



A house is made of walls and beams; a home, of love and dreams.

Lesson 14

Parenting Success Strategies

A parent once asked a counselor, "My children are driving me crazy, what should I do?" "Buy them each a bicycle," was the reply. "A bicycle?" questioned the parent. "How's that going to change their behavior?"

"It may not change it," said the counselor, "but it would spread it over a wider area."

That's just one of many parenting success strategies—and a very minor one at that. But if you want to be a successful parent, there are three indispensable strategies! They have to do with the three major reasons children misbehave. Knowing why children misbehave—and what to do about it—will take much of the guesswork out of parenting.

Strategy 1: The Love Cup Strategy

The number one reason children misbehave is that they need attention. They want positive attention but will take negative attention rather than no attention at all. That's why children resort to destructive behavior, threats of suicide, and blatant disobedience.

Love, or positive attention, has the power to change negative behavior into positive behavior. In fact, giving love can be a more effective behavior-changer than using time-

out, restrictions, and other consequences that are considered more typical discipline!

When children need the type of positive attention that makes them feel loved, no amount of punishment, threats, bribes, anger, or spankings is going to effectively solve the behavior problem. Due to fear, the child may cease his or her disobedience for a time, but if the basic need for love is unmet, the disobedience will soon surface again. When the child needs attention, the only thing that will effectively stop misbehavior is to meet the need as soon as possible so the child is not rewarded for negative behavior.

The "love cup" analogy makes the relationship between love and misbehavior more graphic. Children are like cups. When they are filled to overflowing with love, they have enough love to give away, they can be loving to you and others, and they will tend to behave in an acceptable manner.

Children equate love and attention. So when children haven't received the positive attention they need and are feeling empty, they will try to fill themselves with attention, and too often this bid for attention results in obnoxious behavior: showing off, putting others down, blaming, criticizing, fighting, arguing, and destructive actions.

The Love Cup Strategy is revolutionary: You have the power to someday change

*Children
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your children's misbehavior by simply filling their love cups. Ideally, when you have children, they won't have to misbehave to get your attention.

But let's just pretend: It's a few years into the future, and you just got home from work. It has been a hard day. You're exhausted. You kick off your shoes, flop down on the couch, and begin leafing through the paper. You're particularly interested in what happened on the stock market during the day. Just as you begin to scan the columns, your little three-year-old comes running up to you saying, "Daddy, Daddy [or Mommy, Mommy], come outside and see what I made."

What will you say? "Sure, honey, I'll be glad to," and then put your shoes back on and follow your child outside?

Most of us would probably say something like, "Not now. I'm reading the paper."

And what does the child do? Retreat and silently wait for you to finish the paper? No, this is the typical scenario:

"Daddy, please, I can't wait! I want to show you . . ."

"Well, you better wait because I'm busy."

"Daddy, let me show you," your child pleads, taking hold of the edge of the paper and wiggling it.

"Let go of the paper! I can't read with you jerking it up and down. Now get out of here and let me finish. I'll look at it later."

"But, Daddy . . ."

You cut off his pleading by saying, "If you don't give me a little peace and quiet, then I'll give you just what you deserve. Out with you."

And with the threat of impending danger, your child retreats to the other room. But only for a few minutes.

The child hasn't seen you all day, and his love cup is almost empty. Since children equate love with attention, the child isn't satisfied until he gets the attention he needs so desperately. So what does Buster do? Well, he takes a flying leap and jumps right into the middle of the paper, tearing it.

Now what will you do? Give him what he richly deserves? Or do you give him what he so urgently needs?

Most parents just don't understand the subtle (and sometimes not too subtle) messages that children are trying to give them. Most would see this obnoxious behavior as an ornery streak that needs to be corrected with punishment. They completely miss the real message, "Daddy, my love cup is empty and needs to be filled with a little positive attention—and I can't wait!"

Will too much love spoil a child? No, but too little discipline will!

