

HOME Improvement

The background of the cover features a man in a red long-sleeved shirt, a yellow hard hat, and a tool belt, holding a white pipe. Next to him, a woman in a blue long-sleeved shirt, a white apron, and a white hard hat is sitting on the floor. She is holding a brush. Various tools like a hammer, screwdriver, and saw are scattered around them. The background is white with faint, large-scale images of tools like a saw and a hammer.

The
*Parenting
Book*
You Can
Read
to Your
Kids

Dr. Scott Turansky  Joanne Miller, RN, BSN

■ Here's What Experts are Saying About **HOME** Improvement

*“Once again Turansky and Miller hit the mark with proven methods for effective parenting. **Home Improvement** tackles the tough issues all parents face with solid answers that can be used in any home. Scott and Joanne provide practical tips that work and are based on experience and study. If you are looking for parenting tools you can use and know will work, this is a book you need to read.”*

Chris Robinson, Executive Director
International Network of Children's Ministry

“What an amazing book to help you raise a really great kid.”

Stephen Arterburn
New Life Ministries

“A biblical, spiritually excellent, and highly practical guide for parents who desire to make powerful changes to their parenting. From cover to cover, I was delighted to find familiar principles I practiced in my own parenting during a season when my husband and I were cooperating with the Lord for our family's restoration. This book would have been a favorite had it been available to me then.”

Marilyn Howshall, author of **Wisdom's Way of Learning**
and developer of the **Lifestyle of Learning Approach**
to Home Education

■ **Maybe you'd like to be the next person to endorse this book.** Read it and start putting the principles into practice. Then, write to us and let us know what worked for you.

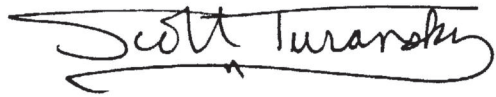


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This book is dedicated, first and above all, to the glory of God. And it is our prayer that many will find the greatest gift of all—life in Jesus Christ.

With Special Thanks

To my wife, Carrie, for her faithfulness to God and to me, and to our delightful children, Joshua, Melissa, Benjamin, Elizabeth, and Megan, who have helped us test these tools.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Scott Turansky". The signature is written in a cursive style and is enclosed within a large, horizontal, hand-drawn oval shape.

To my husband, Ed, for his unfailing support and encouragement that have been an invaluable contribution to this project, and to our wonderful sons, Dave and Tim, whose energy and enthusiasm have inspired me to continue on.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "JoAnn Miller". The signature is written in a cursive style.

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You Can Read
to Your Kids*



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The names of people who have come to Effective Parenting for counseling have been changed. Some illustrations combine individual stories in order to protect confidentiality. Stories of the authors' children have been used by permission.

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Introduction



O kay, it's your turn," my father said as he handed me (Scott) the keys to the car for the first time. With feelings of excitement coupled with fear, I slid into the driver's seat. I had spent many hours studying how to drive, memorizing speed limits, road signs, emergency procedures, hand signals, and a myriad of other helpful information. I had observed others handle themselves in the driver's seat, watched movies about driving, and listened to lectures about the habits of good drivers. Now it was my turn. I remember putting my hands on the steering wheel and wondering, *What do I do now?* That day, I realized there's a big difference between learning about driving and driving.

Parenting is a lot like that. It's one thing to read books on parenting and find yourself nodding in agreement. Somehow, though, you end up wondering what to do when your four-year-old son has a tantrum in the grocery store or refuses to eat his dinner, when your winsome daughter can't seem to keep her shoes on her feet for more than a few minutes at a time, or when your teenager disrespectfully responds to you. You wonder if all that reading and studying about parenting did any good. *What do I do now?* you ask yourself.

