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**STOP**  
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How To  
TEACH  
EMPOWER &  
LET GO

CHILDREN  
LEARNING

# Redirecting Children's Behavior

**KATHRYN J. KVOLS**

THIRD EDITION | REVISED

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*For our children  
and their children*

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“Lord, make  
me an instrument  
of thy peace.”

—*St. Francis of Assisi*

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# foreword

What we know and believe about children and families has changed dramatically in the last twenty-five years. Parents, teachers, and coaches recall the “good old days” when you could tell kids to do something and they jumped and did it! Kids today, on the other hand, are requesting respect and democracy, especially in the autocracies which control their homes, classrooms, and athletic fields. The result is confusion and power struggles with parents and professionals and, often, we don’t know why we’re struggling.

If you step back and look at the progress we’ve made in understanding children, it’s astonishing how far we’ve come in the last quarter of a century. It was not until the late 1960s and early 1970s, through the work of Dr. T. Berry Brazelton and others, that we became aware that infants could see, hear, feel, and actively contribute to their relationships with their parents. How magnificent! With this finding, we began to view children, even at the beginning of their lives, as participants in the family process. Children have become powerful, emphatic collaborators to be respected versus clay for us to mold and control. It’s no wonder that many of us have experienced confusion and chaos.

So here is Kathryn Kvols’s book, *Redirecting Children’s Behavior*, offering us the tools we need to develop the closeness with our children and families that we want so very much. Kathryn believes, as I do, that every person is born whole, perfect, and connected to everyone and everything. Through experiences as children, with parents, siblings, and others, we are socialized and wounded in ways that cause us to lose our awareness of the connections with others. This book offers us the means to reconnect. It provides the framework and process for parenting so that we learn to relate with children in a way that supports their development, creating adults who feel whole and free and able to experience closeness and intimacy with others.

—Timothy J. Jordan, M.D.

# Why I Wrote This Book

Children have the ability to touch the very depths of our souls. One moment we're feeling love and joy; the next moment, frustration and incompetence and, at times, despair. The purpose of this book is twofold: to help you create a warmer, closer relationship with your child that increases love and joy and to teach you new skills that help you when you feel like you can't cope.

People are becoming aware that fear or force are ineffective tools to motivate others, both in business and in our families. We often feel frustrated when we don't know what else to do as our children push us against the wall. When we're running late and our two-year-old refuses to get in her car seat or our teenagers openly defy us, we wonder how to respond so as to do no harm, act according to our values, and teach kids what they need to learn.

When we reach into our bag of tricks, we often come up with methods that our parents used when raising us, or we settle on an expedient solution. These responses often don't produce the results we want.

The suggestions in this book are based on more than twenty years of personal experience teaching courses on parenting, lecturing, counseling, and teaching kids in summer camps and school. I have heard thousands of parents, teachers, and counselors voice their concerns and frustrations over the children in their care. It is my goal, through this book and the parent education I do, to help parents raise self-motivated and responsible children, who are able to win another's cooperation, create and maintain close relationships, and work successfully on teams.

Redirecting children's behavior is a form of discipline that helps parents raise children in a peaceful and respectful way; it is firm and kind. Its goal is for the child to assume responsibility for his or her actions and to become motivated from within rather than by external circumstances or events. The redirecting principle defines discipline as guidance and teaching, with an emphasis on mutual

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respect. This method teaches natural and logical consequences for a child's misbehavior, instead of the use of punishment. As a result, the child gains self-esteem and cooperation skills.

Redirecting children's behavior is a way of life. It focuses on creating win/win situations in which no one is the loser, not the parent, the child, the teacher, the friend, nor the coach. When children sense that you aren't trying to control them, but are rather trying to make both of you winners, they are more respectful and cooperative.

I firmly believe that the family unit is the fabric of which this country is woven. As we create more peace and harmony within families, our society will become more cooperative and experience less violence and isolation. Together, we can make a difference for all children and for our world.

*—Kathryn J. Kvols*

# Take Care of Yourself



**y**our son has just spilled his juice on the carpet. It's no big deal, but you really lose your temper this time. Why do you react so strongly now and not the last time he spilled juice?

One reason we parents become irritable, overwhelmed, depressed, or sick is that we have not been doing a very good job of taking care of ourselves. How long has it been since you had thirty minutes by yourself to do whatever you wanted? Common answers I hear are, "I can't remember," or, "I don't have time to do that."

Just before the airplane takes off, the stewardess instructs parents to place the oxy-

gen mask on themselves first in an emergency and then place a mask on their child. Notice the request: Put yours on first, then you will be able to help your child. All too often we satisfy the needs of our children and others before our own. As a result, our energy is depleted and we have nothing left to give, or we give with resentment and frustration. Even a minor problem challenges our depleted reserves.

Why don't parents take care of themselves? Some important reasons are:

- We've been taught from an early age that it's selfish to take care of ourselves.
- We feel that taking quiet time or "down time" is not good use of our time.
- We don't believe that we deserve time for ourselves alone.
- We believe that we just don't have, or can't find, the time.
- We don't know how to take care of ourselves.

