

Parent Child Journey

An Individualized Approach to Raising Your Challenging Child

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Overview: Different Parents, Different Children, Different Journey

Some children are more challenging than others. When home life is difficult, parents might blame the child. More often, they blame themselves. But a challenging child is nobody's fault. The ten-session *Parent Child Journey* is designed to help parents understand where challenging behavior comes from and what to do about it.

We will begin by discussing power struggles and irrational brains. Power struggles never end well. To avoid power struggles, it's important to understand their source. Potential break-down points include:

1. *Readiness*
 - a. *Engagement*: Your child might not have been sufficiently engaged or attentive.
 - b. *Understanding*: Your child might not have understood exactly what to do.
2. *Willingness*: Your child might have had too little motivation; that is, there was not enough in it for him or her. Or, maybe the task was not immediately gratifying.
3. *Ability*: For your child, the task might have been too difficult.

Most often, it's not just one of these factors but a combination that leads to noncompliance or disappointing performance.

Behaviors only continue if they serve one of four broad functions:

1. The behavior gets a reaction (attention) from someone else.
2. The behavior gets the child what he or she wants.
3. The behavior gets the child out of uncomfortable or undesirable situations.
4. The behavior results in a desirable sensation.

Proactive strategies are key to effective behavior management. Far too many behavior-management programs focus on what to do when a child misbehaves instead of how to avoid misbehavior by setting up a child for success. Through understanding your child's developmental profile, you can recognize the source of his or her challenging behavior. For each of your child's problem behaviors and problem situations, we will analyze what it is about your child that interferes with engagement, understanding, willingness, and/or ability. From the Second Mile through the Seventh Mile in the *Parent Child Journey*, you will learn how to ensure compliance by modifying expectations and commands. Then you will be able to follow with positive reinforcement for success. This does not mean lowering expectations. In fact, effective proactive strategies will decrease power struggles, increase the chance of success, and allow both parents and children to "raise the bar."

Although effective proactive strategies will lessen the need for reactive strategies, nothing ever works perfectly. Effective ***reactive strategies*** will also be necessary. Instead of repeating requests and getting sucked into power struggles, parents have three better alternatives. As explained in the Eighth and Ninth Miles, there are three types of preferred reactive strategies, symbolized as follows:

1. **“Logs” for ignoring:** You can float right over a log. Ignoring can be used when there is no significant threat to safety and the misbehavior is of no serious consequence.
2. **“Lightning” for time-out:** You better get to safety. Time-out should be used when a significant threat to person or property makes intervention necessary.
3. **“Rocks” for pausing for empathy and self-reflection:** You can’t ignore a rock, but it’s easy to get around if you just stop and consider a change of direction. Pausing for empathy and self-reflection is always preferred but not always practical.

Ignoring is very different from *giving-up*, *time-out* is very different from *overpowering*, and *pausing* is very different from *power struggles*. Time-out and ignoring are immediate, nonverbal, and nonemotional; both create physical and emotional distance. The parent is in control. No power struggle. Giving up and overpowering occur only after a power struggle; both lead to more prolonged, negative, and intense interactions. The parent is out of control. Pausing for empathy and self-reflection brings parents and children together but in positive ways that represent the very antithesis of the power struggle.

These *reactive strategies* work well to keep parents and children out of power struggles—but only if parents use excellent technique. We will cover effective technique for reactive strategies in detail, but not until Miles Eight and Nine. Parents who need some reactive strategy help *now* can skip ahead to those discussions. But, by design, the first seven sessions in this program will focus on proactive strategies. After all, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. *Parent Child Journey* is an integrated program. Each session builds upon the last so that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. For different situations, you will need to choose different combinations of tools from your kit.