the following can help you have a more positive attitude?
(Check the correct answers.)**

- Watch your emotions.
- Live a healthful lifestyle.
- Count your blessings.
- Notice the good in your child.
- Keep optimistic about the future.
- Other ideas: _____

4. From the list of realistic parenting goals, pick three goals to begin putting into practice with your children.

- A. _____
- B. _____
- C. _____

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5. How can you show your children that you are committed to them?

6. What is the most important point that you want to remember from this chapter?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR CHAPTER 1

1. What is your attitude toward parenting? Of the five choices given in this chapter, which attitude best describes where you are at this time?

- A. I feel optimistic and willing to learn. I enjoy the challenge of meeting my child's needs.
- B. I feel kids are OK, but there's more to life than parenting.
- C. I feel discouraged when I try so hard and my children don't respond as I want them to.
- D. I sometimes feel like a failure and wish I'd never had a child.
- E. At times I've felt like all of the above.

Then answer the following questions.

- Are you happy with your answer?
 - How do you wish you felt about parenting?
 - What do you think might help you be more positive?
2. What do you personally need in order to have a more positive attitude about yourself and your life?
3. Why is self-improvement an important component in being an effective parent?
4. On a scale from 1 to 10,
- Where would you rank yourself as to your commitment to your family?
 - Where do you think your spouse would rank your commitment?
 - Where do you think your children would rank your commitment?

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5. What messages do you feel parents should give to their children to make them feel secure?
6. If you've been in the military, what important lessons did you learn that can help you be a better parent?
7. Dwight D. Eisenhower once said, "Leadership is the art of getting someone else to do something you want done because he wants to do it." What is your definition of leadership especially as it relates to parenting?

Notes: