

## MODULE 7

### PARENTING

#### THE FIVE NEEDS OF PARENTS

##### Section One

#### I. A NEED FOR UNDERSTANDING

##### Understanding Yourself As A Parent

There was a classic Disney Movie that has been remade for a more recent generation. The movie was entitled *The Parent Trap*. In parenting, there are many parent traps. If we were to make them into movies there would sequel after sequel.

##### *Slide 2*

##### What is a Parent Trap?

Nagging, threatening, arguing, and criticism are examples of parent traps. They seem to work at first but they never build healthy relationships and eventually they just make things worse! A Parent Trap is a dysfunctional (harmful) pattern of behavior that a parent falls into while trying to get a child to:

1. Stop an undesirable behavior (such as bickering with siblings), or
2. Start a desirable behavior (such as clean his bedroom).

Parents use dysfunctional behavior and fall into parent traps because:

1. That is how they were trained by their parents,
2. They don't know what else to do, or
3. Dysfunctional behavior often "works" for a while.

Parent trap behaviors are ultimately harmful to the child and the parent-child relationship.

### Slide 3

## **Do your children train you to be mean to them?**

YES! When parents request politely and children do not comply, the children are actually “punishing” their parents for being nice to them. When parents scream and threaten and the children comply, the children are rewarding their parents for being mean to them. It seems that being nice doesn’t work, but being mean does! Being nice is punished and being mean is rewarded. Therefore children can actually train their parents to be mean and nasty to them!

### Slide 4

Note: Here are a few of the many Parent Traps!

- Anger
- Raging
- Controlling
- Rescuing
- Criticizing
- Arguing
- Inconsistency
- Lying
- Insight (Lecturing)
- Teenage Retirement

### Slide 5

- Parental Disunity
- Conditional Love
- Scape-goating
- Surrogate Spouse
- Holding Grudges
- Favoritism
- Using Excessive Punishment
- Nagging
- Bait Phrases
- The Quick Fix
- Not Using Rewards and Punishments Properly

Study them well, learn to identify them, and then stay out of them; they can destroy the peace and happiness of your home!

### Slide 6

## **Parent Trap #1: Anger**

ANGER, a devastating parent trap, is often a secondary emotion. By that we mean that when a person has been hurt, humiliated, bullied, frightened or frustrated long enough they often convert all their vulnerability and pain into anger or rage which mobilizes them into actions that will change their world and stop their pain and frustration and get them what they want. This can be a toy, a job, acceptance, love, or compliance. Anger is an attempt to change our world, to control what we have not been able to control. Anger is a cry for change. Anger has a demand in it!

#### *Slide 7*

### **Is anger used to control?**

YES! Anger is often used to control both people and circumstances. Unfortunately it usually “works” so well that many parents are (or pretend to be) angry a good part of the time in order to control their families. Like all Parent Traps, the more anger “works” (is reinforced) for the parents, the more they will use it. Many children will conform to the wishes of an angry parent more quickly than they will to a pleasant parent. Remember: People are angry in an effort to control things, to change what they are unhappy with, and ultimately, they are angry because they can’t control the world. Our stress level and anger will be reduced dramatically when we realize and admit that we can’t control everything, and should stop trying. “Controllers” lead disappointing lives!

#### *Slide 8*

### **Does anger achieve control?**

No! Ultimately anger fails to control. Younger children are more easily intimidated than teens or adults. Angry people have only the power that we give them through our fear. You might terrorize younger children with your temper tantrums, but most teenagers quickly begin to realize that nobody can make them do something they refuse to do. Anger and coercion will break the spirit of some children (or spouses), but it will cause others to resent and rebel against you.

WARNING! Anger usually does serious harm to both the angry person and to the target child (or spouse).

#### *Slide 9*

### **Can anger be healthy?**

YES! There is a “good” anger, an anger that is a healthy response when our boundaries are unjustly violated. Healthy anger is absolutely necessary for our survival. This type of anger allows us to overcome our fears and inhibitions, motivating us to take the action needed to protect ourselves and our loved ones. But most anger is not healthy or justified anger. Rather it is the result of being blocked from attaining our own (often selfish) goals! Angry people are not happy people, they are negative, frustrated, miserable beings and they are in pain.

