

RAISING *the* CHALLENGING CHILD

How to Minimize Meltdowns,
Reduce Conflict,
and Increase Cooperation

KAREN DOYLE BUCKWALTER,
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The names and details of the people and situations described in this book have been changed or presented in composite form in order to ensure the privacy of those with whom the authors have worked.

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This book is dedicated to Chaddock kids
and their families for your courage, perseverance,
and faith in a brighter tomorrow.

And to our amazing Chaddock staff
for your unwavering commitment
to those we serve.

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Introduction

Parenting is hard. Certainly, if you picked up this book, you know that.

Whether you're dealing with tantrums or a battle of wills—while also getting well-intended but conflicting advice from others and wanting to appear as if you “have it all together”—at one time or another, you've probably felt ill-equipped for and overwhelmed by the task of raising a child.

Chaddock, the organization where the lessons in this book were honed, has served children and their families since 1853. From the start, our faith-based organization has opened its doors to kids whose families have tried and given up on other options. Chaddock staff work every day, around the clock, with kids considered among the most challenging in the nation. Today Chaddock offers a residential treatment facility for kids, a special education school, outpatient counseling, foster care and adoption services, early interventions, domestic and international training programs, and a team of specialists who serve struggling families around the country.

Over the decades, our organization and hundreds of staff members have worked hard to make a positive difference in kids' lives.

Yet about twenty years ago, despite our best efforts and good intentions, not enough of the kids we served had a happy ending. Those we couldn't help haunted us. *How could we reach them too?*

We refused to give up. Chaddock made a commitment to find cutting-edge interventions and the newest techniques to help us reach as many struggling kids as possible. We opened our minds and doors to innovative techniques, looking for the nuggets of gold.

Our search for best-in-class solutions took us on a journey deep into brain science, early childhood development, and the fields of attachment and trauma. Our staff studied evidence-based practices and practice-based evidence with world-class experts who were incredibly generous in sharing their ideas and treatment models. We worked diligently to discover, test, and refine a unique hybrid parenting approach that draws from many interventions. As our skills and tool kit expanded, we began seeing better results—and more quickly than ever before! These successes told us we were on the right track. Specialists from around the world began visiting Chaddock to study our methods.

When staff told us, “I’m using these techniques at home, and they are really helping! I’m becoming a better parent to my own children,” we knew it was time to share our insights with families like yours. You probably don’t have dozens of highly skilled staff to help you raise your child. But you can take advantage of what we have learned.

The lessons we present here are effective for all kids of all ages, from toddlers to late teens, whether they are from biological, adoptive, or blended families. They work with “ordinary” kids, who can be affected by many of the same fears, stress, unresolved grief, disrupted development, and behavioral triggers as “out-of-control” kids.

All advice in the book reflects Chaddock’s unique blend of proven assessments, evidence-based interventions, and treatment tools, including these:

- Adult Attachment Interview (AAI)
- Attachment Self-Regulation and Competency (ARC)
- Child Parent Psychotherapy (CPP)
- Developmental Trauma and Attachment Program® (DTAP®)
- Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR™)
- Marschak Interaction Method (MIM)
- Principles of Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP)
- Principles of Neurosequential Model of Therapeutics™ (NMT)
- Structured Psychotherapy for Adolescents Responding to Chronic Stress (SPARCS)
- Theraplay
- Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT)
- Trust-Based Relational Intervention (TBRI)
- Video Intervention Therapy (VIT)

All examples in this book reflect real situations with real people, but details have been changed or omitted to protect privacy. Some examples reflect a blend of multiple families' experiences.

We hope you will view this book not as a checklist but as a toolbox filled with thirty tools that have proven effective even in the most difficult situations. You won't need every tool for every child, but these lessons will help prepare you for a range of common situations. You just might be amazed at the influence you can have on your child, not by adding more rules or upping the volume on your directives but rather through the use of one or more of the surprisingly simple (although sometimes quite challenging) lessons included in this book. You can read the lessons in order or head straight to the one that speaks to a current challenge you may be facing.

