

4 Secrets about Change and Transition Parents Can't Afford to Live Without!

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Happy Parents, Happy Kids:

How to Parent Positively with Less Stress

On-line parenting telesummit...

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Whether it's personal or professional, Debi Levine knows what change in life is all about. After navigating successful careers in dental hygiene and university teaching, Debi has now returned to private practice as a marriage and family therapist. Debi's coaching and therapy clients find balance and structure during some of their most challenging seasons of life, where they focus on "navigating change" in marriage, parenting, relationships, chronic illness, retirement, aging, grief, loss, and life. Debi and her husband of 36 years are the parents of two wonderful daughters, an amazing son-in-law, and two beautiful granddaughters.



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My colleague, Tammy Whitten, who I have known and worked with for many years, teaching at our local university and then as therapists in private practice, is quite the talented woman. I am always impressed with her vision and creativity, most recently a plan to put together a telesummit on parenting to share with others. Tammy's ideas spawned from the realization that as human service providers we spend a LOT of time networking and talking with others who share our interest in connecting with peers and learning more about how we can be better at what we do. From each interaction and conversation we take away some new insight or idea... It can be both refreshing and exciting...

So, as Tammy and I do more than our share of having long conversations on a variety of topics of interest, it occurred to her that sharing some of those conversations on focused topics could be of interest to others. This telesummit was birthed as Tammy pulled together some professionals from around the country that she enjoys sharing conversations with, and I am honored to be part of the effort. We all hope that you have benefited from our collaboration and hope that we pass along tools and resources that help you in your own parenting career...

My talk with Tammy focused on my 4 secrets about change and transition that I believe parents of any age child (little and big!) can't afford to live without! As a daughter to a mother who raised four children, regular teen babysitter, a mother of two daughters, and grandmother of two granddaughters, I moved through my own parenting career with plenty of practice and experience above and beyond what I learned in my study of dental hygiene, child development, and marriage and family therapy.

Here are the key points I wanted to pass along:

1. What to consider when a child or family member or circumstances force a major change in your household.
2. Learn to recognize when your parenting strategies need modification.
3. Learn to accept that everything changes; nothing ever stays the same for long.



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Here is the strategy I use to deal with change and transition that I talked about in my telesummit interview with Tammy Whitten, MS, LMFT on Thursday, September 12, 2013! Post these tips and refer to them when you find yourself blindsided with changes in your household! Happens so often for all of us... NORMAL!

This is the way I keep myself calm, centered, and attentive to what is going on when things get hectic and seem out-of-control. The goal is to identify possible solutions BEFORE I get mad and overreact and handle something in a way that may make things worse.

#1. Step back. Refrain from reacting. Use your senses to SEE what is different, HEAR what others are saying (and that means really LISTENING to the messages of others!), SENSE the mood changes and feelings of others, SMELL the house burning down, or note the bad TASTE you have in your mouth about something being “not quite right.” Focus on keeping your breath smooth, continuous, and flowing easily (especially if you are upset or anxious).

#2. Make careful observations of everything happening around you. WHO helps or harms the tranquility of your family life? WHAT might be contributing to changes in behaviors? WHERE is the problem occurring; under what conditions? WHEN are problems more of an issue? HOW is everything changing? WHY now? WHY, in general? Write this info down if it helps.

#3. Ask yourself HOW you (yes, you, the parent!) might be contributing to the problems that have surfaced? Owning your part of any problem goes a long way toward reaching a workable group solution. Honest. Plus, it is a powerful and realistic model of problem-solving and collaboration to pass along to your children and grandchildren. Parents are important role models.

#4. Map out all possible solutions to explore and **give each an honest try**. Discard those that don't seem to make a difference, and keep checking out all possibilities while seeking feedback from family members. So often our kids can give us the best clues and feedback in this problem-solving process. LISTEN to what they are communicating to you via words and actions. It is REALLY helpful to involve them in helping to improve family life. Our kids often have the solutions... if we are willing to hear and consider them (within reason, of course.) And, if you are still struggling after going through these 4 steps, then go through the process again until you find a comfortable resolution. Be patient and stay prepared to repeat as necessary.

