

**Breakthrough Parenting®:**  
**Moving Your Family From Struggle to Cooperation**

**Chapter 1:**  
**The Best Approach to Raising Children**

"Feelings of worth can flourish only in an atmosphere where individual differences are appreciated, mistakes are tolerated, communication is open and rules are flexible – the kind of atmosphere that is found in a nurturing family."  
– Virginia Satir

One has to admire Sharon Reilly's parents for seeking direction early in her life so that they have a unified plan for how they will raise her. They want to be responsible parents so that she will turn out to be a responsible human being. Have you ever met a parent who would answer anything other than "Yes" to the question "Do you want your child to grow up to be responsible?" The answer is obvious. Having said "yes," most people, knowing that they've given the right answer, will start thinking about something else.

But, wait a minute. If every parent would say, "Yes, I want my child to grow up to be responsible," then why are there so many irresponsible people? Look around. Listen to the news. Read the headlines on the front page of the paper. Something isn't right.

Parents invest an enormous amount of their time, effort, energy and resources in loving the next generation into responsible adulthood. No one questions whether it is one of the most important jobs we will ever have in life. Most parents will also agree that it is one of the most difficult, because it is complex and there is so much at stake. Raising a child is a big job! Who is likely to be blamed if it doesn't turn out well?

What if you could greatly increase the chances of thoroughly enjoying your children as they grow? What if they could blossom like beautiful flowers before your eyes into wonderful human beings whom you can be proud of? What if, while you were raising them, you were engaging in one of the most powerful self-development courses in the world, where you find that you are being more successful in all aspects of your life? What if this parenting thing turns out to be better than your wildest dreams?

Would you be willing to put in a little effort right now to see what will make the difference between a mediocre existence with your children and a fantastic one where you and your children are thriving? Parents have been given confusing and conflicting advice about how to raise children.

Take something as simple as getting an eight-year-old child to clean up his room. Christine says, "Johnny, your room sure is a mess. I suppose when you get tired of living this way, you'll clean it up." Bill says, "Johnny, clean up this room now! Get busy." Christine and Bill have very different approaches to helping Johnny be responsible.

**Permissive Parenting**

Christine uses Permissive Parenting. This is the idea that children ought to be allowed to simply unfold without direction about what they should learn or how they should act. The assumption is that when a child is ready, he or she will take charge. This approach assumes that, if left to figure things out alone, children will naturally find their way. This method has been called a progressive new way to raise children. Advocates of this approach have told parents to never use power or authority to punish their children. Instead, parents leave the majority of the decision-making about what is responsible behavior to their children. According to this approach, children learn by experiencing natural consequences, not ones that are imposed upon them.

Permissive parenting works best when children are naturally self-directing, easy to get along with and when they like to please. The problem is that not many parents experience children like this. Most children need routines, structure, predictability and boundaries in their lives, and they don't naturally come up with these themselves.

**Authoritarian Parenting**

On the other hand, the oldest and most used approach for raising children has been authoritarian parenting, the one that Bill uses. Most parents have had a lot of experience with this. Parents assume the majority of responsibility to control their children from birth to adulthood until their children are able to be independent. With this method, parents take charge by using their power and authority to punish their children as a way of trying to teach them what to do. They decide what the consequences should be for breaking the rules. Children show respect for their parents by obeying them. Authoritarian parenting works best when the goal is for children to learn to be able to follow orders and to conform to pre-existing standards. Creativity is either not encouraged, or is narrowly confined. Children are taught to be obedient and to never talk back to their elders. These children are outer-directed, meaning that they look to people outside of themselves to decide what to think and how to act.

All too often, well-intentioned permissive parents get fed up that their child has not been responsible and consequently go ballistic in an authoritarian outburst. After they have laid down the parental law, accompanied by tears and bad feelings, the room gets cleaned. Then, they go back to being permissive. This lack of consistency is especially difficult for their children because the children don't know what to expect, nor are they empowered to take charge of their room with any consistency. Most permissive parents vacillate between permissive and authoritarian approaches. Most permissive parents don't provide structure because it feels uncomfortable being a "boss." The explosion confirms how bad it is to be authoritarian so they and their children drift until the next big upset.

**Breakthrough Parenting**

There is, however, another way of raising children that is neither permissive nor authoritarian. It is called Breakthrough Parenting, and the responsibility for solving problems is shared between parent and child. The child isn't given permission to decide not to be responsible, nor is the child told exactly what to do. Brian uses this method with his eight-year-old daughter. "Angelina, your room is really a mess. I would like to know what your plan is for cleaning it." Angelina is expected to take responsibility for cleaning her room. It is up to her to decide when and how she will do the job.

If her plan works, great. If she doesn't show much success, then a process of problem-solving occurs with her father. "Angelina, it looks like you started to clean your room, but you didn't finish. It doesn't seem like your plan worked very well." Dad continues to expect Angelina to be responsible for cleaning her room. Whose room is it? Hers. Whose problem is it? Hers. What is Dad's job?

To help Angelina attain mastery over keeping her room clean. Dad and Angelina engage in problem-solving until both of them agree on how she is going to take care of her room. Dad acknowledges her success with a big smile, and points out how she accomplished the various tasks related to keeping her room clean. He continues with this approach until it is no longer necessary for him to even mention that her room needs to be cleaned.

Self-mastery is the goal. The key is for children to be inner-directed, to take charge of their own lives, such as grooming, feeding themselves, doing their homework and a host of other tasks that we all have to learn in order to be able to take care of ourselves in the world. The majority of children are capable of much more than we have ever given them credit for. When parents use Breakthrough Parenting methods they are amazed at how easily children learn self-mastery, and at how enjoyable they are to be around. Struggle is replaced with cooperation.

**Things Have Changed**

Throughout human existence, life has been fairly constant. Around the world, most children lived their lives no differently from their parents or their grandparents. People had to work hard to get their basic physical needs met. Work was back-breaking and relentless. Virtually all work was physical, and children were expected to work along side their parents. It took every available hand to assure family survival.

To get paid to use one's mind, rather than one's muscle is something new in the history of the world. If you survived by muscle alone, then education was not necessary. For centuries the idea of a creative new way of doing things that would make life better wasn't welcomed. People didn't invite change, because change was often viewed with fear - a way to make things worse, not better. While most people struggled to get their physical needs met, they also did their best to stay out of harm's way. People did not choose their station in life, they were born into it. One's birth dictated whether one would be a peasant, craftsman or royalty. There wasn't any way to change one's station in life. Peasants and craftsmen often had their lives completely controlled by other people.

When people are struggling to survive, are uneducated and don't invite change that will make their lives better, it is easy to exploit them. Power was something to be hoarded, not to be shared. There was no one to stop the ruler when he or she misused power to hurt people. People were told how to act and how to think, and how they felt was irrelevant. People learned, for safety's sake, to not question the authority of the master, for to do so could result in dire consequences. Thus, people learned that they had to obey.

The authoritarian method used today to raise children comes from this history. The authoritarian method relies on children's fear of punishment to assure conformity to a predetermined standard that children are not allowed to challenge.

The concept of human rights, of happiness, of self-determination and of laws that are voted upon by the people they are designed to govern was unheard of. Thomas Jefferson wrote: "All people have the right to the pursuit of happiness." "All people?" Have a "right!" To be "happy" and to "pursue" it during their lifetime? This one statement was an amazing breakthrough in the human condition! Virtually no one had the experience of voting on how they would live together. No one thought that they could be happy in this lifetime. Maybe, if you were really good in following someone else's law, then you might stand a chance of being happy in heaven. No one had the opportunity to get justice by appealing to laws that would protect them. The idea that you could pursue what made you happy- well, what was that?

