

Making Children
MIND
without Losing
YOURS

Revised Edition

**DR. KEVIN
LEMAN**


Revell

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Grand Rapids, Michigan

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To protect the privacy of those who have shared their stories with the author, some details and names have been changed.

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To Kristin Leman O'Reilly,
our middle child and second daughter,
who endured many hand-me-downs
and far fewer pictures in the family photo album.
Your contagious smile,
your sensitivity to and love for others,
and the ways you're rearing your own children
make me proud to be your daddy.
I love you, Krissy.

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Introduction

Who's in Charge?

If your kids are in charge, it's time for a new game plan that's a win-win for all.

Your kitchen is heating up—not because of your cooking but because of the angry exchange between you and your son.

“You're so stupid! I hate you! Back off! Get out of my life!”
12-year-old Ethan spouts in your general direction.

Your blood pressure rises further, and you open your mouth to reply.

But you're not fast enough. Stomping out of the kitchen, he kicks the hallway wall for good measure and slams his bedroom door.

You're left glowering in the kitchen, wondering how much it would cost to UPS him to Zimbabwe.

Fast-forward two hours, and you have a ruined batch of chili and two antacid tablets for your churning stomach.

Ethan saunters into the kitchen. “Drive me to the mall, okay?” he tosses your way and proceeds to put his jacket on.

You lift an eyebrow. Is this the same kid who dissed you a short while ago in no uncertain terms?

You have a choice. Are you going to drive that kid to the mall just to get a breath of fresh air in your house and some downtime? Or are you going to do something different?

You inhale deeply, then say calmly, “I don’t feel like driving you anywhere right now.”

He swivels toward you. “Huh?”

The planet stops turning as your son stares at you, unable to comprehend what you’ve just said. But you turn away and walk out of the room.

Wise parent, you’ve now created what I call “a teachable moment.” But what happens next is even more critical.

Your son will follow you and argue with you to see if you’ll change your stance. You won’t, of course, so he’ll try tactic two: apologizing. “Mom, I didn’t mean what I said earlier. I was just mad,” he’ll say in that repentant, little-boy tone that usually turns you to putty.

But you hold firm. “I accept your apology,” you respond in an even tone, “but I still won’t drive you to the mall.”

To some of you, that sounds mean. The kid did apologize, after all. Keep in mind, though, you’re reading this book for a reason. You want some things to change in your relationship with your kids. I’m here to tell you that if you don’t stick to the consequences for bad behavior, *nothing* will change in your home.

So Ethan will try tactic three: ratchet up the whining.

That still doesn’t work, so he tries tactic four: the angry, “you don’t love me” routine.

You, though, are being ultimately calm and reasonable. Most of all, you stay firm. Your 12-year-old doesn't go to the mall. He wanders down the hall to his room, utterly confused because the rug has been pulled out from under him. What worked before didn't work this time. He's scratching his head in puzzlement, trying to figure out what happened.

Instead, he has to text his friends and tell them he can't meet them. Sure, he'll likely turn you into the bad guy because he'll be too embarrassed to explain what really happened. But what's important is that you hold firm on the consequences and don't change them with your kid's whims. Even more, Ethan will get a shocking jolt of realizing who is *really* in charge at home. It certainly isn't him.

And you? You're relaxing with a cup of coffee in the kitchen, smiling because the plan worked.

Dear reader, would you like this to be you tonight? If so, read on. It can be.

Do any of the scenarios at the beginning of this book sound like you, your kids, and your home on a typical morning?

Do you wish you could stop your 10-year-old from tattling on his 12-year-old sister?

Are you tired of the “she wore my clothes without asking” battles between siblings?

Do you long for a phone conversation without your kids interrupting?

Have you felt like the slave dog of the family for a long time?

Are you tired of snarky remarks thrown your way? Chores not getting done? A room that resembles a garbage dump?

Is your toddler running you ragged with his tantrums and finicky demands?

Has *food* become a four-letter word as you try to keep everyone in the family happy?

Are you sick of hearing slamming doors? Is “mediator” your middle name?

Then it’s time for a new game plan. You need one if you want to regain your sanity.