There is much to gain when we take good care of ourselves. We are:

- Refreshed and have more energy for our children.
- More confident and creative when our children spring surprises on us.
- Ready and eager to spend time with our families.
- Teaching our children, by example, how to take care of themselves.
- Sending the message to them that it is not only okay but important that they take care of themselves, now and when they too are parents.

## What makes taking care of yourself a challenge?

Parents may be under a number of strains that make self-care a challenge. Some of these strains are self-imposed and some are reactions to what is going on around them. Look through the challenges I've listed to see which describe your situation. Consider the suggestions for relief.

### ***Burnout***

When you have no more energy for the demands life makes on you, you suffer from burnout. Look for these symptoms:

- irritability and crankiness
- feeling rushed and overwhelmed
- accident prone
- tired
- overburdened
- sick often
- depressed
- weepy
- resentful

When you feel these signs, you need to take time out for yourself. We'll talk more about how to do that later.

### ***Negative thoughts***

The negative thoughts that cause the most trouble are worry, fear, guilt, resentment, and anger. These emotions sap our energy and keep us from being fully present with our children.

### ***Worry***

As parents, we often waste energy worrying about a problem, instead of trusting that life will work out. If you are worried, ask

yourself, "What action can I take to solve this problem?" Then take action and let go.

*When my son, Tyler, was five years old, we were driving up a winding road through a large piece of property purchased for our business. The property was run down and in need of extensive repair before our opening day. My son looked at me and said, "Mommy, what's that face?" This was the question he always asked when I appeared to be discouraged. "I guess I'm worried," I said. "Worried? About what?" I answered, "I'm worried about money." Tyler replied reprovngly, "Mom, don't you know life works?"*

### **Fear**

Fear of mistakes paralyzes us and causes us to mistrust our own capabilities. Rudolf Dreikurs, M.D. wrote wisely in *Children: The Challenge*:

*The importance of courage in parents cannot be overemphasized. Whenever you feel dismayed or find yourselves thinking, "My gosh, I did it all wrong," be quick to recognize this symptom of your own discouragement . . . you need the "courage to be imperfect." . . . Watch for the little improvements, and when you find them, relax and have faith in your ability to improve further.*

### **Guilt**

Guilt is completely ineffective as a behavior modifier. It takes away your self-confidence and doesn't show you how to avoid repeating the same mistake. Instead of feeling guilty about an action, think about what you will do differently next time.

*It was the ninth time Mom had asked Sara to quit running in the living room. She was getting very annoyed because Sara seemed to tune her out. So Mom spanked Sara and sent her to her room.*

*If it were to happen again, Mom decided she would ask Sara once to stop running in the living room. If she didn't, Mom would pick her up gently and take her to the family room or outside.*

## *Anger*

Anger is an honest emotion. Most parents get angry at their children. You want to learn to manage your anger and have it work for you rather than against you. Use these five steps to help you manage your anger positively.

### **ANGER MANAGEMENT**

1. ***Watch for the early warning signs of anger.*** You may get tense somewhere in your body, such as your jaw or stomach, or your hands may start to perspire. These physical signs tell you that you need to take appropriate action.
2. ***Acknowledge that you feel angry.*** It doesn't help to stuff or deny your anger. Say to yourself, "I feel angry."
3. ***Take a break to cool off.*** Count to ten, go to your room, take a walk, or otherwise remove yourself emotionally or physically from the situation.
4. ***After you have cooled off, take action.*** When you take action, you feel less like a victim and more like a person in control of her life.
5. ***Tell the person what you're angry about*** (might not be possible in some cases): "I'm angry because the kitchen is a mess."

Unlikely as it sounds, a simple statement of the problem can help solve it. Start with an "I" statement rather than a "you" statement: attack the problem, not the person. Notice that there is no name-calling, blame, or exaggeration in your simple statement of fact.

## *Resentment*

People feel resentful when they have given up something they want or when they do more than their share of the work, or carry more

than a reasonable load of responsibility. Learn to stick up for yourself. Say “No” more often and get the help you need.

### ***The day's stresses***

Determine what parts of your day are the most stressful. Take steps to counteract the toll on you. Here are some parent solutions:

*A father found it extremely stressful to go directly from work to his home where three children, all under the age of six, greeted him. So he made an agreement with his family that he would go to the gym and work out before he came home. By the time he got home, he was more relaxed and in a better frame of mind to be with his wife and children.*



*A mother of a three-year-old decided that the morning was her most stressful time. She had a horrible struggle trying to dress her daughter and was often late to work. She decided to get her daughter dressed for preschool the night before. This solved her problem.*