These are ideas that we take for granted today. Most people don't realize how new these concepts are in the history of humanity. Instead of expecting things to stay the same, we now pay attention to what is different. We expect things to change, to get better, to make us happier. We've grown accustomed to labor-saving devices that help us get our physical needs met with little effort. We are interdependent on laws that are designed to make the quality of our lives better, not worse. Other people grow our food, manufacture the products that we need and have developed safety devices to protect us.

We live in the Information Age, and technological advances have utterly transformed how we live our lives. In order to keep up in this age, we need ongoing education so that we can keep our freedom. If we don't understand what is going on around us, we cannot participate in the decision-making process.

Think about how much has changed since you were born. Changes in the 20th century have been mind-boggling. We've seen ever-increasing progress in technology that affects all aspects of our lives. The Information Age has given us an expansion of the basic knowledge of the way the universe operates in ways that even an elementary school age child can access.

**Assuring That Our Children's Future Success Begins Now**

In moving from one century to another and into a whole new millennium, we can easily see that today's children have inherited a life that is radically different from the lives most of us have known. The even greater changes in store for us in the future are not for the fainthearted. We need to exert our maximum effort to prepare our children to actualize their potential, because when they spread their wings, they will be flying into uncharted territory.

If today's children are raised in the same authoritarian ways most of us were raised, we will unwittingly make them dysfunctional in their future.

In order to be successful, children have to be adaptive, creative and quick to learn new ways of doing things. They must be able to work with other people in resolving difficult problems. Because we now live in a global economy, they need strong relationship skills to be socially responsive to people who are very different from themselves. They need to be well-rounded, and well-socialized in different cultures and value systems from their own.

They need to know themselves, which means that they must develop a high degree of self-esteem. Today's children must develop self-mastery, not by being told what to do, but by being able to think on their feet what to do. They need to learn that there are many ways to solve problems. They must be skilled at the art of negotiation. They especially need to be aware of what they are good at and what they are not good at, so that they can build on their strengths that will make them employable in the market place.

Today's children must be in touch with their feelings, understand them and respond to them quickly and in appropriate ways. They need to be inner-directed. Breakthrough Parenting is the best method for successfully raising today's children. It is also one of the best methods for personal development around. It is positive, growing, interesting and builds success for every family member everyday. It works!

Because most parents have been brought up under either a permissive or authoritarian method, they will have to be willing to adopt a new way of doing things. New habits have to replace old ones. It is easy to go back to what is familiar without giving this new method a chance. There are numerous groups that support adults in getting in touch with their feelings, in making wise choices that enhance their lives, and in expanding their skills and knowledge in the areas that interest them. Fortunately, most of us live in a family, one of the best laboratories for change that we have available to us.

**The Parent's Role as the Child's Steward**

Traditionally, when a crown prince was born, a steward was assigned to supervise the growing child's affairs. The steward was the prince's agent, guardian and protector. The steward managed every aspect of the prince's care and was responsible for preparing the prince to be a successful king. In the Breakthrough Parenting method, parents learn to become stewards of their children. When children are too young to be fully responsible, parents look after their affairs. They counsel with them about the best way of doing things.

Children are provided with many experiences that help them consciously make choices and accept the consequences of these choices. In doing so, children learn how to be good problem-solvers and decision-makers while they are still in a supervised environment. Children learn that they are free agents, who have the power to decide well or to decide poorly.

The methods that stewards use are designed to help children grow up to be in charge of their fate; a fate that the steward cannot fully predict. Therefore, the steward pays attention to such qualities as helping children become eager to learn new things and to be adaptable, emotionally well-adjusted, skillful and socially responsible.

Children are expected to become their own persons. While the steward has the primary responsibility to protect and to guard a child from harm, he or she is also teaching the child how to eventually do all of this independently of the steward. By the time these children are adults they will have matured to the point where they have a deep awareness that I alone am responsible for my thoughts, feelings and actions. When they act consistently with this principle, they will have attained self-mastery.