Your Master Manipulators

I’ll be blunt. If you think your kids don’t have a plan, you’re mistaken. Those sometimes innocent-looking cherubs of yours actually are masterful manipulators. Worse, unless you have only one child, there are more of them than you, so you’re easy to gang up on. Add to that your multiple responsibilities between work, home, and anything else you do; the lack of hours in the day; and your general tiredness, and you are “easy pickin’s,” as a Southern friend of mine used to say. Guess who knows how to get your goat the fastest? Your kids. They know all your hot buttons, and they delight in pushing them.

A lot of parents admit they struggle with the whole notion of control. Especially if they grew up in homes where one parent (often the father) was dictatorial—“do it because I said so”—they don’t know how to exercise authority in a healthy way. Most find themselves erring on the side of threats, with little follow-through—acting just like their emotionally distant father did with them. Those who rebel and determine to be different than their parents often err on the permissive side, letting their kids get away with anything.

Let’s be honest with each other, shall we? When you get home after a long day at work and your child still hasn’t done what you’ve asked him to, what would you do?

1. Nag him for the fifth time that week.
2. Just do the job yourself and be done with it, because option 1 takes too much energy and means you'll need to refill your blood pressure medication.

The majority of parents would take option 2. But what are you really teaching your child by doing that?

Kids don't come into this world with interest in anyone but themselves. They start out wanting to be held, be fed, be burped, and have their diaper changed. They are hedonistic by nature. Life is all about them—"me, me, me, and only me"—and it will continue to be so unless you, wise parent that you can be, choose to step in and enlarge their worldview beyond themselves.

Is modeling doing what's right, teaching your kids to respect others, and following through with discipline easy?

No. But it's amazingly simple. I'll show you how.

Is it necessary?

You tell me. Do you want to keep living the way you do now—always in the sails of your child's wind?

What type of child do you really want to have?

Taking the Long View

Recently a teacher told me about a conversation she'd had with a kindergartener about a violation of dress code. She gently said, "Brent, your shorts don't fit our dress code. Please wear ones that do fit the dress code tomorrow. If you aren't sure what that is, ask your parents for help."

What did that little 5-year-old do? He fired back, "But I like these shorts. And I'll wear whatever I want."

His answer showed no respect for authority. Worse, when the teacher phoned the mother, she backed up the child. “But they’re his favorite pair. Who says he can’t wear them?”

When the teacher insisted kindly that Brent needed to adhere to the dress code, his mother argued with her, then threatened to get the principal involved.

Who really is calling the shots in that family? I daresay it’s that little kid who’s the height of a yardstick, who will someday grow up to diss his overprotective mother . . . if he isn’t already. In a few short years, that permissive mother will have more to deal with than she ever bargained for.

Contrast that to 8-year-old Dylan, who asked his mother to make an extra lunch for him the next morning.

Surprised, she asked, “Why do you need two lunches, honey?”

“Well, there’s this kid at school who never has a lunch,” Dylan said, “so I’ve been sharing mine with him. But I thought he might like a real lunch all to himself. I don’t think he has a mom, or anybody to pack one for him.”

If you were that mother, how would you feel? I’m sure my eyes would fill with tears, knowing I’d done something right as a parent to rear a child who is sensitive to the needs of others.

That 8-year-old will also become a thoughtful, responsible teenager who helps those in need, and one of the few-and-far-between adults who gives back to society.

That, parent, is your goal—to teach your values, train your child to do what’s right, and follow through with words and consistent actions that not only propel him toward personal success but give him opportunity to develop sensitivity to others along the way.

But how do you get there? Especially when so many things—school, work, extracurricular activities, social media—tug

against family time? Whether you have a two-parent family, a single-parent family, or a blended family, it's likely that you work. It's not uncommon these days for a 3-year-old to be dropped off at a preschool or day care at 6:00 a.m. and be picked up at 6:00 p.m.

As soon as you open your front door, you're besieged with requests for dinner and help with homework, and you hit the sack way too late trying to juggle it all. A long, hot shower is a distant memory. There simply aren't enough hours in the day to get the basics done, much less ride herd on your kids to make sure they turn out all right. You're weighed down by heaps of guilt for what you can't do.

At night, you worry about the growing viciousness of the jungle that surrounds your kids every day. You fear that your kid might be the one who just happens to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. You wonder what he's watching on YouTube and are startled by some of the things he knows that you didn't have a clue about when you were his age. And when she's at an evening activity, you can't sleep until she is safely in your nest.