Hope you find these secrets of mine useful. Use or adapt as best fits with your family.

Would love to hear about what works for you!

Visit my website and post comments at www.DebiLevine.com, e-mail me your thoughts at debi@debilevine.com, and follow me on Facebook at *Navigating Change*.

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NOW for the **4 secrets** you have been waiting for!!!

#1. Everything changes. Nothing stays the same. Certainly not your kids and how life goes with them. And, your own parenting strategy may need regular updates and adjustments to go along with your growing and changing child (children). Think of a computer. If you don't do regular upgrades and maintenance the entire system gets slow, messy, and downright uncooperative. You can buy a new and improved computer, but it is not so easy to buy a new and improved version of your kid! That will take a lot of hard work and patience over many years.

#2. Pay close attention to the needs and wants of family members who are exhibiting symptoms. Try to figure out the root cause. What unmet need might this person have? Adjust your own reactions and way of responding to the changes. Seek understanding and work toward constructive solutions. Work as a collaborative team with your family and everyone affected.

#3. Be mindful of your expectations for your child and for yourself. Are those expectations reasonable? Are they realistic? It is fair to expect your two-year old to brush his teeth, comb his hair, use the potty, wash his hands, and tie his shoes before heading out the door to preschool? Developmentally, this is not likely to happen without a lot of coaching and reminders, even if the specific skills are mastered! Seek child development resources and get feedback from a trusted adult if you are uncertain about expectations you have for your child and/or yourself.

#4. Note the structure and function of the family. This can involve little and big things that might be modified and make a big improvement in the problems that have surfaced. Modify the external environment when possible. So often it is something as simple such as limiting TV time, or shifting the dinner hour, or the bedtime routine that can make life surprisingly better!



What is Your Parenting Style?

Like most couples, my husband and I came from two families that were similar in some ways in terms of values and core beliefs, yet there were distinct differences, most of which surfaced after the birth of our first child. My husband and I talked about wanting a family of our own, planned for it, yet we never actually had a discussion about HOW we were going to raise our children! Looking back we just assumed we knew what we would do...

But within days after the birth of our first daughter we realized that our parenting style was not the same! I was comfortable with a few moments of infant crying. My husband wanted tears stopped instantly, by mother. And I didn't see anything wrong with a trusted sitter staying with our baby for an hour so that we could have a quiet dinner away from home. But my husband believed that no one but mother could care for a child which meant we did not go anywhere without the babe. Better yet, I was always to stay home with her. Needless to say, the first 18 months were pretty tough on us as a couple. I came from a home where the parents took turns caring for the children, shared responsibilities, and developed a network of trusted care-givers, believing that everyone deserved occasional breaks from the normal routine. My husband came from a household that was fairly traditional, where father worked and brought home the family income and mother stayed at home with the children. Consequently, my husband and I had very different ideas about the roles we played in our new family. Negotiating those roles, along with our collective parenting style, was a very difficult challenge that neither of us had anticipated or prepared ourselves for. But, we survived, as did our children, never fully agreeing on a single parenting style, but coming to our own about how we could best parent given our past experiences and our current reality. Our kids figured us out as mom and dad, and survived in spite of our inconsistencies and mistakes.

It helps if parents are fairly close in parenting style. It is easier on the marriage. Yet few parents will be exactly on the same page at the same time. There will always be individual differences that play out. Key is if the parents are "close enough." I also think it helps the children when there are subtle differences between how mom and dad parent, teaching them that everyone is different and how to adapt to those natural human differences, which is an important part of living in a world with many diverse people.

To follow is a parenting style model that I find helpful to share with my clients. It is a very generic explanation of the five most common parenting styles, and gives couples a frame for discussion about where they are coming from and where they hope to go, hopefully as strong co-parents, which is a huge benefit to their children.

Baumrind's Parenting Patterns

Demandingness (Controlling)

Responsiveness	Low Control	Average	High Control
High Child-centered	Permissive	Democratic	Authoritative
Average		Average	
Low parent-centered	Rejecting/ Neglecting		Authoritarian

Diana Baumrind is a researcher who has studied parenting patterns and styles for many years. Here is a description of the five most common parenting patterns based on her findings.