## Slide 10

### What does anger communicate?

When we communicate angrily with a child some of the messages we give are:

- “You’re not OK!”
- “You’re stupid!”
- “You’re not important!”

Anger demeans, discounts, humiliates and frightens. It destroys self-esteem and personal relationships.

## Slide 11

### A Note On Anger

We sometimes “fake” anger to frighten, intimidate, control or coerce others into compliance with our wishes. When others comply, our anger is rewarded. We then continue to use it in order to keep people fearful of us and keep them “in line”. This produces parents who are always angry in order to keep the children in compliance. Some people seem to be angry as a way of life: always unhappy.

Splitting Psychologists tell us that little children “split”. They cannot understand that daddy can be angry and love them too, because a young child cannot mentally hold and evaluate two concepts at the same time. So, if dad usually comes across as angry, they assume he is only angry and that he has no love for them. Therefore, they split off the “loving” dad while retaining the “angry” dad. They further conclude that since dad is angry at them, there must be something wrong with them. This has a negative impact on the child’s self-esteem, usually for life!

## Slide 12

### Parent Trap #2: Rage

Some people allow themselves to become so angry they begin to RAGE. In this respect, rage is “runaway anger”. In a sense, the “rager” has an “emotional bowel movement” on his target. After emotionally relieving himself through venting and abusing, this “rageaholic” can put up with things until the frustration and pain builds to intolerable levels again and the cycle is repeated. The “rageaholic” settles his nerves or relieves his/her stress by angry emotional venting in the same sense that an alcoholic takes a drink to feel “normal” or settle his “nerves”.

Rage is inexcusable in the home. It has no place in our associations with our loved ones. It

is NEVER justified. It DESTROYS!

*Slide 13*

**Can we become addicted to rage?**

YES! We can become addicted to rage as surely as we can become addicted to drugs. Some people medicate their pain, and whether with alcohol, drugs, nicotine, food, gambling, sex, or raging, it is all the same. “Rageaholism” is an addiction (obsessive compulsive behavior) and is destructive to all healthy relationships. Just as the drug user will go crazy without his next “fix,” the rager’s anxiety builds until his next “fix” of raging and venting takes place.

Drinking (Alcoholism) is not about being thirsty!!

Alcoholics drink to alter their mood and to feel OK again; not because they are such thirsty people! They can always find many reasons to justify their drinking! Alcoholism or rageaholism, it makes no difference; it is all addiction! Rageaholics rage, not out of justified anger, but to alter their mood and to feel okay again; and they can always find many reasons to trigger their raging. Their preferred lifestyle is to be constantly angry, or even given to violent outbursts of rage. Of course, like the alcoholic, the rager is in “denial” and does not easily admit his addiction or his desperate need for help. Rage kills (physically, psychologically and emotionally) as surely as alcoholism because it adds such great stress to the human system.

*Slide 14*

**How do you teach your children to rage?**

By your example! Children copy parents’ dysfunctional and destructive behaviors (such as raging). Thus anger and rage pass from one generation to the next. Leave out the anger and rage when correcting a child. Defuse the negative emotional situations. Stop being angry. It’s your choice!

*Slide 15*

**Is raging abusive?**

YES! Whether there are physical blows or not, raging is emotional violence upon another person, and is often perpetrated upon innocent children who have no way to censor out the false but damaging “put down” messages of the rageaholic. A child does not realize the raging parent is unhealthy, but rather invariably blames him/herself. The child comes to feel shamed, flawed and not okay as a human being. Rage is poison and will destroy every relationship. People that are “raged” at often feel hated! Remember: We are not happy around people that act like they hate us! We do not seek nor enjoy their company: we avoid them even when they are “family.”

## **Noncompliance: Is it a setup for rage?**

Yes! The more requests mom has to make, the more upset she usually becomes.