Let me tell you a secret. Good parenting isn't easy, but it's simple. You *can* do it. It doesn't matter whether you have a toddler, an elementary school kid, a middle school or high school scholar, or a returned-home-from-college young adult who's living with you.

If you're looking for parental direction in your jungle, and your precious cherubs often seem to have the upper hand, you're not alone. Millions of parents are asking the same questions. I know, because I've talked to them at events, in my private practice, and at churches, schools, and Fortune 500 companies. I've addressed their questions through my

podcasts—with two million downloads and counting, I know the topics are hitting their target—and through Twitter, Facebook, and countless radio and TV programs.

How can you encourage healthy attitudes, positive behavior, and long-lasting values in children of all ages? *Making Children Mind without Losing Yours* is a simple model that will put you in healthy authority over your kids—no screaming or swinging from vine to vine needed. It'll help

Good parenting isn't easy, but it's simple. You can do it.

you gain a mutual-respect environment in your home that's a win-win for all.

You see, discipline isn't something you pass down; it's the way you choose to live. With my practical, action-oriented methods, you'll gain kids who not only willingly listen to you but seek you out in conversation. No more shrugs or "okay" thrown your way, like a bone to a dog. You'll get the scoop on their day when they're ready to tell you—maybe even before they respond to their friends' texts.

When they're away from home, you won't have to wonder where they are. They'll happily fill you in.

You won't need to lecture your kids because the way you live intrinsically provides values they will want to emulate. Chores will get done without nagging. Rooms will be cleaned because everyone contributes to the family and has the pride of ownership in your home.

You'll become the authority your kids trust and their safe place. If caught in a bad position, they'll call you for a ride home, without embarrassment. You won't have to worry that your son or daughter will be sucked into harmful peer groups or indoctrinated with ideas that go against your family values.

In short, they'll become the well-behaved kids you dream of having—hardworking, responsible, kind to others, and difference makers in the world.

Sound like an impossible pipe dream?

It's not. Better yet, the change can start today.

Want respectful kids who make good choices now and in the long haul? *Making Children Mind without Losing Yours*

is a simple game plan you can follow to take you where you want to be. You'll discover the following:

Discipline isn't something you pass down; it's the way you choose to live.

- Why children behave the way they do (hint: they've been programmed to do so) and how to raise them to be responsible adults
- How to navigate the dangers in today's jungle
- Why reality discipline works and how you can use it to create a win-win situation every time
- Why consistency always wins over perfection
- How to get your kid to apologize for what he's done wrong
- Why *not* asking questions gets you answers
- How to handle social media, the new Goliath that's here to stay
- How kids learn, and why what your child thinks counts more than what actually happens
- Why reward and punishment no longer work, and what to do instead
- How to get your kids to copy your values without the lectures

- Ways to foil finicky eaters, win over bedtime battles, minimize sibling rivalry, and turn off toddler tantrums and teenage blowups
- How to *really* be your child's best friend
- Why it's important (especially for single parents) to throw away guilt and give yourself a break
- How to build a unified blended family
- What to do when your kids act up (hint: use your secret ace in the hole)
- How to stop power struggles before they start

At the end of each chapter is a section called “Things to Think About”—questions to stimulate your thoughts. You can also use them as discussion starters with a spouse or significant other, your work lunch group, your yoga group, your walking partner, other parents over a dinner table, or a small group. To grow your parenting skills, converse with other parents. In their experience, what worked and didn't work? Why? What would they do differently now, if they could respond to that situation all over again?

Comparing notes and brainstorming with others in the trenches is a great reminder that you aren't alone in your successes and failures. You can encourage and support each other in this difficult but highly rewarding task of rearing children into happy, healthy adults.

Filled with real-life experiences and practical assistance, *Making Children Mind without Losing Yours* will put you back in the driver's seat of your family, help you manage the chaos that's a natural part of life, and bring sanity to your mornings (and every other time of day too).

Guaranteed.

1

It's a Jungle Out There (and Maybe in Your Family Room Too)

Ever feel like Tarzan or Jane, grabbing vine after vine and occasionally falling, as you navigate the wilds of parenting? Here's what you need to know to manage the chaos in your jungle.

I was 7 years old when I sneaked my first cigarette—a Viceroy. After that, I got cigarettes the inexpensive way. I cleaned my father's Lucky Strikes out of the ashtray and smoked the butts. It was a good day if he was in a hurry and had to put his cigarette out only half-smoked. When I went fishing, which I did many days as a kid (ditching school sometimes), I'd take the butts with me.