Raising children is one of the most challenging responsibilities a person can have, and all parents find themselves frustrated from time to time. Sometimes they're confused because they just don't know what to do. They feel like the mother who saw her three-year-old son put a nickel into his mouth and swallow it. She immediately picked him up, turned him upside down, and hit him on the back. He then coughed up two dimes. Frantic, she

called to her husband outside, “Your son just swallowed a nickel and coughed up two dimes! What should I do?”

The father yelled back, “Keep feeding him nickels!”

Don't you wish all solutions could be that easy?

Too often, parents want instant answers for problems that took weeks or months to develop. Life is demanding; pressures squeeze from every side. But good parenting isn't something we can just do during commercial breaks or while driving children to school. Worthwhile solutions require work before a challenging situation improves. Parenting is indeed a lifetime investment.

This book explains and illustrates eight tools that make parenting easier and more effective in our hectic world. Learning and applying these tools will improve your parenting, but they are not a magic formula. They will require work on your part.

In this book, you will meet Craig and Marlene, typical parents who struggle to respond to the day-to-day challenges of raising children. They've been married for nine years and have two children, eight-year-old Jennifer and four-year-old Danny. You'll identify with Craig and Marlene as you see them wanting to guide their children toward maturity—but some days they are just trying to survive. Their questions and feelings may seem familiar to you. Neither Craig nor Marlene had any formal instruction in child rearing, but they've picked up ideas along the way—some helpful and others not so helpful.

This book is divided into eight chapters, each one independent of the others. Feel free to read and reread those chapters that best meet your needs now.

The tools in these chapters have worked for many parents, and they'll work for you. So find a comfortable chair, and journey with Craig and Marlene on their parenting adventure. Who knows? You, too, may learn some things that will change your life.

Chapter 1

Encouraging Obedience Without Yelling

Danny! Stop poking your sister.” Marlene glared into her rearview mirror and tightened her grip on the steering wheel.

“She started it.” Danny, age four, turned and stuck out his tongue at Jennifer, his eight-year-old sister.

“I did not!” Jennifer scowled. “He always says it’s my fault.”

Marlene took a deep breath. Why had she thought that taking the kids grocery shopping was a good idea? All the bickering and tantrums on this ride were enough to drive her crazy. By the time she pulled into the driveway, she’d had it.

Releasing her seat belt, she stated, “Each of you grab a bag.”

“But Mom,” Jennifer whined, “I have to go to the bathroom.”

Danny jumped out of the car. “There’s Zack with his new bike!”

“Come on, kids! Bring in some groceries. You can take a minute to help.” But Danny ran off to Zack’s house, and Jennifer headed for the bathroom.

Marlene slammed the car door. “Danny, come back here!” He continued racing down the sidewalk. *They make me so mad. They never listen! It’s always the same. They ignore and disobey, and I get mad. Then they’re off having a great time, and I’m stuck feeling upset.*

She trudged up the front steps carrying two bags of groceries. *They just ignore me. Life sure would be easier if these kids*

would learn to think of someone other than themselves. I've got to do something different.

The next morning, Marlene walked into the living room. "Danny, it's time for school. Put those things away and get your coat." Danny hung over the side of the couch with an action figure in each hand, pretending he hadn't heard her.

Here we go again. Every morning's like this. I've got to drop Danny off and be at the office by nine, but getting out of this house seems to require the skills of a salesman, a drill sergeant, and a porter all at the same time.

"Come on, Danny! Put away those toys and get your backpack." She stared at his stocking feet. "Where are your shoes?"

Danny looked at his feet as if surprised that his shoes were missing. "I don't know."

"I've told you three times to get your shoes on. Just stand by the door. Don't move.... I'll go find them." Marlene dashed down the hall and looked in his bedroom. Then she glanced into the bathroom. *Yes! There's one. The other can't be far away. Ah, there it is. In the bathtub? Why can't he just put them on the first time I tell him?*

Marlene knew she'd never get to work on time now, and she hated coming in late. She used to get annoyed with people who always had an excuse for not being on time. Now, she only had one excuse. "Danny, where are you?"

