

From

Difficult

to

Delightful

in

Just 30 Days

How to Improve the Behavior
of Your Spirited Child



JACOB AZERRAD, Ph.D.

AUTHOR OF THE BESTSELLING *ANYONE CAN HAVE A HAPPY CHILD*

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JACOB AZERRAD, Ph.D.

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The case histories presented in this book are real. However, names and other details have been changed to protect privacy.

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

FOREWORD



SHORTLY AFTER THE discipline of psychology declared its independence from philosophy several hundred years ago, most of its professionals hitched their wagon to the coattails of psychiatry in an effort to better understand normal and pathological behavior. The “medical model” reigned supreme throughout the ensuing centuries. Reading the early history of this adventure, one encounters the excursions into laborious assessment strategies, along with the familiar terminology and mysterious concepts that defined much of psychiatry. Prominent among the thinking of this age is the attribution of unconscious and preconscious mechanisms to account for undesired (if not pathological) functioning, along with the genetically endowed controlling mechanisms such as traits and instincts for which there is little optimism to expect satisfactory treatment or cure.

Especially when professionals are asked to intervene on behalf of a child’s actions and behaviors, the standard fare has been to espouse the party line that there is a need to understand. There is always the hope that eventually there will arise the good fortune to “outgrow” behavior problems or that the child will luck into the cutting edge miracle drug that will finally save him or her. Technical and popular writings by experts of many colors have been advocating this message in books, articles, and appearances in the media.

Things did not get much better for many decades, at least until the miraculous advances of pharmacological medications seemed to offer an avenue of hope; no longer was the accepted explanation for inappropriate behavior to be seen as the result of inner forces and perhaps prenatal influences but rather as a biology gone wrong. This exaggerated conclusion was rather quickly shattered in the face of mounting criticism against the growing pill culture and the fostering of a drug dependence to address psychosocial functioning. Evidence of frank prescription abuse together with the failure to live up to the expected promises to cure what needed to be cured persuaded both physicians and patients to look elsewhere for help.

To be sure, many generations of clinical psychologists, psychiatrists, and other “mental health professionals” continue to champion the psychodynamic methodologies in which they were trained but perhaps with greater skepticism than their elders and mentors. Only in the relatively recent past has an acceptable alternative been proposed and a different set of treatment technologies been developed, viz. a behavioral and learning based approach.

Such an approach gained scientific respectability from the countless basic science animal studies and human experiments that culminated in a behavioral therapeutic model. Increasingly, such programs were discovered by the many suffering clients and their caregivers as rational, efficient, and welcome solution alternatives.

The hungry public that seeks solutions and remediation for the concerns they seek became a strong force in continuing the rejection of flawed therapies and mythological theories and has made impressive inroads in educating the wider audiences of health-service providers and consumers alike. One need only reflect on the striking success of television productions such as “Nanny 911”; once a learning-based environment is introduced in the seemingly complex and intertwined world of home, proper behavior can be dramatically restored in a mat-

ter of days. When parents are able to face up to their responsibilities by learning some basic parenting skills that foster learning of proper behaviors, and when the child is able to master some easily acquired repertoires, the former horror scene involving sibling, adult, and child interactions are then played out with civility and mutual respect in a seemingly magical setting.

Jacob Azerrad was trained as a traditional clinical psychologist. Over the years in his extensive practice, he became disenchanted with the dynamic approaches he had been using and discovered the behavioral approaches that he continues to use to this day. He is not only a master clinician, but he has also become an advocate for more rational and effective therapeutic strategies. With a sharp pen and a gift of wit, he has produced a most readable work that is chock-full of serious, practical, and valuable ideas for restructuring failed behavior patterns.

Such a book could only come from a therapist who has had extensive exposure to a variety of behavior problems and who has been able to achieve huge successes in dealing with his clients. It is must reading for anyone who owns a child!



DAVID MOSTOFSKY, PH.D.

Professor of Psychology

Boston University

PREFACE



IF YOU'RE THE PARENT of a difficult child and you follow the simple, commonsense steps described in this book, you will see a remarkable turnaround. In less than a month, tears will give way to smiles, tantrums will be replaced by cooperation, and "no" will turn to "yes." I've seen it happen a thousand times.

The success of this program doesn't depend on any form of medication. In fact, the reckless, unwarranted use of prescription drugs can be a huge part of the problem.

It doesn't involve blame—not for the parent, nor for the child. Blame is a just a way of explaining why something fails. This approach doesn't fail.