Part 1: Be a Leader starts by focusing on you, the parent. Some of the lessons in this section may seem counterintuitive (share power to get power?); however, each has been “battle tested” with hundreds of kids of all ages, from a variety of backgrounds and family compositions. Time and again, parents have been absolutely convinced that one or more of these strategies would never work for their child—until it did. When you change your approach, you just might be surprised at how quickly your child’s response will change too.

Part 2: Dig Deeper turns the focus to your child. These lessons challenge you to move beyond the “what” of your child’s behavior to consider the “why.” The lessons provide a road map to help you recognize the subtle, and not-so-subtle, ways your child is telling you what they need. With this new perspective, it becomes much easier for you to respond in ways that create a win-win for you and your child.

Part 3: Prepare for Success lays out steps for both you and your child to help reduce trigger points that create significant challenges for your family. Why drive headlong into a test of wills when you can take a quick detour around the likely roadblock and still get to your intended destination? Implementing the seemingly simple strategies of these lessons in advance, before you “need” them, can help reduce meltdowns—for you and your child.

Every lesson in this book has been tested time and again by hundreds of Chaddock staff members, with thousands of families, and the results are clear. These lessons work. But don’t take our word for it. Pick a lesson and try it. What have you got to lose . . . other than stress, confrontation, misunderstandings, and hurt feelings?

Turn the page and let’s get started.

PART 1



BE A LEADER

one

Invest in the Relationship Bank

Mom picks twelve-year-old Tom up from soccer practice at the end of her workday. Soon the two walk in the front door, set down their bags, and sigh, glad to be home.

“Tom, don’t forget you have that big test tomorrow.”

“How could I forget? Math . . . yuck.”

“I know it’s not your favorite subject. Bummer you couldn’t like every subject as much as you like science, huh?”

“No kidding!”

“Would you like to study while I’m making dinner to get it over with or would you rather take a break for a few minutes and study after dinner?”

“That baseball game I wanted to see is on TV tonight.”

“Oh, that’s right. I guess that means you’re choosing to study now, and I’ll go make us some supper.”

“I guess so.”

“Maybe tonight we can eat in front of the TV so we don’t miss any of the game.”

“Thanks, Mom!”

Does this scenario seem too good to be true? It doesn't have to be. These are the kind of parent-child interactions you can get when you intentionally nurture a relationship.

At Chaddock, we call the process of cultivating strong and positive relationships “making deposits into the relationship bank.” Every time you do something nice for your child, listen to their concerns with respect and patience, grant permission to a request, or praise their efforts, you are making a deposit to the relationship bank. With each deposit, you show the child they matter and you care about their well-being.

Each deposit helps “pay” for times when you have to make a withdrawal—like when you have to ask the child to do something difficult or take no for an answer. When those times come, if you haven't made deposits, you won't have anything to withdraw. So your goal is to make frequent deposits and keep the relationship bank full. A full relationship account gives us the best assurance that kids will cooperate and the day will run smoothly.

You make *deposits* by doing the following:

- Saying yes
- Giving appropriate choices
- Sharing how much you enjoy their unique and special qualities
- Praising their efforts
- Enjoying activities together
- Acknowledging what they are saying or feeling

You make *withdrawals* by doing the following:

- Saying no
- Issuing commands
- Telling kids they are wrong
- Enforcing rules and consequences

- Being insulting, condescending, or sarcastic
- Ignoring them

What If You Can't Help Giving a No?

Nos withdraw from the relationship bank, so try to avoid them. But sometimes there's no way around it. For example, on a work-day and school morning, when you have just thirty minutes to get up, get dressed, and get out the door, there's little flexibility. That's withdrawal time, so you say, "We need to leave at 7:30 sharp! Let's go!"

Shopping at a store, too, could require more nos than yeses. When your child asks to purchase a new toy, often you're going to say, "No, we're not here to buy toys today." For an older child, it might be, "We are not here to buy jeans today. You need a new pair of shoes." You will soften these disappointments by banking yeses at other times.

TIP: For best results, make many more deposits than withdrawals.

Deposit #1: Praise Little Successes

With our busy lives, we often function on autopilot and miss opportunities to give kids positive feedback. Remember to bank relationship deposits throughout the day by praising little successes. For example, you could say the following:

- "Wow, you did a great job getting the dishes done."
- "I can see you really are being kind to your little sister today."
- "I really like how organized you have your bedroom today."
- "You did a good job making your bed today."