Authoritarian parents are high in demandingness (controlling) and low in responsiveness. They tend to be restrictive in granting children jurisdiction over decision-making, and they are more likely to insist on specific views, without much discussion. Children of these parents are moderately competent – daughters tend to be more assertive and less responsible.

Authoritative parents are high in both demandingness and responsiveness. Children of these parents tend to be both socially assertive and socially responsible (competent).

Permissive parents are high in responsiveness, but low in demandingness. Children of these parents tend to be moderately competent – daughters tend to be more responsible and less assertive.

Rejecting/Neglecting parents are very low in both demandingness and responsiveness. Children of these parents tend to be either low on both social responsibility and social assertiveness (incompetent) or low on social responsibility for boys and low on social assertiveness for girls.

Democratic parents are high on the responsiveness dimension and average on the demandingness dimension. Children of these parents tend to be high in social assertiveness and moderate in social responsibility.

Not all parents can be classified according to one of these parenting profiles. Indeed, many parents are average on both of Baumrind's dimensions. Do you see where you might fit?

Along with coming to grips with your own parenting style is the issue of discipline. My study of child development helped me discover countless resources to share with my husband. How lucky for us! Fortunately, we were more aligned with discipline beliefs and practices, so it was much easier for us to follow a relatively consistent plan with our children, which we believe was extremely helpful to them. Thankfully we had very few problems with our daughters over the years, all quite minor, some rather comical. Here is an outline of our plan...

Use guidance and discipline, not punishment.

● **Discipline vs. Punishment**

- Discipline is helping the child learn values that generalize **vs.** punishment that teaches you not to get caught
 - Child learns right from wrong – how to cope
 - Child learn that if you don't get caught it's OK
- Discipline involves consequences **vs.** punishment, which is inconsistent and unpredictable
 - Consequences – all actions have a reaction
 - Punishment – one parent may use a belt one time for something and the other parent doesn't punish at all for the same thing
- Discipline involves communication and follow-up **vs.** punishment, which involves little talking and leaves the child puzzled
 - Talking with the child about why it was wrong and how to act differently next time **vs.** reaching out and hitting someone
- Discipline creates closeness, intimacy and an ability to trust others **vs.** punishment, which creates distance, and angry children
 - Able to trust the adult to deal fairly with a situation
 - When someone bigger hits you – you no longer trust them and don't want to share with them
- Discipline takes place while adults are in control of themselves **vs.** punishment which takes place out of anger, frustration, and with little self-control
 - You yourself have to be the adult and help the child to learn
 - You fly off the handle this time – knee jerk reaction
- Discipline knows that challenges are normal **vs.** punishment which only wants to change unacceptable behaviors and attitudes
 - All children will try to challenge as they seek independence
 - Punishment comes because you can't fit into this mold of what a child should be
- Discipline recognizes the difference between mistakes and challenges to authority **vs.** punishment, which does not
 - We all make mistakes – accidents, forget, don't make wise choices – we all do it

- Do it my way or else – never giving them the chance to make mistakes without fear of reprisal
- The goal of discipline is for the child to learn internal control of their behavior **vs.** punishment’s goal which is to change the child by using external force
 - Internal control is something that is always with you no matter the situation to give you guidance on how to act
 - If you have to rely on others for how to behave – you may make bad choices depending upon the people you are with
 - Research shows that if spanking is the primary discipline method used – it has the potential for long-term effects such as aggression, violent or criminal behavior, impaired learning, and depression

Whatever way you discipline please realize that you do not have to do what your parents did to you. You can change and use discipline instead of punishment! You may have to work at it, but helping a child to have inner values will help them in the long run to have a happy and productive life.

Guide to Speech and Action

- State suggestions and directions in a positive form
- Give the child a choice only when there is really a choice
- Use your voice as a teaching tool: simple, slow, direct
- Use methods of guidance that build a child’s self-confidence and self-respect
- Help children set standards based on their own past experiences (rather than comparisons to other children)
- Redirect the child in ways consistent with his/her developmental level
- Time directions and suggestions for maximum effectiveness
- Allow the child to explore and become independent
- Make your directions/instructions effective by reinforcing them when necessary
- Learn to “foresee” and prevent rather than “mop-up” after a difficulty
- Clearly define and consistently maintain limits --- they are necessary!