*A mother of a five-year-old realized she was most stressed when running errands immediately after picking up her daughter from preschool. The time was pure torture because her daughter would whine and fuss, refuse to get out of the car, and then refuse to get back in the car to go! The mother decided to take her daughter to a park and play with her for fifteen minutes before running her errands. After doing this for a week, she reported that her daughter had become more cooperative once she got her mother's full attention for a brief time.*

### ***Indecision***

When you are wishy-washy about what you want, your children may take advantage of your indecision. This experience was an eye-opener for me:

*I couldn't figure out why Tyler wasn't sleeping through the night. He was certainly old enough. He would wake me up in the middle of the night to nurse. I worked full time and I was exhausted. One night I asked myself,*

*“What might I be doing to encourage Tyler to get up in the middle of the night?” I realized nursing him at that hour was the only time in the day when I was alone with him without thinking of anything else. Part of me really enjoyed our quiet time and he obviously looked forward to it, too.*

*I decided to continue for the next thirty days with our midnight rendezvous, and then to train Tyler to sleep through the night. At the same time, I also cleared my schedule over the next month so I had more time with Tyler during the day. After thirty days, Tyler “magically” started sleeping through the night.*

Our children read our intentions. So, if you have a problem with your children, get clear about what you want to have happen. Your children will sense your clarity of mind as well as your determination to change the situation.

### ***Lack of confidence***

Many parents hold beliefs that interfere with their ability to be effective. Concern that our children always like us makes it difficult to set appropriate limits and be firm. We tend to give in to kids' pressures: “Well, all right, I'll buy you the toy if you stop crying.” Self-doubt also gets you into trouble when children challenge or threaten your control.

The desire to be indispensable interferes with our desire to raise self-reliant children. At first, we are truly indispensable. Without us, our child would not survive. However, when our children are older, we often do too much for them, either out of desire to have a role in their lives or to avoid the more difficult challenges that confront us as adults. It is easier for us to succeed in the tasks of tying shoes and getting children started on time in the morning than it is to work on our own dreams.

The belief that you must be in control will cause problems when your children threaten or challenge your need for control (as they inevitably will if this is your belief). Whenever you try to make your child do something, you're very likely to have a power struggle on your hands.

As we turn more responsibilities over to our children, it's easy

to feel as if we have been fired, or at least sent away on a long vacation. However, our task as parents is to work ourselves out of that job. We must allow our children to experience the successes and failures that teach them self-confidence and self-reliance as they grow.

### *Lack of self-reflection*

Many parenting problems are caused by personal issues that parents need to take care of, rather than their children's misbehavior. Parents need to practice parenting "from the inside out," so to speak. My children have taught me much about how to play, love unconditionally, handle anger, let go of grudges, and find joy in each day. I must have known these things in my own childhood, but have allowed the pressures of adulthood to bury them.

I use my children as my barometer to measure my inner peace. Usually they misbehave when I'm not at peace. I check in with myself (self-reflection) to see what is amiss. Sometimes I find I've been working too hard, haven't taken time for myself, or haven't spent enough time with my family.

At other times parents may find, upon self-reflection, that their children's behavior is bringing up unresolved issues from their own childhoods. I recall when my son started normal exploration of his sexuality, I was concerned and upset. What I figured out was that his behavior brought back painful memories of my childhood exploration and my own parents' intense shaming of me. Consequently, I overreacted to Tyler's normal, healthy exploration.

Have you noticed how a small child gets angry, lets off steam, and then goes on his way? Some of us learned to stuff our anger inside instead. Unacknowledged anger can lead to depression, illness, and resentment. It can surface later on as retaliation toward others. When we have learned to stuff anger, we often respond inappropriately to events and issues in our adult lives. These situations are especially likely to provoke overreaction: children fighting, anyone being angry or crying, poor grades, unfinished chores, money and eating issues. When you have trouble with any of these situations, look back to your childhood family and think about how

your parents dealt with them. What did you learn that may be getting in the way now? What do you want your children to learn from the situation that will be healthier for them?

## How to cope with the challenges

It is hard to live a joyful life when your cup is almost empty. Take responsibility for filling up that cup and demand less of others to fill it for you. Taking responsibility for your own happiness will also keep you from self-destructive behavior, such as drug addiction, over-eating, complaining, alcoholism, smoking, insufficient exercise, and illness.

### *Use calming self-talk*

One way to make your life more positive is to get rid of discouraging thoughts. I do this by repeating as many times as necessary the phrase, "I am unlimited in power, peace, and love." In time, I find that I have chased away the negative thoughts and replaced them with this positive one.

Elephants on parade in India would pull down poles and do other mischievous things with their trunks as they marched along. Their trainers discovered that if they gave the elephants short poles to carry, the animals were less disruptive. Like the elephant's pole, the repetitive, encouraging phrase can keep your mind from wandering into mischief.

### *Let go*

Another way to get rid of negative thoughts is to let go. To do this, you give a situation your best effort and then let go of the result. You can't control the result, and the more detached you are from it, the more peaceful you will be. Letting go means you trust your own or your child's innate wisdom, even when there is no visible evidence of it!