And it's so simple, you can do it yourself. You don't need a doctor or therapist. You don't need to have a degree in psychology or to wade through a thousand pages of mumbo jumbo.

Best of all, you don't have to wait until your child is ready for Social Security before you see the results. The results start right away.

But you've got to follow the steps. None of this happens until you make the changes described in this book. When you do, you will dramatically improve your child's life. And, of course, your own as well.

That's a promise . . . mine to make, and yours to keep.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



THERE ARE A great many individuals without whom this book would never have become a reality. The most important of these individuals is Henry Scammell. Henry has taken what I have written and transformed my words and sentences into an extremely helpful book for parents whose kids are driving them crazy and who are on the verge of giving their children medication for what in the past were considered ordinary childhood misbehaviors.

I would also like to thank my mother. She fortunately did not read the parenting books currently in print. These books all too often teach parents to protect children from the ordinary slings and arrows that are part of everyday life. Strong-willed children are believed to need a protective or “user-friendly” environment or, in reality, an “emotional bubble.” As a result, we have generations of children who have never learned to handle the ordinary disappointments of living. This book, in large part, is the product of my resilience and ability to handle disappointment and my never having experienced a “user-friendly” environment.

I would also like to thank John Aherne, my editor at McGraw-Hill, and my literary agent, Peter Rubie. They have both been extremely supportive and helpful toward the goal of making this book a reality.

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Many thanks to Susan Buckley, who has worked tirelessly on the many changes, deletions, and updates that resulted in the final manuscript. Having worked with me for well over a decade, she has responded to my many imperfections with humor and grace. Joan Curtice has also been extremely supportive and most helpful in terms of both her creative and organizational skills. She has been an invaluable source of encouragement and support long before the first words were put on paper.

Last but surely not least, I feel fortunate to have two wonderful children. To Suzanne and Jeffrey, who make it all worthwhile.

People in power have a vested interest to oppose critical thinking.

—CARL SAGAN



The tenacity with which these theories were kept alive in the analytic community . . . despite the fact that their therapeutic application did not improve the patient's condition, reflects the strength of an ideological structure disregarding clinical facts.

—AMERICAN PSYCHIATRIC ASSOCIATION, 1989

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PART ONE

HOW BEHAVIOR HAPPENS



1

WHAT DO CHILDREN WANT?



DON'T BE PUT OFF by the chapter title's paraphrase of Sigmund Freud's famous rhetorical question about women; you won't find much else that sounds like Freud in this book. The reason for that absence lies in the answer to the question. Children don't want psychiatrists or psychologists, and they don't need them. They don't need drugs. What they want and need is parents.

Why? Because all behaviors are learned. Sainthood is not a drug-induced behavior, and neither, in most cases, is brattiness. Saints learn to be saintly. Monsters learn to be monstrous. Childhood behaviors, in which all such life paths begin, cannot be prescribed by psychiatrists; they are learned, first and foremost, from the mother and father.

But parenting is learned as well, and for the last four generations many of America's parents have been taught the wrong skills. Under the misguidance of a library-full of parenting books based on Freudian concepts, parents have taken on the role of therapist, nurturing the

very behaviors that are driving them crazy. They have been encouraging children to be unhappy, fearful, needy, and difficult in their relationships with others—and the way they have been taught to do it is by rewarding just about everything their children do that is inappropriate, destructive, or self-defeating.

Now, with government intervention, the problem has taken an ominous new turn. In the past few years, the number of children on behavior-modifying drugs has skyrocketed into the tens of millions. These are not the so-called recreational contraband from far-away shores, but mainstream, mind-altering pharmaceuticals manufactured in America, prescribed by physicians, and administered by parents and school nurses across the land.

Childhood behaviors, in which all such life paths begin, cannot be prescribed by psychiatrists; they are learned, first and foremost, from the mother and father.

What's happening to the children of America? How did we come to accept this wholesale, mindless marketing of folly, not just of drugs but also of basic, causal concepts of behavior and responsibility? Who taught the parents these costly mistakes that have become so

ingrained in our culture? Why are they so counterproductive? Can they be unlearned? Is the damage reversible?

This book starts with the behavior issues that so often lead to such negative outcomes for the children—and for parents and for our culture as a whole. It offers a proven, commonsense response to the challenges and opportunities of parenting, focused on the natural, systematic nurturing of the qualities of character and maturity that author Daniel Goleman has labeled as emotional intelligence.