Children behave inappropriately for a variety of reasons:

- uncertainty about what the rules are and how to follow them
- inability to figure out how to substitute appropriate actions for inappropriate ones
- inappropriate adult expectations
- acting on impulse
- faulty perceptions
- contradictory rules
- controversial rules
- mixed messages
- testing limits

It is effective to combine a warning and follow-through with a personal message.

Personal Messages:

1. A way for adults to express their behavioral expectations to children
2. Adults are serving as a model for using “words” to express emotional states
3. Sharing feelings helps promote closer ties between children and adults
4. Children are interested in how the significant adults in their lives react to what they say and do
5. Once adults have described their emotions, it is important to tell the child which behavior has caused them to react
6. Remember --- “behaviors” are actions you can see, hear, etc.
7. Children are better able to understand and respond to adult expectations when these expectations are accompanied by reasons
8. When we provide reasons, children are able to recognize that behavior standards have a rational rather than arbitrary basis --- reasons make connections among actions more clear to the child
9. In addition, adults must “match” reasons to children’s developmental level of understanding

Parts of Personal Message:

Part 1: REFLECT: Use a behavioral, paraphrase, or affective reflection

Part 2: REACT: Describe your emotion and the child’s behavior

Part 3: RULE: Tell the child what to do rather than what not to do (always stated positively!)

Examples of Personal Messages

Example 1: *A child is poking Ms. Baldwin in order to get her to listen to her story.*

Personal Message: You are excited to tell me something. But I don't like it when you poke me to get my attention. Please call my name or tap me lightly on the shoulder.

Example 2: *Several children have left the jump ropes, hula hoops, and balls scattered on the playground.*

Personal Message: You were in a hurry to get back inside. It bothers me when you leave all the playground equipment outside because I have to pick it all up. All playground equipment goes into the basket before going inside.

Example 3: *The children are preparing for lunch. As you open the door, several children take off down the hall and are shouting "I'm getting pizza today!"*

Personal Message: You all are excited about pizza for lunch today. It is disruptive to other classes to have children running down the hallway shouting and not safe to run indoors. We use walking feet indoors and quiet voices while inside.



Positive Discipline vs. Punishment

Positive Discipline...

- fosters self-control
- encourages children to think about their actions
- builds self-esteem
- helps children feel competent
- focuses on the “process”
- preserves the child’s self-esteem

Examples of positive discipline strategies...

- logical consequences
- natural consequences
- redirection
- restitution
- ignoring (when appropriate)
- appropriate limits

Punishment...

- damages a child’s self-esteem
- is often arbitrary / unpredictable
- tends to create resentment in the child
- is not always “logically” related to the offense
- often encourages the child to “get even”
- may foster aggression in the child
- is hurtful, degrading, humiliating, disrespectful
- does not help teach the child self-control

Examples of Punishment...

- time-out (if used inappropriately; less popular at this time)
- public humiliation
- spanking / slapping
- threatening
- physical restraint (if used inappropriately)

Remember, the goal of guiding / disciplining children is to...

- bring about long-term behavioral change
- help the child learn the difference between appropriate and inappropriate behavior
- help the child to become “self-disciplining”

Principles of Effective Parenting

Give appropriate praise and love

- Children depend upon their parents first for the development of emotional security – parents must provide a warm, emotional context in which children can develop
- Parents must help in the development of good self-concept by acknowledging good behavior and allow natural consequences for poor behavior

Set limits

- Letting a child know that their behavior is not acceptable
- A difference between punishment and discipline

Provide security

- Predictable responses from parents, a familiar bedroom or playroom, and an established routine help to establish a sense of security
- Knowing that they can return to an accepting environment gives children confidence to become involved with the world outside the family

Encourage responsibility

- Giving children, increased responsibility encourages the autonomy and independence they need to be assertive and independent
- Successful parents are those whose children can function as independent adults

Provide sex education

- Talking with your children can help to reduce early intercourse and reduce the amount of risky sex

Express confidence

- Like the self-fulfilling prophecy – if you show the child that you have confidence in him or her, the child begins to accept these social definitions as real and becomes more self-confident

Co-parent

- New parenthood calls for husbands and wives to work together, coordinate attitudes and beliefs, and to respect, and perhaps negotiate between one another's unique ideas about raising children
- Parents are becoming interchangeable with parenting being shared
 - In the past when Mom went to the store – Dad would take care of the children until Mom (the real parent) returned – almost like babysitting his own children. Thankfully times have changed!!!