Love is something like vitamins. Eating a nutritionally balanced diet can probably meet your nutritional needs, but it never hurts to take a multi-vitamin. The same with love—it never hurts to give a little extra, just to make sure cups stay full. What's the daily dose that will assure an emotionally healthy love cup? In the book *Creating Love*, the author suggests giving a little extra...

- Vitamin A: positive focused **Attention**—at least fifteen minutes each day.
- Vitamin B: a **Bear hug** morning and evening.

- Vitamin C: **Compliments** throughout the day.
- Vitamin D: love-based **Discipline** to teach appropriate cup-filling behavior.
- Vitamin E: **Encouragement** as often as needed!¹

Most important, don't deliberately empty a love cup! Each time you reject a person, shame her, or humiliate him, you empty. Here are some of the most common emptying practices.

- Bossing or telling the child what to do without giving a choice.
- Threatening terrible consequences for noncompliance.
- Criticizing, ridicule, and sarcasm.
- Screaming or shouting at a child to get his attention and cooperation.
- Rejecting the child's bid for attention or need to be close.
- Neglecting to meet the child's needs.

Sometimes children give parents **"love tests," doing the worst possible thing they can think of to see how their parents will react.** If the parent reacts by emptying the child's love cup in one of the above ways, the message is, "You're not loved." A flunked love test is given again and again. **To pass, the parent must treat the child with love even though it's not deserved.**

Here's a typical love test you might face when you have children. Your older child becomes jealous over all the attention being given to the baby. When the baby is finally asleep, the older child tests you by waking the baby. If you scream and threaten, you have flunked the test. The child will give

you other tests to see if she is loved, like flushing the baby's teddy bear down the toilet. What do you need to do to pass the test? Show the child she's loved—even though the child doesn't deserve it. After you have passed the love test, you can correct the child—but not before!

You don't have to wait until you're a parent to use the Love Cup Strategy. The next time someone you know becomes obnoxious, if the cause is an empty love cup, nothing will change that offensive behavior quite as quickly as a little extra love—positive attention. Spend some fun time together; share some words of appreciation and encouragement. See what a difference it makes!

Strategy 2: The String Strategy

The second reason children misbehave is that they want power. They want to control their own lives, make decisions, do what they want to do. And when they get into power struggles with their parents and other authority figures, they want to win. They seldom give up the fight easily. That's why when you become a parent, you must focus on preventing conflict, or if conflict does arise, solving it so it doesn't surface again. The fewer the conflicts, the fewer power struggles there will be in your family, and the easier obedience will be.

Children are born with wills that must be molded, or the children will be misfits in society and threats to others—or themselves. Some people believe that children are born either compliant or defiant. That's not true. Rather, children are born with varied charac-

"The exercise of force is contrary to the principles of God's government; He desires only the service of love; and love cannot be commanded; it cannot be won by force or authority. Only by love is love awakened."²

teristics, some of which are easier to live with than others.

When a number of more difficult characteristics are seen in the personality and behavior of children, the parental tendency is to try to force them into behaving more like the "perfect" children parents want them to be. The more parents push their own expectations upon children, rather than respecting their God-given characteristics, the more resistant they become to change—and the more defiant. It's like the chemist Morris Moen once said, "To use a computer analogy, each child is born with its own individual hardware. It is up to the parents to figure out (without a manual) which software works for what child. You will not have good results trying to raise a Macintosh child using IBM programs."

What do you do when conflict is imminent? The answer is The String Strategy. Take a string and stretch it out in front of you. Now take one end and push the string forward—against itself. Does the string move straight in the direction you're pushing? No, of course not. It buckles up. And if you keep pushing, you will soon have a wadded-up string. But try pulling the string in the way you want it to go, and it will follow.

Children are like strings; they tend to resist when they feel pushed or forced into doing something. Once they start to resist, the tendency of most parents is to push them all the more: to threaten, to manipulate, to force, and to punish. And the consequence is, the more you push, the more powerless the child feels and, therefore, the more rebellious.

