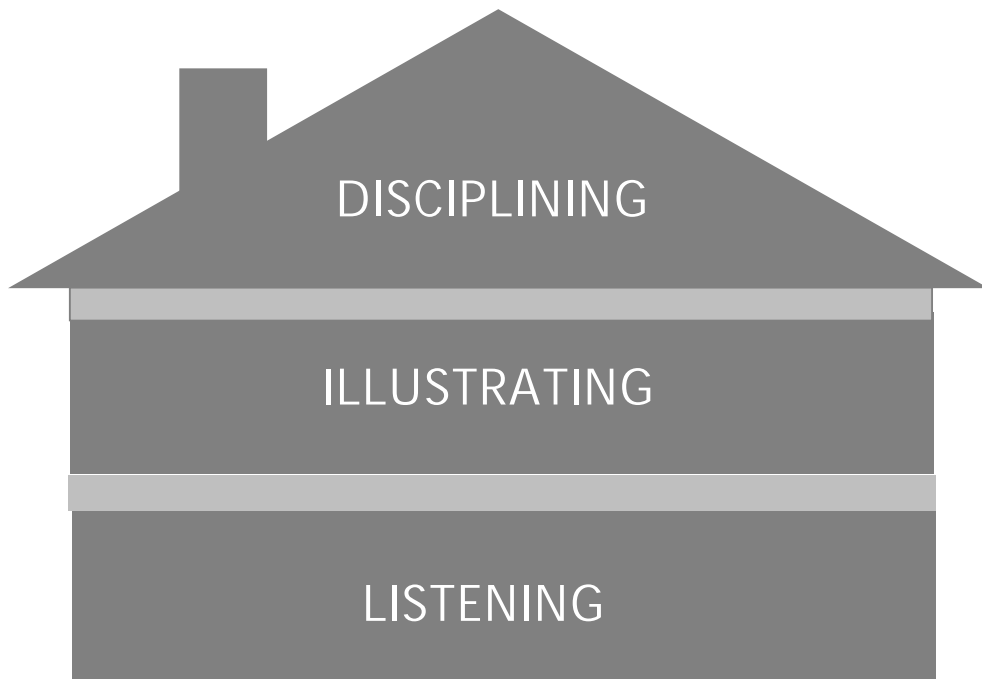

3 Steps to Parent-Child Harmony

A New School Approach to Relationship Skills for Parents*



* And Everyone Else, Too

Chuck Adam, MSW

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(First Edition)

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Introduction

This book is for parents, teachers, and others who have tension and conflict with children they love, care for, and work with. It primarily addresses parents, but the principles, techniques, and relationship skills discussed are applicable to any relationship that any adult has with any child—and, for that matter, with any other adult as well. While it's directed at parents, it's good for everybody.

How to Use This Book

There are at least three ways to read this book. If you want to know *what* to do, start with chapter nine, on discipline. If you want to know *how* to do it well, start with chapters four to eight (the relationship skills). And if you want to know *why* these are the best things to do, start with chapters one to three. It's pretty much up to you, obviously. Here's how I set it up.

The first two chapters present the context for a radically different approach to parenting, particularly with headstrong children. The first chapter contains lots of good ideas about the parent-child relationship, tension and conflict between parents and children, what causes most of those conflicts, and how the age-old parenting model that virtually all of us were raised with contributes significantly to every single conflict that parents have with headstrong children.

The second chapter compares that “Old School” parenting model with a very different model, one that I call “New School,” and shows why a few significant changes in a parent's attitude about, and approach to, parenting almost always makes a world of difference in terms of children's willingness to cooperate with them rather than fight them.

Chapters three and four deal with the parent's “magic wand,” listening, which is something we all do all the time, every day, but which parents have not been taught to do *well* with their children. In chapter four I present three specific listening techniques that any parent can use very effectively with a little concentration. They've helped countless parents obtain almost instantaneous improvements in child behavior. That's why listening is the “magic wand.”

In chapters five and six I show how parents speak continuously to their children, and how they can use three specific techniques to verbally talk in ways that actually elicit honest verbal communication from their children in return.

Chapters seven and eight address the all-important topic of discipline, which, in my “New School” approach, rests upon the parent's ability to have a dialogue with the child—that is, the parent's ability to listen and speak effectively. Three discipline techniques are presented that totally eliminate the need for punishments by engaging children in two different but stunningly effective forms of semi-structured dialogue. The first is the “behavior dialogue,” which leads to the child's commitment to “right behavior,” and the second is the “accountability dialogue,” which serves as the replacement for punishment when the child breaks his or her agreement, something we can be sure is going to happen at times.

In chapter nine I discuss the family meeting, a safe space in which all family members can come together to express themselves, bond, resolve tensions, plan, and learn to appreciate each other more. In this chapter I also present a number of ways in which parents can very intentionally teach their children that wonderful relationship skill called *self-control*.

What Parents Want Most

The parents I've worked with over forty-plus years are most concerned with the nitty-gritty aspects of discipline—"How do I handle my son's disobedience?" "How do I handle lying?" "How can I get Johnny to do his homework?" "What do I do when Sue comes in at three in the morning?" If discipline is your really big interest, and you think you are a good listener and can talk effectively and respectfully with your child (no matter what their age), you might want to start with chapter seven on discipline. If your interest is piqued, or questions about what I'm saying arise, or you want some help with communication skills (which are the foundation of good discipline), you can always go back to chapters three through six) on listening and talking to get useful tips. Or, if you think what I'm saying sounds a bit radical, you can always go back to chapters one and two to check out my ideas on behavior motivation, child misbehavior, the tricky business of parental control, the mistakes most parents make that actually encourage the very problems they are trying to eliminate, and the underlying conceptual pillars of the Old and New School parenting models as well as the attitudes and practices that characterize each of them.

Why I Wrote the Book

This book grows out of my forty-plus years of being a stepfather and working at different times as a therapist, educator, and coach with adults, children, families, and groups. My purpose in writing it is quite simple. I want to make some powerful and empowering ideas about relationships available to as many people as possible—especially people who work "from the heart" with children. These include parents, grandparents, foster parents, adoptive parents, parent substitutes, babysitters, teachers, school counselors, social workers, therapists, mentors, camp counselors, and the legions of other care takers, both professional and non-professional, who give their best energy, their love and patience and caring to the guidance and nurturing of our greatest treasure.

Some of the ideas I present may seem radical to some—a colleague once told me I am "turning parenting on its head." For some reason, these ideas are simply not talked about by the vast majority of therapists, teachers, or authors. And yet they can make parenting a lot less stressful, a lot more fun, and a lot more effective and rewarding. In this way they can prepare the next generation of parents (our children) to do an even better job of parenting and caring for kids than their own parents, parent substitutes, and authority figures have done with them.

Our world is in serious trouble on many fronts. I believe the family, in all its forms in different countries and cultures, the place where we learn to be people, is our best hope. As a well known educator and spiritual guide, Marianne Williamson, has so eloquently and concisely said: "*There is no single effort more radical in its potential for saving the world than a transformation of the way we raise our children.*" My hope is that you—and others through you—will find in this book some practical ideas for transforming conflict and stress into cooperation and harmony in all your relationships with children and adults in your home, your school, and your community.

Chuck Adam, MSW,
Milwaukee, Wisconsin, August, 2012