- “I was so proud of you when the teacher said you stuck up for a child who was being picked on at school today.”

These remarks might seem unimportant, but kids appreciate them. Comments like these help fill the relationship bank account. And don't be misled by a child's bigger size as they age! Older kids still crave a parent's approval, even though their actions might seem to contradict that fact.

TIP: For an easy deposit, catch kids doing something right and praise them for it.

Deposit #2: Let Them Pick, Even When It Doesn't Matter

From a kid's point of view, they usually go through the day being told what to do. Whenever we give kids a vote in everyday activities, we're making deposits to the relationship bank. Age-appropriate choices make them feel important and boost confidence.

Here's a great strategy: offer choices that don't really matter to you! The child still gets a yes, and you get to bank a deposit. The idea is to only give choices you're okay with but still let your child feel acknowledged and help them gain confidence and skill in decision-making. It's a win-win. Here are a couple examples:

- Let a young kid pick colors.
Most parents simply put the blue cup on the table. Instead, bank a deposit by asking the child, “Do you want the red cup or the blue cup?”
- Let an older kid decide when to take out the trash.
Parents might set down the law and say, “You need to take the trash out right now, before you do anything else.” That's a definite withdrawal! Instead, turn this into a deposit by saying, “Do you want to take the trash out right

after school and get it out of the way or do it after supper?” This way, the child still takes out the trash but gets to decide when to do it.

TIP: Find ways to give your child more simple choices (red or blue, now or after breakfast) throughout the day. Choices = deposits.

Deposit #3: Look for Compromises

Be creative and look for compromises that turn a no into a yes. Parents often miss out on great opportunities to compromise. When compromise is appropriate, it can be very effective. Here a five-minute compromise avoids a possible twenty-minute meltdown (that would still leave the room a mess):

Parent: It’s time to clean up your toys.

Child: I don’t want to!

Parent: Okay, here’s what we can do. You can have five more minutes and I will set the timer.

Child: Okay!

Here’s an example of compromise for an older child:

Child: Can I stay up and watch the basketball playoffs?

Parent: Yes, you can stay up an extra hour if you have all your homework and chores done.

Keep in mind that by looking for ways to give yeses, you aren’t catering to your child’s every whim. You still use good parental judgment. You say yes only when it is reasonable, possible, and safe to approve a child’s request.

If you keep the balance toward the positive, everyone’s day goes more smoothly. A child who got four yeses during the day will give

you less trouble when they hear no later in the store than one who has only heard no all day.

Are You Going to Spoil Your Child?

Just because you consider your child's wishes and try to say yes as often as possible doesn't mean you are no longer in charge or you are spoiling them or becoming a pushover. Parents must remain leaders of the family and have the final say.

The beauty of the relationship bank is that it builds on good feelings and encourages give-and-take as well as sharing age-appropriate amounts of power. It helps a child feel valued, recognized, and appreciated. And when a child sees their needs being met, everything goes easier. As your kid feels valued and appreciated, they trust you—and themselves—more! They begin to feel confident and empowered, and they begin to cooperate.

Withdrawal #1: Parenting from “Gotcha” Mode

Some parents get caught up in being a rule enforcer or quality inspector. They try to catch their child doing something wrong instead of focusing on closeness and positivity, which strengthen relationships. These types of “gotchas” withdraw from the relationship bank:

- Eavesdropping on kids talking on the phone in their room and later saying, “I heard you swearing.”
- Telling the child to clean their room, then focusing only on what was wrong about their cleaning job. Maybe 98 percent of what was on the floor has been picked up, but instead of complimenting that the parent points out that there's still a sock under the bed!

TIP: Are you feeling negative, anxious, nervous, or angry? That’s when you are at greatest risk of playing gotcha. How can you escape gotcha mode? Try this: before you say anything negative, say five things a child has done right.

Research shows that when a husband and a wife say many more positive statements to each other than negative ones, they keep their relationship strong. This same principle applies to maintaining strong parent-child relationships. The “magic ratio” of positive to negative is five to one. This means that you need to make five positive statements for every one negative interaction to have a stable and happy relationship with your child.