Outward compliance caused by forcing doesn't necessarily mean inner compliance, and sooner or later inner defiance causes outward defiance! It's like the little boy whose dad told him to sit down in church. When the boy kept jumping up, his dad physically pushed the kid into his seat with the command, "I said SIT DOWN!" The little boy sat there, but a few minutes later you could hear him muttering, "I may be sitting on the outside, but I'm standing on the inside!"

Any time a child begins to resist, even slightly, remember the string and immediately quit pushing. Instead, step back a few paces and consider creative ways to lead the child in the direction you want him or her to go. If nothing else, acknowledge the child's feelings and ask for cooperation. "I can tell you don't like what I've told you to do. But it really needs to be done. What would it take to make the task more attractive to you?" Respect a child's rights, but don't let the child step on yours. As a member of a family and as a citizen, children have certain responsibilities. A parent's job is to motivate, encourage, guide, persuade, and gently influence children so they will choose to fulfill those responsibilities and do what parents want them to do.

And what if children don't choose to obey? That's where consequences come in—time out, behavior modification, and other disciplinary techniques.

It takes time to motivate, encourage, guide, persuade, and influence instead of

pushing a child, but it's worth it in order to have the child willingly comply with your requests rather than stubbornly resist everything you say. Or worse yet, to make decisions based on an attitude of rebellion. Sometimes rebellious teens think they are hurting their parents by defiant behavior such as smoking or premarital sex, but in reality they are hurting themselves far more!

So, don't push the string. Instead, follow some of these ways, mentioned in Kay Kuzma's book *Easy Obedience*, to lead children in the way you want them to go:

1. Make requests when a child is not deeply absorbed in some favorite activity. Children don't like to be interrupted any more than adults do.
2. Give a child fair warning that a change is about to take place. "You have ten minutes before you need to put away your blocks. I'll set the timer."
3. Ask for cooperation: "I really need your help to set the table." "It would make me happy to have you work with me." "If you help me now, I'll be able to help you with your science project later."
4. When possible, give a child a choice: "I've listed three things that have to be done before we go shopping. Which task would you rather do?"
5. Work together happily. Children enjoy doing what parents are doing—if they're fun to be around.
6. Use humor, games, and play-acting to hurdle potential conflicts. Play beauty shop when combing tangled hair. Play restaurant with finicky eaters. Reverse

your roles when the house needs cleaning—and let the child tell you what to do.

7. Encourage! Encourage! Encourage! Remember, it's a discouraged child who most often misbehaves. You can turn defiance into compliance if you just remember the String Strategy!

Start practicing this strategy on your peers. No one likes to be forced and manipulated. When you sense resistance, retreat and try to persuade, motivate, and encourage rather than pushing for what you want.

Strategy 3: The Iceberg Strategy

Another major reason children misbehave is that they allow their emotions to control their behavior. Rebellious behavior is often the result. They want to get back at the people they feel are controlling them; they want revenge!

In order to be an effective disciplinarian, you'll need a refresher course in Iceberg Psychology, because there's a close analogy between icebergs and human behavior.

Here's what you need to know. There is always more iceberg under the surface than above. Yet, when you look at an iceberg, you're not immediately aware of the bottom part. If you try to change the iceberg by chipping away at the top part, the iceberg adjusts itself in the water, and chances are something else will emerge.

This is very similar to children's behavior. Anytime parents see some emotionally based behavior they don't like—whether it's destructive actions, sassy or mean words, teasing or hostile actions—it's like the top of

the iceberg. The parental tendency is to get rid of the behavior that is offensive. They spank, they yell, or they threaten to try and change that behavior. Sometimes, these tactics appear to be successful. The offensive behavior disappears. But if they haven't defused the underlying emotion that caused the behavior, then there is a strong chance that some other behavior is likely to surface that may be worse than the one they tried to get rid of in the first place. Here's how it works.

One day ten-year-old Bruce came home yelling, "I hate my teacher. She's stupid." His face was etched with anger; he threw his books to the floor.

Mom was shocked by this tirade. She stormed into the room, "Bruce," she said, "I'm ashamed of you. That is no way to talk about your teacher."

"I don't care," retorted Bruce. "She's stupid, and I hate her."