"In here." Danny had dumped the race cars onto the living room floor.

"What are you doing? I told you to wait by the door." Marlene's stomach tightened as her voice rose. "Sit down." She forced her son's shoes onto his feet. "Hurry up and get into the car."

Finally, Marlene dropped off Danny and headed for work, relieved that she could take a break from kids.

Later that day, Marlene arrived at the preschool to pick up Danny and watched the class for a few minutes. The children seemed happy and content, and Mrs. Fithian calmly interacted with them as they cleaned up the classroom.

Mrs. Fithian asked Danny to put away a puzzle. Without any fuss or complaint, he picked up the pieces, plopped them into the box, and slid it back on the shelf.

Marlene's mouth dropped open. Danny obeyed—certainly more quickly than he ever did at home. In fact, Mrs. Fithian gave a few more instructions to him and the other kids, and they listened and obeyed right away. *How can she be so cheerful and get all these kids to cooperate like that?*

Marlene opened the door. "Hi, Mrs. Fithian."

"Hello. How are you doing this afternoon?"

"I really appreciate the way you interact with the children," Marlene began. "Danny responds well to you. Do the kids always listen to you like that?"

Mrs. Fithian smiled. "Well, it didn't start out this way. It took a few weeks for them to learn that I mean what I say. Now they know I only say things once, and if they don't respond, there's a consequence. It took a lot of work those first few weeks, but as you can see, the children are happy when they understand our classroom rules and know that my Action Point is pretty tight."

"Your Action Point? What's that?"

"An Action Point is the moment when I stop talking and start acting." Mrs. Fithian picked up a stack of art papers and began putting them into the children's cubbies. "Many parents are frustrated with their children for not obeying, but in essence they have taught them that they don't have to obey quickly. A tight Action Point is a tool I use to teach obedience."

"I'm not sure I understand."

“Let me ask you something. If you tell Danny to get ready for bed and he doesn’t do it, what happens next?”

“I tell him again.”

“Then what?”

“Usually I have to tell him three or four more times.”

“Does he obey then?”

“No. I usually have to raise my voice next. I don’t like to, but it seems that I have to get angry and yell at him before he takes me seriously.”

“By giving Danny several chances, you’ve taught him that he doesn’t have to obey you the first time.” Mrs. Fithian grabbed another pile of papers. “I know from our previous discussions that you’re trying to follow God’s principles in raising your family. The Bible gives many helpful insights for family life. I like Matthew 5:37, which says, ‘Let your “Yes” be “Yes,” and your “No,” “No.”’ In that passage, Jesus taught that extra words are not needed to validate our statements. We should mean what we say when we say it. I think we can apply this to our interaction with children. Danny needs to know that you mean what you say without your having to yell or repeat yourself.”

“But I tell him that he should obey me the first time.”

“Yes, parents often say that, but do you really mean it?”

“Of course.”

“Then why do you give several warnings or tell him so many times? Why don’t you follow through with a consequence right away?”

“I never thought about it that way.” Marlene paused. There was something here that she needed, but she wasn’t quite sure what it was. “Are you saying that I’ve taught Danny that he doesn’t have to listen to me right away?”

“Exactly.” Mrs. Fithian smiled. “A tight Action Point teaches children to obey your first instruction.”

Marlene glanced at her watch and realized that she needed to hurry in order to meet Jennifer's bus. "Mrs. Fithian, you've given me something to think about. Thanks for sharing this Action Point idea with me."

"Well, having a tight Action Point doesn't solve all the problems, but it does help quite a bit. I've learned a lot by working here and raising my own kids. If you want to talk some more, give me a call and we can set up a time."

"Great! I'd really like that. Thanks again." Marlene took Danny by the hand and led him out the door.

That idea makes sense, Marlene thought as she drove home. Danny waits to obey until I say something three or four times, yet he responds to Mrs. Fithian right away.