Here is a typical interchange between Mom and her son (age 10):

Mom: Sweetheart, mother needs the garbage taken out. Will you please take it out for me? (1st request, pleasant)

Son: OK! (but does not comply or reinforce “nice” mother)

15 minutes later

Mom: Son, you forgot to take out the garbage yesterday and now it’s overflowing, please do it now! (2nd request, little irritation)

Son: OK! (does not comply or reinforce a very “irritated” mother)

30 minutes later

Mom: Now, I’ve asked you nicely several times to take out the garbage. Turn the TV off and get in here now before I have to punish you. (3rd request is threatening and getting angry)

Son: OK, I will! (in a whiny voice but he does not comply or reinforce even “threatening” mother)

- Three or four more requests by mother over the next hour and a half finally escalate mother’s emotions from frustration, to anger, to boiling. At last she comes raging into the room yelling and possibly even swinging. At this point her son finally jumps up and starts for the kitchen to take out the garbage. By now the situation is ugly and unpleasant. The son’s compliance to mother’s requests finally took place when his mother reached a high level of raging and abusing.

Note:

- The son did not reward mother’s appropriate behavior. When she was nice he ‘punished’ her by noncompliance and ignoring her. Therefore she was training him to comply only when she raged.
- The son only rewards mother’s raging behavior!

### *Slide 17*

#### **Did rage cause compliance?**

NO! NO! NO! It only looked like rage caused the son to comply. Mother, in the example, has just made a terrible mistake in concluding that she must rage in order to get her son to comply! Her son DID NOT comply because mom was unhappy, disappointed, upset, angry or even insanely raging! It is what is about to follow the rage that gets her son's attention!

### *Slide 18*

#### **What motivates compliance?**

ACTION! ACTION! ONLY ACTION! Her son complied because mother was taking action! it was what mother was about to do because she was so angry that motivated her son. Frankly, her son was not concerned with how mother felt, or how mad she was getting or anything else. Kids, are not concerned with your mental health! In this case mother was finally taking action (however inappropriate) instead of "talking" or "raging." It was the action that her son feared, not the anger itself. If we put mother in a cage where she could take no action, but could only rage, her son would probably still be sitting there watching TV instead of taking out the garbage.

### *Slide 19*

#### **When do you take action?**

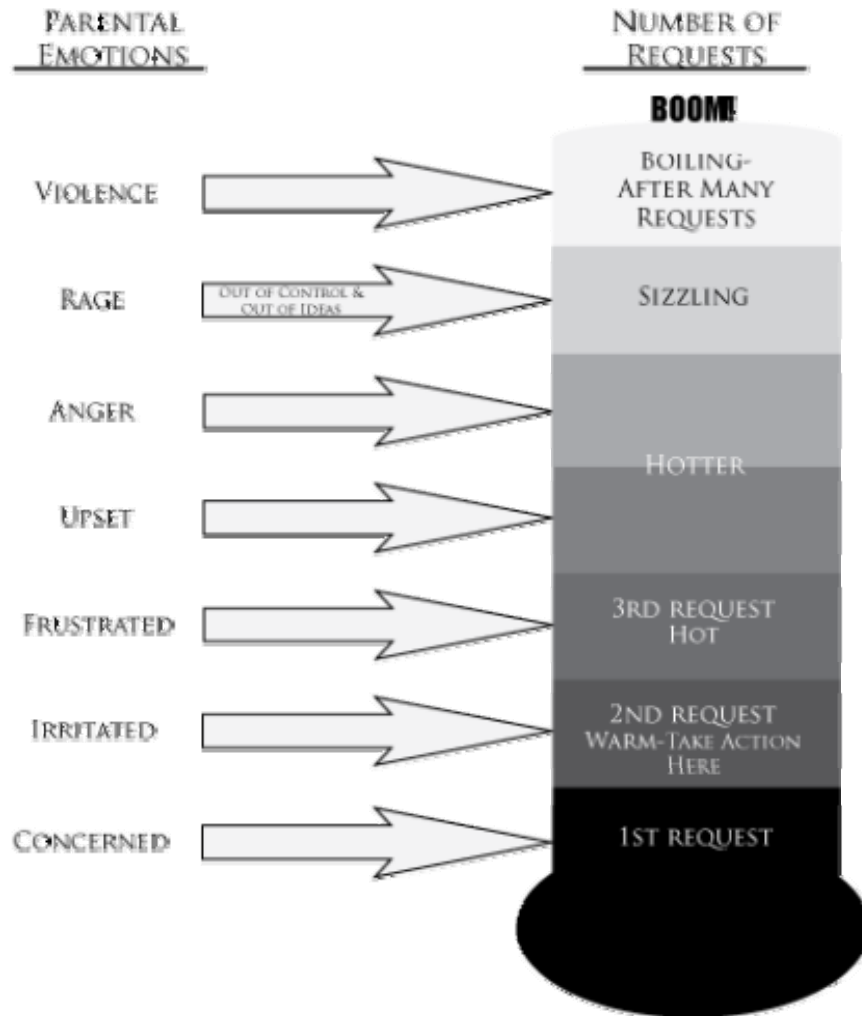
At any point you want! How crazy do you want to be? How angry and frustrated do you want to get? Take action after the very first request or demand if you want compliance after one request. Study the Rage Gage on the next page and see how the emotion builds when children do not comply even to repeated parental requests.