"Enough! I'll not have you talking like that. You shouldn't hate anyone, and I should wash your mouth out with soap for calling someone stupid—especially a teacher. Now pick up those books you've thrown all over the floor."

By this time Bruce was livid with rage. He stormed out of the room and slammed the door. Later he smashed his mother's favorite vase and refused to come down to dinner.

What went wrong with Mom's attempts at disciplining? Mom was only trying to solve a problem. Bruce's words "I hate my teacher" were unacceptable to her. She was trying to teach Bruce to respect adults. He needed correction. But her correction only

made matters worse. Why?

Now replay the scene with a few minor changes and see what you can learn. Ten-year-old Bruce came home yelling, "I hate my teacher. She's stupid."

Mom did not approve of Bruce's behavior. But she recognized that there was something beneath the surface that was causing this outburst. She began to search for the underlying problem. Watch what happened:

"Wow," said Mom. "You are angry."

"I'll say I am," retorted Bruce. "My teacher made a fool of me in front of all the class."

"It makes you angry to be embarrassed in front of your friends, doesn't it?"

"Yes, it does." Bruce's face began to relax as he started to pick up the books that he had thrown to the floor. "I can't understand why she picked on me. It wasn't my fault. And I tried to tell her, but she just wouldn't listen." At this point Bruce's anger began to melt. His mother came over and put an arm around him, and tears began to slide down his cheeks. They sat down on the couch and Bruce unloaded the whole story.

When all had been told, explanations listened to, and emotions defused, Mom asked, "Bruce, how do you think you are going to solve your problem with your teacher?" And for the next ten minutes Mom and Bruce worked on the problem together. At the very end, Mom added, "And by the way, Bruce, it never really helps when you get angry. And calling people 'stupid' doesn't solve anything."

"Yeah, I know. I'll try to remember. And thanks for listening."

When it comes to searching for the emotion underneath the anger and misbehavior, the key is to **listen**, because the only way the troublesome emotion is going to be defused is to be vented by talking about it. What you want to avoid is letting the emotion be acted out in unacceptable ways.

If misbehavior at this emotionally based level is not handled effectively in the early stages, troublesome emotions build and become like giants that eventually control our lives. Often the unresolved emotions of children become focused against parents and other individuals in authority positions in the form of rebellion or revenge. The child reasons, "If I can't win, at least I can get back at them." When decisions begin to be made out of rebellion, look out! This is a sign that something is wrong in the parent/child relationship, and if this alienation is allowed to grow, it can cause deep-seated dysfunction, acted out in rebellious, anti-social, destructive, revengeful ways.

Children can also express unresolved emotions by becoming covertly revengeful. They are afraid they'll be punished if they tell their folks off, so they become underhanded, getting back at their folks in subtle, passive ways. The children who lie, steal, destroy things, or refuse to do anything at home may be rebelling in a passive way. The children who behind their parents' backs deliberately do what their parents have strictly forbidden are doing it for revenge.

Do you know any teenagers like that? Do you think the Iceberg Strategy would work on them?

If you doubt these strategies will work on adults, step back in time to the courtyard of the temple where Jesus is teaching when some high officials come dragging a woman up to Him and throw her down at His feet. Her clothes are torn, her hair tangled, and it's obvious that the way she makes a living is by allowing men to use her body. They shout, "We caught this woman in the very act of adultery. The law says she should be stoned. What do you think we should do with her?"

A few of the men have stones in hand, ready to fulfill the letter of the law. The case couldn't be more clear. No need for a trial. **She deserves to die.**

What does Jesus do? He knows her love cup is empty. He knows that some of her accusers are the very ones who led her into sin. He stoops down and begins to write the sins of her accusers in the dust, and one by one, embarrassed, they slink away.

Now alone, it's time for a lecture. Right? Wrong. She didn't need information. She needed love. And Jesus gave her the kind of love that is truly filling. With gentle words He forgave and encouraged, "I don't condemn you. Just don't do it any more." (See John 8:1-11.)