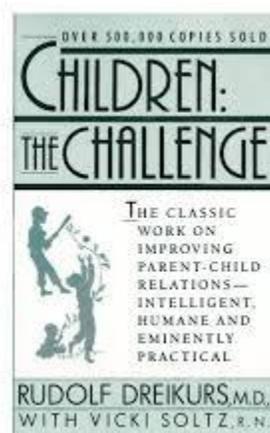
Perhaps one of my most favorite child development books is a primary source by **Rudolph Dreikurs, MD**, titled ***Children: The Challenge***, written in 1964. This is a classic work on improving parent-child relations. It is intelligent, humane, and very practical. Many of the concepts I have presented in this little handout are rooted in Dr. Dreikurs's beliefs and teachings.

Based on a lifetime of experience with children --- their problems, their delights, their challenges --- Dr. Rudolf Dreikurs, one of America's foremost child psychiatrists, presents in ***Children: The Challenge*** an easy-to-follow program that teaches parents step-by-step how to cope with the common childhood problems that occur from toddler through preteen years (and beyond, I believe). This warm and reassuring reference helps you to understand your children's actions better, giving you the guidance you need to discipline lovingly and effectively.

It can help you to:

- Win your child's cooperation and consideration
- Put a stop to senseless accidents and carelessness
- Deal with jealousy and fighting
- "Downgrade" bad habits
- Overcome your own fears

Children: The Challenge offers excellent advice and proven strategies for parents who want to build love and trust in their families, helping them to raise happier, healthier, and better behaved children.



The years have passed and my children have grown and launched. Now I get to watch and share in the growth and development of my grandchildren! I wish this joy for everyone...

Sometimes clients ask me for the “latest and greatest” parenting resource as they are so overwhelmed with the wide array of choices currently available. There are certainly plenty, and I have read and reviewed many. Some perspectives are too off-base for me and my beliefs. Thankfully, a fair number are rooted in solid principles and practices that have been studied and used for a long while. My favorites are grounded in Dreikur’s work, often repackaging and restating the same basic concepts. So, in the end, if I want to give new parents a gift, I always seem to find ***Children: The Challenge*** the most comprehensive and easy to understand resource that a tired parent can easily read in snatches and digest between feedings, naps, and all the other stuff of life to help them set the foundation for this new chapter of their lives.

When I watch my daughter and son-in-law effectively navigating the trials and tribulations of being parents to young children I feel a sense of great pride and accomplishment. *What was the secret?* I would have to say luck in having a good foundation growing up with my own family of origin, having a mate who helped in all ways that he could, being naturally blessed with two good daughters, the wisdom and guidance of seasoned educators, and a solid belief that I was on the right track while able to adapt and make adjustments to our lives as changes unfolded...

It is all about your internal drive and motivation, your skills as a parent, and the foundation your family puts in place.

Start with you. Work hard. Learn and improve your skills. Create a family context that supports healthy growth and development for all family members. As my 3-year old granddaughter would say with exuberance, ***“Come on. You can do it!”***



Traits of a Healthy Family

The Healthy Family:

- Communicates and listens
- Affirms and supports one another
- Develops a sense of trust
- Has a sense of play and humor
- Exhibits a sense of shared responsibility
- Teaches a sense of right and wrong
- Maintains family rituals and traditions
- Has a balance of interaction among members
- Has a shared religious/spiritual core
- Respects the privacy of one another
- Values service to others
- Fosters table time and conversation
- Shares leisure time
- Admits to and seeks help with problems

Curran, Dolores. (1983). *Traits of a Healthy Family*.

Best wishes to you and your family! I wish you smooth sailing through your parenting career.

Debi Levine, MS, LMFT