### *Slide 20*

#### **What is The Rage Gage?**

At the point you act, at the time you take action compliance takes place. In other words (look at the Rage Gauge) you have the option to take action after the first or second or 3rd or 10th request. Tension and stress build and increase after each request; so how much stress and tension do you want in your home? You hold the key, and the key to compliance is action (consequences)! How mad and upset do you want yourself and your family to be all the time? The choice is yours. You alone are responsible for the level of tension, anxiety and stress in your home. Stop requesting, stop whining, stop the hand wringing and complaining, and ACT!

### THE GAUGE OF RAGE



At what point above would a wise parent take action? After the first request? The 4th? The 10th? Can it be this simple? Yes! TAKE ACTION AFTER THE FIRST REQUEST QUICKLY AND WITHOUT A SECOND WARNING!!

#### A Note On Rage

Rage is a mood-altering experience; it allows the rager to change his mood. He vents his anger and frustration, thereby unloading his pain and anxiety on innocent others. Some psychologists have said that all rage is the result of feeling unaccepted; certainly that is often true. Raging discounts others, making them feel rejected and worthless. All anger and rage should be eliminated when administering consequences to a child. Although

some people are fooled into believing that raging works, it is actually action, or the threat thereof, that is motivating to children.

RAGE is INEXCUSABLE in the home; it DESTROYS! Rage is an addiction that must be dealt with! Although raging seems to work for the rageaholic, like any addiction, it destroys the rager, those around him, and all healthy relationships. Rage frightens and intimidates the fearful individual who complies, which is rewarding to the rager. Like the alcoholic family with its codependents and enablers, the rager/victim games continue until the addiction is dealt with.

*Slide 22*

### **Parent Trap # 3: Control**

Control can be an unjustified intrusion into another person's right to life. Unjustified controlling, power plays, and coercion are violence on another person's sacred right of choice. Our world is not set up for us to make decisions for others and protect them from their irresponsible choices.

Infants and very young children are obvious exceptions to this rule but even young children become conscious of their ability to disagree with and defy parents. We begin to lose "control" much earlier than most of us realize. Good examples of this fact are crying babies that will not stop, or a one-year-old who refuses to eat more strained vegetables and spits out everything!

*Slide 23*

### **Shouldn't I help my children choose?**

Yes, but people (children too) are morally free to choose, think, believe, and live the way they decide to live, it is not possible to live another person's life, to make their choices and life's decisions for them. When parents assume the responsibilities of decision making that their son should be exercising, they communicate to him that he Obviously is not mentally or morally capable to take responsibility for his own life. That is not only insulting, it undermines his self-esteem and robs him of the opportunity to grow and develop the coping skills that he would acquire by working out his own life's problems and challenges. Children are free to exercise their moral agency. That means they have the power and right to make their own decisions in life, either good or bad ones. Unfortunately they start this process long before we parents think they are prepared to make wise choices!