I smoked at baseball practice in high school too. Some days we kids would hit the ball over the fence on purpose. Our coach was so frugal that he never wanted to lose a ball,

so he'd send us to hunt for it in the tall grass. That little hunt gave me just enough time to smoke the cigarette butt I'd tucked in my baseball sock. Talk about a dedicated athlete. How much more dedicated do you get than that?

I was the kind of kid who was convinced my mother had 360-degree vision. Good thing too, since I was continually up to something, and most of it wasn't good. Because both my mom and dad worked outside the home to make ends meet (unlike most kids in my neighborhood, whose moms stayed at home in that era), I had plenty of opportunities to get into trouble, and I took full advantage of them. There were days my mom prayed for just one C to show up on my report card, to reassure her there was hope for me. Yet somehow, because of her steady influence and the fact she never gave up on me, here I am years later—with five grown children, four grandchildren, and psychology degrees—writing a book called *Making Children Mind without Losing Yours*. No doubt Mama Leman's wisdom did pay off after all.

But a lot of things have changed since my growing-up years in Western New York. In those days, neighbors knew each other well enough that if they caught you doing something wrong, they'd grab you by the ear, march you home to Mama, and recount all the horrifying details of what you did. When I got into trouble, it was usually at home, in my school, or in my neighborhood. Swift retribution typically followed. I can still remember Mrs. Moore shrieking, "Cubby Leman [my nickname], every time you come in this yard, something gets broken!" And it was true. I was a very rambunctious child. Not many young kids can add to their bio that they got kicked out of Cub Scouts.

What You Should Know about Today's Jungle

Today's kids are growing up faster, and they're living in a tumultuous, dangerous jungle too. They're doing drugs earlier, and not merely cigarettes. Heroin costs just 10 bucks a bag, and it's available in most schools, especially ones attended by more affluent students, who have a bit more cash in their pockets. In fact, principals from multiple schools have told me heroin is the number-one drug in high schools. The painkiller OxyContin and marijuana—often procured from a parent's own cache—also pop up easily. Ditto with beer, wine, and hard alcohol. For a slight surcharge, it's easy to get someone of age to buy anything for you at the corner store. Marijuana has been legalized in many states and is on the table for discussion in others.

News headlines ratchet up the perilous tale of today's jungle. The Colorado shooting sparked the tragic beginning of children being gunned down by classmates in their own schools. It continues to this day as a deadly reaction of children unable to cope with pain, anger, and life's realities. Toddlers have been victims of drive-by shootings in Chicago and other cities. Bullies are still in full swing on the playground and in school hallways, but they've graduated to a new level with cyberbullying. Even elementary school kids are aware of what sexting and cutting are, and many know at least one friend or more who is on medication for depression or who has attempted suicide.

With social media, Xboxes, iPhones, iPads, etc., everyone has access to a wide world of information. Sure, it can help you narrow down the best hotels for your upcoming trip to the Caribbean or find a reputable place for you to get a tattoo of three little hearts as a reminder of your kids. But not

all the information out there is good or healthy for young viewers who haven't yet learned discernment. With the internet just a mouse click or a touch screen away, children are exposed much earlier than previous generations to violence and sexuality through games, social media videos, chat rooms, and online headlines. Even a very young child can browse any topic of interest. Though a lot of the information can be educational and entertaining, such exposure can't help but have some negative effects.

Not all the information out there is good or healthy for young viewers who haven't yet learned discernment.

There is a “strong correlation between media violence and aggressive behavior” in youth, claims the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry.¹

Recently I was speaking to a large group of moms about the subject of sexuality. “You know the age you should start talking with your kids about sex?” I asked.

“Thirteen? Fourteen?” a mom called out.

“Nope. Around age 9,” I said.

You should have seen the dropped jaws and horrified faces.

One mom blurted out, “But they're just little kids at that age!”

“That's what you think,” I countered. “How many kids do you know who have had iPhones since they were in kindergarten? Or any kind of internet access? They're already streetwise by age 9. What they're doing at ages 10 to 12 would make many of you pass out. So don't you want to get on the front end of the sexual information they're being deluged with? Who better to sort through the facts and misinformation with them than you, their parent?”

The moms were shocked into silence.