Later that afternoon, Marlene stood in the kitchen cutting carrots and peppers for the salad. Her thoughts returned to Danny's teacher and the tight Action Point.

Seeing her son's coat on the kitchen floor, she called, "Danny, please come get your coat and hang it up on the hook."

No response.

Marlene could see the kids playing on the floor in the family room. She knew he could hear her, but he wasn't moving. *I'll bet he'd move pretty quickly if Mrs. Fithian gave the instruction.*

Marlene thought again about the Action Point idea. *Just yesterday, Craig asked the kids to help him clean up around the house after dinner. And they did, without complaining or arguing.*

Last week, she remembered, her brother, Patrick, took the kids to the park near their house. When it was time to leave, she had walked up to meet them. Patrick had called the children and, although a bit reluctant, they came running. Surprised, she knew that if she had called them, the picture would have looked different. Patrick had a great relationship with the kids, and when he

gave an instruction, they listened. If they didn't, he became quite firm with them.

In contrast, Karla, the babysitter, often had trouble with Danny. Each Wednesday evening, Marlene and Craig went to their small-group meeting at church. This past Wednesday, as they were getting ready to leave, Karla told Danny several times to stop jumping and being wild. He just ignored her. Craig had to step in and speak to Danny.

Marlene's thoughts snapped back to the present as Jennifer yelled from the family room, "I'm telling Mom!"

"You make me so mad!" Danny shouted.

Marlene turned off the stove, Danny's words replaying in her mind. *You make me so mad!* Those were the very words she used when she was frustrated with them. *Is that how I sound?*

After Marlene intervened, Jennifer went outside to play.

I've got to do something different before they learn all my bad habits. Can I teach them to respond to me before I get angry? What will happen if I tighten my Action Point?

She decided to try a little experiment. She walked back into the family room where Danny sat on the rug playing with Legos. "Hey, buddy, come hang up your coat," she said quietly.

Then she slipped out of the room and peeked around the corner. Danny continued to play as if he hadn't heard. "Danny," she called calmly, "if you don't hang up your coat right now, I'm going to send you to your room."

Danny added another section to his tower, ignoring her warning. So she calmly returned to the family room. "Because you didn't obey, you need to go to your room."

Danny looked up, surprised. "But, Mom!"

"No, you didn't obey. Go to your room now."

Danny knocked over the tower and stomped down the hall. After several minutes, Marlene walked into Danny's room to

find him lying on his bed. She sat down next to him. “Why didn’t you obey me the first time I told you to hang up your coat?”

“I don’t know.” He didn’t look up.

“I think I know why. I usually tell you to do something over and over again. But that’s not good. It makes you think you don’t have to obey me right away. From now on, I’m only going to say things once, and I want you to obey the first time. Do you understand?” Marlene put her hand on Danny’s back.

“I guess.” He rolled over and sat up.

“God has given me the responsibility to teach you to obey. I’m trying to learn how to do the right things as a mom, and I want you to learn how to do the right things as a child. We need to work together in order to be the kind of family God wants us to be. Does that make sense?”

Danny nodded, and Marlene gave him a hug. “Let’s try again. I’d like to see you obey me and pick up your coat.”

“Okay.” He grinned and headed out the door.

Wow! Marlene thought. I got through that whole episode without getting upset. I like this new way of working with Danny. Tightening my Action Point can help him learn to obey more quickly and help me stop reacting with anger.



USING TOOL 1: A TIGHT ACTION POINT TEACHES PROMPT OBEDIENCE

A tight Action Point teaches the value of obedience. You don’t develop a tight Action Point just so that you can boss your kids around. There’s much more at stake here, and it has to do with character. If your children learn to obey, they’ll develop significant qualities that will carry them into successful adulthood. Part of a child’s job description is to learn to obey. In the same way that an effective boss gives a list of goals and objectives to

employees, children have things they need to learn and do as well.