Withdrawal #2: Refusing to Give Affection

Sometimes parents stop being affectionate or spending positive times with a child who misbehaves. This is a mistake. All kids deserve affection and kindness with no “toll” required. Positive times with a parent are an important way to build up the relationship bank and should not be tied to a specific behavior. If you must say no or give consequences, protect the relationship account by focusing only on the specific behavior—and not lashing out at the child as a person.

Nurturing, time, and attention need to be given, not earned!

Withdrawal #3: Shaming

One common—but surprisingly ineffective—discipline strategy is to make kids feel ashamed about their behavior. Harsh words such as “You should feel ashamed,” “You never get this right,” “Why can’t you be more like _____?,” or “You always mess up _____” are deeply painful to a child and actually lead to more problems.

On the surface, it might appear that scolding and negative labeling stop unwanted behavior. But shaming makes kids feel small, worthless, and powerless. It makes them want to hide or strike back in self-defense. Shaming corrodes the positive parent-child bond that naturally leads to better behavior and healthy long-term development. Shaming makes *big* withdrawals from the relationship bank.

Note: Shaming should be avoided. However, *guilt* can be appropriate in specific situations. Guilt can motivate a child to feel remorse for an undesirable behavior and want to repair damage. For example, instead of shaming a child by saying, “You are a mean brother,” set limits and focus on the desired behavior. For example, try saying, “Calling names is hurtful. Please apologize to your sister.”

TIP: Connect before you correct. In other words, work to strengthen relationships before asking a child to change their behavior.

Prioritize the Relationship

With the relationship bank, you lay the groundwork for a positive relationship that makes everything easier. There’s no yelling and no insults, because those could be damaging to the relationship. The relationship bank approach is softer. With a full relationship bank, conflicts become fewer and simpler to resolve. Day-to-day parenting becomes less of a struggle.

Even when my kids weren’t exactly following the line I hoped they’d follow, I learned to continue to be considerate and treat them with respect, instead of punishing and piling on consequences. Natural consequences are often more powerful than parent-imposed ones. For example, when my son was fifteen, he went to a party where the police ended up being called. He was on a sports team, and our town had a code of conduct. Players who attended this type

of party faced suspension from the team. I allowed natural consequences to take place to help him see that these are situations you really need to think about in advance. Once you're in them, it's too late.

I had to be careful about my attitude and approach as a parent—not blowing a gasket and getting all stressed out and wondering what other people were thinking about my son being caught up in this. Sometimes my sons are going to make mistakes and bad choices. I'm not going to overreact or allow myself to get overwhelmed and upset when they don't meet those expectations. The best thing is to empathize that it really stinks being suspended from the team. The natural consequence will have much more impact if the parent gives empathy rather than more lectures and punishments.

The payoff? My kids recognize that I've treated them with respect and love. I have not gotten in their face and/or screamed or been physical. I think they respect me for that and are highly appreciative. As a result, we have great relationships. And as a family, we're very close.

—Chaddock staff

TIP: It is much easier to treat everyone with respect and protect the relationship now than to play catch-up and do extensive repairs later.

Perhaps you've done this . . . Instead, try this . . .

“You are a bad boy, making Mommy call you over and over again!”	“I need you to answer the first time I call you. Will you please do better with this?”
“You are such a mean little girl calling people names!”	“Janie, you know we don't allow name-calling in our house. Please stop that, and you need to apologize.”
“I can't believe what the school is telling me about you! You are never going to amount to anything!”	“Jack, I heard from the school today that you have not been turning in your homework. We are going to have to come up with a plan to help you do better with that.”
Shook your head and said no when your child tried to talk while you were on the phone	“We'll talk as soon as I'm finished with this call.”

BE A LEADER

Perhaps you've done this . . . Instead, try this . . .

Checked your phone messages at the same time your child came home and wanted to tell you something exciting that happened to them

“Let me read this message, and then I want to hear all about it.” Then put your phone down and look into your child’s eyes as he tells you about his day.

Rolled your eyes when your child dressed inappropriately for the weather

“It is supposed to snow today. You can wear that shirt as long as you also wear a sweatshirt. Do you want to pick out the sweatshirt or would you like me to help you choose which one to wear?”