I'll be blunt. Today's kids don't consider sexting wrong. They think nothing of taking a selfie of a body part and sending it to a boy or girl they like. They don't think of oral sex as sex. It's not uncommon for it to happen in middle school bathrooms or even under lunch tables in high school. Last week a middle school in Arizona suspended a boy for just such an act on school property.

Social media and texting are here to stay, and most of you are hooked on them yourselves, so fighting against them for your kids is a waste of energy. I once watched a mother and son sitting next to each other in a doctor's office. That both were texting wildly was no surprise. Most people with cell phones text like mad woodpeckers. But mother and son were clearly texting *each other* to communicate instead of talking face-to-face. If the same thing happens in your home, is it any surprise that your kids find it hard to share thoughts and ideas with you in person?

Today's kids don't consider sexting wrong. They think nothing of taking a selfie of a body part and sending it to a boy or girl they like.

Do you know what your child is watching on the internet? Why not be proactive in finding out and grow your relationship with your child at the same time? One mom and daughter I know watch a YouTube video together every day that the daughter has discovered. It only takes three to five minutes of that working mom's time, but it gives her a window into the music and topics her daughter is intrigued by.

No matter your stance on social media, every parent has the responsibility to be smart and knowledgeable about new

apps that pop up for kids. That includes the ever-growing popular private space to be used after school for swapping stories and information. Problem is, unlike Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat, and Instagram, which can be accessed and tracked by parents, this app is private and anonymous. All a child has to do is click on a school name to access the conversation. Though the app is meant for teenagers, *any* child at a school—whether a kindergartener, a fifth grader, or an eleventh grader—can access and use the app without a parent’s knowledge. Though intended to be a positive site that claims no tolerance for bullying, parents are not allowed access, and users don’t have to identify themselves or back up any information with facts. You read between the lines about what that really means and where it can lead. For starters, the app has already received negative media attention and FBI involvement for leading comments students have made, such as, “If you value your life, don’t go to school tomorrow.” Scary indeed. Yet the app continues to gain members.

Respect has failed miserably on the internet, the largest communication source today. With the great power of the internet come great responsibility and a loss of privacy, which few children are prepared to grapple with. No wonder Hollywood stars such as Sandra Bullock, George Clooney, Jennifer Lawrence, Emily Blunt, and Jake Gyllenhaal have chosen to steer clear of social media.² After all, it’s much easier to sling derogatory responses on Facebook, YouTube, or a chat room than it is to face someone across the table and say the same thing. Jealous of a peer? Screen-shot her embarrassing Instagram and circulate it on YouTube. Today’s kids may be media savvy, but they lack discernment and social consciousness. Few realize that anything released on

the internet—photos or statements—is there forever. That means 10 or 20 years from now a potential employer can come across it as he googles background information about you.

With lack of authority and respect abounding, is it any surprise that your kids sometimes balk when you step in as an authority in their life? That your 7- and 10-year-olds, so different from each other, go head-to-head in vicious battles in your presence? That your third grader rolls his eyes at your commands and exits stage left to do what he wants? Or that your teenage daughter throws a snarky remark your way when you ask about her school day and then locks herself in her room?

Today's kids may be media savvy, but they lack discernment and social consciousness. Few realize that anything released on the internet—photos or statements—is there forever.

Kids don't respond to authority the way they used to, because nowhere is respect modeled in our society, perhaps other than the military. That means children don't automatically have the respect factor for adults that I had when I was growing up. They also lack follow-through on their actions because they've been rescued too often from their bad choices by permissive parents who snowplow the roads of life for them. Or they may be rebelling because they've lacked the opportunity to make decisions on their own since decisions have always been made for them.

In such a world, how can we create kids who make wise decisions and take responsibility for their actions?

The answer is simple. It all starts with us, the parents.

In the next chapter, I'll show you how.

Things to Think About

1. What kind of child were you—one who always colored within the lines set for you, or who was rambunctious and rebellious like me? Explain.
2. Without life experience behind them, kids can be as dumb as mud. What's one thing you did as a child or teenager that your parents were unaware of? Do you regret doing that now? Why or why not?
3. What specific worries about your kids keep you awake at night? Does it differ for each child in your family? If so, in what ways?
4. Who are your child's role models? What kind of world-view do they represent? In what ways has that view influenced your child positively or negatively?
5. What are some effective, nonintrusive ways you can enter your child's social media world?