The use of control is sometimes justified. For example when a child is in danger you act, and even against his strenuous resistance you force him out of the busy street. However, we do not want to "over-control" our children, or be constantly involved in power struggles with them over their life's decisions. POWER, FORCE and CONTROL can be justified sometimes and in some situations may be absolutely necessary. The parent has the right and responsibility to judge when to intervene with the use of power or force or

coercion. We must use skill and wisdom in the use of parental control. it is so very tempting to just jump in and “insist.”

*Slide 24*

### **But won't my child make mistakes?**

OF COURSE! But your home must be a safe place for a child to try, fail, and then to try again. Children must be encouraged to “try.” Perfectionist parents intimidate their children to the point a child won't try out of fear of criticism if they fail. Mistakes are a necessary part of our learning experience and, within reasonable limits, must be allowed.

Parents can trap themselves into offering an endless chain of reminders, suggestions, recommendations, historical commentaries and warnings.

*Slide 25*

### **Can “Controlling” become addictive?**

Yes, just like rage, the compulsion to control can become an addiction. Some people cannot stop without help; they must control everything to keep their own anxiety level down. People who control out of their own needs lead frustrated, angry lives, because, they cannot control others. Some people attempt to control to feel superior, needed, important, or powerful. Parents highly invested in their own images may control out of the desire to have successful children so that they can see themselves as being successful parents. Parents can control by fear, anger, guilt, hyper-vigilance, conditional love, giving money, and many other ways. Many parents attempt to “control” and coerce their children because they can't stand the personal pains they would experience if they allowed their child to “fail” at something or suffer for some reason. You will regain control of your own life when you give up the fantasy that you can or should control another person's life.

*Slide 26*

### **Can I get out of the control trap?**

Yes!! Give up the “control fantasy” and LET GO! When you give up trying to control others, you are only giving up the fantasy that you were in control in the first place! Give up the misconception that you have the power, the wisdom, the right, or the moral responsibility to use coercion or power in any form over another person. It is a fact that if a teenager is absolutely insistent that he is going to drink, try drugs, or do sex, eventually he can figure out some way to drink, or do drugs. etc., and there is nothing that a parent can do to guarantee it won't happen.

Acknowledging that we cannot control others does not mean that we are to become permissive. We simply recognize that people will exercise their right to free choice and that they will make some good and some bad choices. As parents we counsel and teach correct principles to our children and set a good example realizing that our children have the right to (and will) choose their own life styles. Let us acknowledge this truth and he

gracious in it. As we respect our children's boundaries we also have a right to expect them to respect our boundaries. If you have faithfully taught your children right from wrong, they are responsible for the choices they have made. Good parents are not responsible for the lives their children choose to live.

#### *Slide 27*

### **Control or responsibility? Which?**

Trying to control breeds power struggles rather than an individual sense of responsibility for one's life. A power struggle becomes a game about who is going to win; about who is the strongest, not about what's right!

Can we lose our sense of personal responsibility for our lives in a battle over freedom? A son is chumming around with a friend his parents feel is of low character and a very bad influence on him. The son rejects his parents' counsel to drop this friend and so his parents deny privileges, nag him and punish him. Johnny resents his parents demands and the taking away of his freedom. So, to show them they have no right or power to make him do as they wish, he increases his association with his friend. At this point the son is reacting to his parents' coercive tactics more than considering the quality of his friend who actually does use drugs. The battle for freedom has overwhelmed the son and the parents to the point that Johnny is now failing to make personal decisions over a very important issue in his life (...should he be associating with drug abusers?).

A daughter might reject the church of her parents, not because she disbelieves the doctrine but because in the power struggle with her parents over her attendance at services and going with a "good" crowd, she feels justified in rejecting what is being "forced" upon her. Her issue is not whether church is good or bad but that her parents have no right to force her to do anything. She has the right to make her own moral decisions. It is very unwise to force a child into the position of having to reject what is best for him/her in order to prove who has the right to make his/her moral decisions. No matter how noble the cause, we have no right to force others. That is a terrible trap indeed! However, parents often feel justified in forcing children to do what the parents feel is "best" for them.

