



Why Children  
**Misbehave**  
*and What To Do About It*  
AN ILLUSTRATED GUIDE FOR PARENTS

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Revised Edition, first printing

Print ISBN: 978-1-54391-063-6

eBook ISBN: 978-154391-064-3

Photo credits: John Everett, Janice Adams, Christine Adams and Ernest Frugé

Distributed in U.S.A.

Printed in the United States of America

This book is dedicated to our children and our parents. They have taught us the most fundamental lessons about human relationships. The book is also dedicated to all the children and parents who strive to improve their relationships.



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## PREFACE

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When we wrote the first edition of this book many years ago, we wrote from our experiences as child and family psychologists and as parents of young children. Our intent was to offer a framework for parents that included the sound science behind effective parenting methods along with specific examples of how to put those principles into action.

We said that the methods were not new fads, but were the tried and true methods based upon many years of research on child development. We also acknowledged how difficult and frustrating the task of parenting can be. We are now more convinced than ever that the principles and the methods described in this book are the most effective ways of raising responsible, resilient, emotionally healthy children.

As we said in our original preface, you will not find quick fixes or shortcuts offered in this book. There are none. What you will find is support for and reassurance about the rewarding but commonly difficult and frustrating task of parenting children.

This book describes some ways of approaching discipline that are flexible but consistent. Discipline means teaching and learning. Effective discipline teaches children how to gain control over their behavior, to adapt to demands of life, and to appreciate the rights and needs of others. These methods are not new fads, but are the tried and true methods that forty years of research on child development has shown to be the most effective ways of disciplining children.



These methods work because they maintain your authority and leadership as the parent while allowing you to build a positive, close relationship with your child. With these methods, you, the parent, will teach your child self-control, consideration for others, and self-respect through your own actions.

The best parenting methods are ones that continually send the messages of love and respect for oneself and others. These methods take some time to show results, but they make discipline more effective because they lead children to feel valued and to appreciate the benefits of doing the right thing.

Finding the best methods of parenting is like establishing a healthy lifestyle. It takes time, planning, and self-discipline to carry out and often takes longer to show positive results. However, the results are usually more enduring and lead to more friendly and pleasant day-to-day relationships within the family as a whole.

Christine Adams, Ph.D.

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2017

## FOREWORD

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We were young children when our parents published the first edition of their parenting book. We are now successful adults who are living proof that these parenting methods work and work well.

Our parents had fully expected to go through rough times with us when we entered adolescence. They expected to have enough material to write a second book on how to help parents guide their adolescents through the typical self-defeating or risky behaviors that tempt adolescents to go off track. That book was never written.

The parenting methods that they had used since we were born has paid off. We each had a rewarding, fulfilling adolescence. We had our ups and downs but nothing out of the ordinary, illegal or dangerous. We stayed on track, went to highly regarded undergraduate and graduate programs and have entered young adulthood happy and content. We are confident about our futures knowing that we learned the problem-solving skills we need to meet the challenges life has thrown our way and will continue to throw our way.

Of course, there are no guarantees that children will become successful if their parents follow certain principles. Too many random forces come into play, for good or ill. However, if you follow the principles our parents lay out in this book, you will be setting the stage for the positive development of your child. You will increase the odds of your children developing into responsible, happy and fulfilled people that you can be proud of. And,

as our parents say, the good news is that you don't have to be a perfect parent. They certainly weren't perfect even with all their knowledge and skill - living proof that you don't need to be perfect either to raise happy, well-adjusted, successful children.

Anne Frugé

Christopher Frugé

2017

# THE BIG PICTURE

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## CHAPTER 1

# Understanding Aggression

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### Key Ideas

- Anger and aggression are normal but need to be controlled and appropriately channeled.
- Children learn to control their aggression when they see adults control their own aggressive drives.
- Children need to learn how to balance their needs with the needs of others.

## Important Definitions

1. **Survival instinct:** Natural tendencies to protect yourself and your loved ones; also the motivation to use talents, compete, and achieve a better life.
2. **Aggression:** Hostile or harmful action taken to satisfy your needs or goals without regard for the rights of others.
3. **Assertiveness:** Constructive use of the survival instinct to achieve a positive goal. Assertive actions are taken to advance one's own interests and to protect one's rights; they are not taken to infringe upon the rights of others. Assertive actions are respectful of the rights of both yourself and others.



*When children are frustrated, they may behave aggressively.*

## Survival Instinct

You are born with a survival instinct that helps you take care of yourself and your loved ones. This survival instinct is necessary for a healthy adaptation

to life's stresses and challenges. Without it, you would not succeed in life. You would never try to do anything. You would never take on challenges, strive to better yourself, or fight for your rights.