When we counsel with children in our office, we like to ask, “What would you think if the mail carrier picked up trash around the neighborhood?”

“Oh, that would be nice,” kids usually say.

“But what if he wasn’t getting the mail delivered?”

“Oh, then he’d get fired.”

“That’s right,” we say. “He has a job to do: to deliver the

mail. That’s what he needs to think about. Did you know that you have a job to do? You need to focus on the job that God has given to you as a child—obedience.”

Children have a job description, and learning obedience is at the center of it. In fact, God instructed children in Ephesians 6:1, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.” God gives children the assignment to learn obedience at home because hidden within this quality are principles kids need in order to be successful in life. When children learn obedience, they learn to give up their agenda for someone else. They become skilled at doing a job without being reminded. They recognize the need to report back when they’re done. In short, obedience teaches responsibility, responsiveness to others, and cooperation—three character qualities that will strengthen children and prepare them for adulthood. Parents can teach obedience in a number of ways, but one helpful tool is using a tight Action Point.

How often have you told your child to get ready for bed and then had to say it again and again before he or she started to move? Or have you told your child to pick up toys and then



**OBEDIENCE TEACHES
RESPONSIBILITY,
RESPONSIVENESS TO
OTHERS, AND COOPERATION.**

found them still spread all over ten minutes later? How long does it take for your teenager to get off the phone or mow the lawn?

It's easy to get pretty attached to the ways in which you relate to your children, even when those ways create part of the problem. Improving your children's responsiveness often requires adjustments in you before they will make positive changes.

Step 1: Recognize the Cues You Use to Tell Your Children It's Time to Obey

The way you relate to your child is often just as important as what you say. You can change a diaper gently or in a rough way. You can put a child to bed as an item on your to-do list or with loving care. When it's time for your teenager to take out the trash, you can ask pleasantly or harshly. The difference is more than just words. The actions you use and the tone of your voice also communicate a message.

These cues reveal something to your children about your Action Point, the point when you stop talking and start acting, the point when the children know you mean business. *I always mean what I say*, you may think. But children know the difference between the first time you say it and the last time, just before you do something about their lack of responsiveness. A tight Action Point moves your action closer to the first instruction, teaching the children that when you say something, you mean it. How do they know? You give them verbal and nonverbal cues that reveal what



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you're really thinking and meaning. Perhaps you get out of the chair or start moving toward the kitchen where you keep that special utensil. Maybe you raise the pitch or volume of your voice, or use the child's middle name.

If you don't know the cues that tell your kids when it's time to obey, ask them. "I've noticed," you might say, "that I have to tell you several times before you respond to me, but then you do. How do you know when I mean business?" It's surprising how insightful kids are.

One dad said, "I know now that my Action Point has to do with my intensity. Somehow my children learned that when my voice gets loud, they better get moving. I didn't even realize it until I began to watch *when* my kids actually responded. I started experimenting and saw that if I increased my volume the first time, they listened. I was shocked. I'm not sure I want my intensity to be the signal, but I now understand what my kids have known all along: I'm giving them cues to know when I'm serious."

The important thing about an Action Point is that it helps children understand when they must obey, and they know that they don't have to obey until then. Furthermore, each person who disciplines children has different Action Points. The rules are a little different in the classroom, for example, than they are on the playground or in the home. That's why when Dad says it, the child may jump into action, but with Mom that same child may not respond as quickly. Kids may take advantage of babysitters who often have loose Action Points.

Think about what it was like in your family growing up. What were the cues your mother or father used that let you know that you had better obey? "They used my full name." "My dad moved toward me." "My mom just gave me that look, and I knew I'd better do it." These are the types of cues we're considering.

What is the interaction like in your family today? If you were able to watch the patterns you and your children have developed, what would you see?