Aren't you glad Jesus never treats people as they **deserve** to be treated—only how they **need** to be treated. **And if you need love, He'll give it.** Jesus was a love-cup filler, who never pushed or manipulated and who was always willing to listen.

It may be a few years before you have children, and by that time you'll likely for-

get many child-rearing principles that you're being introduced to now. Just don't forget the Love Cup, the String, and the Iceberg Strategies. Armed with these, you'll be able to handle three of the major reasons why children misbehave, and you'll have a good start to becoming a successful parent. Does "success" mean your children will always do what you want them to do? Every parent wishes that were true. But children aren't robots; they have minds of their own. They will make their own decisions—and reap the consequences. Using these strategies, however, should significantly increase a parent's chances of having children who like themselves, love God, and bless others.



Anchor Text

"Do not withhold good from those who deserve it, when it is in your power to act" (Proverbs 3:27).



Bible Search

1. Examples of how Jesus filled love cups

A. The woman at the well

Read the story in John 4:1-26 and *The Desire of Ages*, chapter 19, "At Jacob's Well," and answer the following:

- (1) What evidence was there that the woman's love cup was empty?
- (2) Describe how Jesus filled her love cup.

B. Simon's banquet and the woman with the alabaster box

Read the story in Matthew 26:6-13 and Luke 7:36-50 and *The Desire of Ages*, chapter 62, "The Feast at Simon's

House," and answer the following:

- (1) What evidence was there that Simon's love cup was empty?
- (2) Describe how Jesus filled his love cup.

2. Relationship between anger and love

A. Read the following texts, write out what each text says, and then write two or three summary paragraphs on the relationship between anger and love and how this could relate to parenting. Read section B before writing your summaries.

- (1) Ephesians 4:26.
- (2) Ephesians 4:31, 32.
- (3) Psalm 37:3, 8.
- (4) Psalm 145:8.
- (5) Proverbs 21:14.
- (6) Proverbs 10:12.
- (7) Proverbs 25:21-23.
- (8) Colossians 3:8, 12-14.

B. In your summary paragraphs answer the following questions:

- (1) Why are love and anger so often mentioned in the same passage?
- (2) What is the power of love in relationship to anger?
- (3) How should parents treat an angry child?
- (4) How should parents behave when they get angry at a child?

Endnotes

1. Kay Kuzma, *Creating Love* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1997).
2. Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1940), 22.

Reaction

Discussion Questions

1. What is the basic principle behind the love cup? How does it apply to children?
2. What happens when a child's love cup is empty?
3. Why is time spent together with the child so important?
4. Is it ever possible to give too much love? Explain.
5. Why are children like strings?
6. What is the major cause of children's defiant behavior?
7. How is children's behavior sometimes like an iceberg?
8. What happens when negative emotions are not handled in the early stages?
9. What causes a child to become revengeful?
10. How would you define *success* in terms of parenting?

Personal Response

Does the Lord push, force, or manipulate you? Note what Psalm 23 says that our Shepherd is going to do for you.

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He **leads** me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; He **leads** me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake (Psalm 23:1-3, NKJV, emphasis supplied).

Now read Revelation 3:20.

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.

How does it make you feel to know Jesus isn't going to push you to drink from still waters, or He's not going to force His way through the door of your heart?

If this is how Jesus treats you, how should you then treat your children someday?

Practical Application

1. Applying Strategies to Friends and Family

Don't wait until you are a parent to begin using the Love Cup, String, and Iceberg strategies. Here's how:

- A. Love Cup: If someone seems down or is acting obnoxious, try filling his or her love cup: Give a compliment, do a kind act for him or her, or just listen.
- B. String: If someone seems to be resisting your efforts, back up and start encouraging, motivating, and persuading, rather than pushing.
- C. Iceberg: When someone expresses a negative emotion, acknowledge that emotion (say "You feel . . ."). Then listen. Allow the person to talk out the emotion without your reacting.

Record the results of your experiments, indicating what you said or did.

2. Compile a book of proverbs for parents using the handout provided by your teacher.