#### *Slide 28*

### **Can "Over-controlling" cause rebellion?**

Yes. Power struggles create an adversarial atmosphere of contention and competition instead of harmony, peace and love. Parents obviously want what is best for the children they love so deeply. However, power struggles are not about what is right or best; they quickly turn into games of who's going to win, who's the strongest and who has the right to run my life? Parents are usually struggling for what is best and right for the child; but the child is usually struggling for his right to be free to choose what he wants, and unfortunately, what is best or right is not the issue with him (although he may argue about what is best or right)! Do not create a situation in which you as a parent are so controlling

that a child feels justified in rebelling over the right to make the decisions that she should be making (and which you are erroneously denying her because your own fears, etc).

## **A Note On Control**

Some have said you cannot win a power struggle. If you “win” you teach that you win through power and control; if you lose, the inmates take over the asylum! If you must always “win”, you make your children the “losers.” Our control should decrease as a child gets older, while at the same time our influence should grow. We control little babies, but can only love, support and influence older children. We influence by role modeling, constructing an environment of consequence, and by loving and supporting.

### *Slide 29*

## **Over Controlling, Power Struggles And Unjustified Coercive Actions By Concerned Parents**

1. Rob children of their freedom to choose; to exercise moral agency.
2. Deny children the opportunity to gain valuable consequential experience from mistakes they could make.
3. Take responsibility for the children’s own lives away from them.
4. Setup a contentious power struggle and tempt children to rebel.
5. Cause the family to focus on power and on who is going to run the child’s life, drawing focus away from the child’s responsibility for his own personal education, health, safety, future, etc.

These attitudes lay the foundation for a great power struggle between the parent and the child. The issue raises these questions:

Who is responsible to see the child is taught what is right? (Parents)

Who has the right to make the child’s life decisions? (Child)

Who is going to make life’s choices for the child? (Child)

Then, who is responsible to see the child does what is right? (Child)

Why is a power struggle so devastating in a home? Besides the obvious fact that it introduces an ugly spirit of contention, criticism, coercion, punishment, anger and rebellion in the home, there is another terrible consequence. This battle often becomes such an issue

that the child's decisions are often based on not doing what parents want, or in deliberately doing what parents don't want, just to make the point that he/she can't be controlled. Unfortunately many of these decisions are not based on what the child thinks is best for himself, but what will win the power struggle for him. This catches the child in the trap of rejecting what is best for him just because the parents are for it. When the right to choose becomes the issue in the child's mind, he/she (just to spite parents) often rejects the good and chooses the bad.

Whose right is it to choose for oneself? Who will choose? Who wins? Who must eventually "lose?"

*Slide 30*

## **Who Will Choose**

### Parent's Views

A Child is not experienced, ready or capable of knowing what is right and making responsible choices yet.

### Child's Views

A Child feels moderately capable of running his own life and has a strong sense of his right of choice.

### Parent's Views

B Parent fearfully takes control and insists on certain choices regarding friends, school, church, music, dress, etc. Parents may justify their actions, until he shows more mature judgment."

### Child's View

B Child focuses not on the wisdom of parental choices, but on the violation of his freedom and right to choose; possibly insulted by parental lack of confidence, he resists.

### Parent's View

C His resistance confirms parent's fears that, "He is not ready to make these decisions yet!" So they become more vigilant, restrictive and untrusting. A cat and mouse game begins.

### Child's View

C The holy war for freedom begins and he sometimes resists and rebels for freedom's sake, even while realizing parental limits and counsel are wise. Issue has now become one of freedom (the right to choose) and no longer one of responsibility or what is wisest or best for oneself!

### Parent's View

D "Everything you do proves you are irresponsible, selfish, and ungrateful, and we must crack down hard until you grow up. Now, go clean your room and do your homework. You must change your clothes, music, and sleazy friends. We will control you until you show some sense, We will see who wins every day, (YOU OR US!) You will thank us later.

### Child's View

D Life's mission flow is to prove, "I have the right to choose my own life, and you have no right to force me. You can't control me either, and I'll prove it to you! I choose these clothes and this music and these friends. School stinks and we'll see who wins, even if it destroys me! I will win!!"

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

*Slide 31*

- 1. What is the Parent Trap of Anger?**
- 2. What is the Parent Trap of Rage?**
- 3. What is the Parent Trap of Control?**