Most of the time, the survival instinct is directed into positive goals and outlets. Examples of this positive, constructive use of the survival instinct include the following: self-defense, healthy competition, courageous acts, leadership, and achievement of personal goals (education, sports, career, social causes, and so on).



*The survival instinct helps us reach positive goals in sports...*





*...and learning.*

The word assertiveness is now commonly used to describe this positive use of the survival instinct for non-harmful, constructive goals. Sometimes people use the word aggressive to describe something positive, such as aggressive medical treatment or aggressively going after business, but they are actually describing self-defense or assertiveness.

To get along in the world, children have to learn how to balance their own needs and wants with the needs of other people. Successful children know constructive ways of handling their angry and aggressive feelings. They understand that being cooperative yet assertive helps them find that balance between themselves and others.



*Successful children balance their needs with the needs of others.*

When the survival instinct is not controlled, the result can be harmful or hurtful behavior, which is aggression. In this book, the word aggression means harmful or hurtful behavior which can be either intentional or unintentional. Aggressive feelings and behaviors are a natural part of human nature. However, the price of uncontrolled aggression for children, families, and society is enormous. Learning to control aggression is one of the central challenges every child and parent face.



***Aggression is normal but needs to be controlled.***

### *Learning to Control Aggressiveness*

Your child will be motivated to learn how to control aggressiveness and to cooperate when he or she feels loved and valued by you and other important adults. Your child will also learn to control aggressiveness when important adults in his or her life control their own aggressiveness. Children imitate what they see; when important adults behave aggressively in response to frustration, children tend to follow that example. However, when you show self-control and respect toward your child when he or she is misbehaving, your child learns to value respectful, constructive resolution of conflict. Your child also sees that people who love each other can express strong disagreements but still behave with consideration and respect.

Most of the time, young children do not really want to hurt others when they behave aggressively. Their aggressiveness is usually motivated by a desire to get something they want or is a natural response to frustration. Children do not automatically outgrow aggressiveness. If children continue to get what they want enough of the time by being aggressive or

if they themselves are treated aggressively they tend to become more and more aggressive as they get older.

### *Self-Protection Is Necessary*

While you want your child to be cooperative, sometimes aggression is necessary for self-protection. You do not want your child to be selfish or a bully, but neither do you want your child to be pushed around or intimidated by others. Parents certainly want children to know when to rightly question the authority of adults and older children so that they can protect themselves from strangers or dangerous situations.

The best way to teach your child to judge these situations accurately is to keep the parent-child relationship close and trustworthy. Parenting methods that emphasize understanding with reasonable, predictable standards of conduct foster closeness and trust. Using methods that focus exclusively on controlling misbehavior by demanding submission is a mistake because these methods miss the more important, larger goal of teaching children self-control, independent thinking, problem-solving, and compassion for others.



*Aggression is necessary for self-protection.*



## CHAPTER 2

# Guidance

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### Key Ideas

- Being empathic and understanding helps children calm down and behave.
- Understanding the normal stages of child development makes it easier to step back from the heat of the moment and use an empathic approach.
- Limits or restrictions on behavior need to be predictable and consistent.
- Being either too permissive or too harsh is harmful to children.
- Using an empathic, problem-solving approach is better in the long run because this approach emphasizes teaching children what to do.

## Important Definitions

1. **Empathy:** Being able to see and understand things from another person's view and to imagine what it feels like to be in that person's shoes. Empathy is *not* sympathy or simple reassurance. Empathy does not necessarily mean agreeing with someone.
2. **Limit:** A restriction on behavior. Examples of limits include:
  - Rules - *Muddy shoes stay outside.*
  - Boundaries around acceptable behavior - *Whispering is acceptable in the library, loud talking is not.*
  - Standards of conduct - *Be polite to others.*
3. **Consequence:** A consequence is any result or effect that follows after or because of an action. A consequence can be either positive or negative. In parenting, consequences can be used to encourage desirable behavior or to discourage misbehavior. Consequences can happen naturally, accidentally or be delivered intentionally by a parent: Examples include:
  - Getting a failing grade because of not doing school work
  - Increasing skill level because of sufficient practice
  - Not getting dessert if dinner was not eaten
  - Cleaning up a mess or spill that one has made
  - Having a toy taken away after it has been thrown at someone
  - Being praised for doing a good deed

A consequence can also be something parents *do not* do, such as permit a child to spend the night with a friend. Parents can enforce limits by using consequences.