

## **Parent Child Journey**

*An Individualized Approach to Raising Your Challenging Child*

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### ***Fifth Mile: Self-Motivation and Learning through Experience***

The Fourth Mile strategies, just covered, require you to step forward and reinforce your child's behavior by giving positive attention. In this Fifth Mile, you're going to learn about the importance of taking a step back. We will discuss the following:

- “Skinned knee” or “broken femur”?
- Natural consequences

#### **Ignoring your child's inappropriate demands**

Children often make demands which are inappropriate, unreasonable, or unhealthy. Parents may give in to these demands or get sucked into arguments.

- If you give in, you might unintentionally reward your child's demands. As a result, s/he learns to demand more.
- If you “stand your ground” but engage in lots of back and forth, your child's demands may not be granted, but s/he still get lots of attention. By being overly responsive and reactive, you may unintentionally reinforce your child's demanding behavior.

Some important life lessons:

- You cannot always get what you want.
- Sometimes, you need to help yourself.
- Very unreasonable or inappropriate demands will not be reinforced (or dignified) with a response.

If parents exercise restraint and ignore unreasonable demands, children can learn to “do without” or “do for themselves.” Here are some common ways that parents might give in to inappropriate demands:

- providing pacifier, bottle, or breast to your child or on-demand (when it's not the right time or it's no longer age-appropriate)
- giving in to unhealthy or impulsive eating and drinking
- rocking, lying down, or staying with a child to help them fall sleep
- fetching things for your child on-demand
- transporting your child on-demand
- buying things for your child on-demand

#### **Ignoring your child's noncompliance to allow learning from experience**

- What happens if I don't eat? (hunger)
- What happens if I don't sleep? (fatigue)

- What happens if I don't put on a warm coat? (cold)
- What happens if I don't try to work out problems with siblings and friends? (no one to play with)
- What happens if I don't do my homework or study for a test? (failure)
- What happens if I don't clean up my room? (lost stuff)
- What happens if I don't put my laundry in the basket? (no clean clothes)
- What happens if I don't help myself? (nobody else will)

### Logical sequences (“first-then”)

Noncompliant behavior is often the result of illogical sequencing. What does this mean? Most children do not easily shift from preferred activities to nonpreferred activities. For example:

- “George, I want you to stop playing that video game (preferred activity) and do your chores (nonpreferred activity)”;
- “George, stop playing with your friends (preferred activity) and do your homework (nonpreferred activity).”

Some other examples of logical “first-then” sequences:

- Get out of bed, go to the bathroom and get completely dressed. Then, you can have your breakfast.
- Brush your teeth and get your backpack ready. Then, I'll be waiting for you in the car with your favorite song on the radio.
- Do your chores. Then, you can have a friend over.
- Clean up all your toys. Then, you can have a snack.
- Finish all your homework. Then, you can watch TV or use the computer.
- Eat at least three pieces of each food on your dinner plate. Then, you can have dessert.
- Put your dish in the sink and come upstairs. Then, we can play a game of cards.
- Brush your teeth, get your pajamas on, and pull out your clothes for tomorrow morning. Then, we can have story time.

### Homework for the Fifth Mile

1. *Practice natural consequences:* Pick one problem situation when you should take a step back and “help your child more by helping your child less.” Give your child the chance to learn from natural consequences. Prepare for some protests and distress but hang in there with good ignoring technique.
2. *Practice logical (“first-then”) sequences:* Pick another situation—usually a morning, afterschool, or evening routine—where there's been a problem because preferred activities have come before nonpreferred. Flip it around so that your child is motivated to do nonpreferred *before* preferred. Consider using visuals, such as a “first-then” board.