Step 2: Eliminate Negative Cues

For many parents, anger is a primary Action Point. Dad or Mom gets angry, and kids get moving. A raised voice or angry look communicates that action is imminent. Anger, however, can be a destructive emotion, causing more damage than good to the relationship. The trade-off isn't worth it. You may get prompt obedience by yelling at your kids, but you lose the closeness that's possible in your family.

Sometimes a mother will say to us, "You don't understand my kids. They won't respond unless I get angry." We believe she's right, but her children respond that way because she has trained them to. Her kids wait until they see her anger before responding.

Allowing anger to motivate your Action Point is a short-term solution. It says, "I want to solve this problem right now, and I don't care how it will affect our relationship." The parent who uses anger is a bit like the foolish woman in Proverbs 14:1: "The wise woman builds her house, but with her own hands the foolish one tears hers down." It takes intentional work to move away from anger to more productive cues, but you will achieve better results, your children will be happier, and you will preserve your relationship.

Your anger isn't all bad, though. When you become angry at your children's lack of obedience, we suggest that you use your anger as a flag to remind yourself that your Action Point



**ANGER IS GOOD
FOR IDENTIFYING
PROBLEMS, BUT
NOT GOOD FOR
SOLVING THEM.**

is not tight enough. You've allowed a situation to progress far beyond where it should be, and your anger has finally motivated you to take action. The next time you get angry with a child, step back and ask yourself, *Is this one of those times when I should have taken action sooner?* Anger is good for identifying problems, but not good for solving them.

Once you've determined that you no longer want to respond in anger, you can choose new motivational cues. Think of some consequences that can provide the motivation instead of your disapproval or intensity. You might say to a five-year-old, "I've told you once to get your pajamas on. If you don't respond right now, I will pick you up and dress you myself." Or say to ten-year-old Jimmy, "If you don't come in right now, you're going to have to go to bed a half hour earlier tonight."

Step 3: Explain Your New Action Point to Your Children

The next step is to explain the new plan to your children. You don't want to surprise and confuse them; you want to train them. An Action Point determines the rules of the game for parent and child. If you try to change an Action Point without explanation, your children may feel hurt and resentful. Although you have never clarified it before, you have taught your children to respond the way they do. If you're going to change the rules, talk to your children about what you're doing. They will learn to respond to your Action Point as well as to the Action Points of other people.



**IF YOU'RE GOING
TO CHANGE THE
RULES, TALK TO
YOUR CHILDREN
ABOUT WHAT
YOU'RE DOING.**

One single mom had a meeting with her two boys, ages nine and eleven. "Boys," she said, "I see a pattern in our relationship that needs to change. I

think that I've taught you to respond slowly when I give you an instruction. I now know that God expects you to respond quickly. From now on, I'm going to ask you only once to do something. If you don't respond, I'm going to act with some kind of consequence. This may be a difficult pattern to change for all of us, but it's very important for you to develop the character quality of obedience."

Just as in the earlier illustration, Marlene needed to explain her new Action Point to Danny, you need to do the same. In fact, if you are married, both you and your spouse need to do this. If Mom works hard to teach the children when to obey, this will do little to change their responsiveness to Dad. He must do his own work to teach the kids his cues for his Action Point and the responses he expects.

Step 4: Train Yourself to Respond to Disobedience More Quickly

A tight Action Point means that you will give an instruction, sometimes offer a warning, and then immediately follow through. Don't give an instruction, then a warning, warning, warning, warning, warning, warning, and finally explode. Children know these relational patterns. It's like a game, and they know how to play it better than we do.

So, when you start tightening your Action Point, don't give instructions ten minutes before it's time to eat. You may give your child a warning that dinner will be in a few minutes, but don't give the instructions to wash hands until it's actually time to do it.

Train yourself to respond to disobedience more quickly by giving cues when you want action. It will take some thoughtfulness and self-discipline on your part, but the work you do here will be worth it. If you want your children to be self-disciplined and respond to your instruction the first time, then you need to be self-disciplined and tighten your Action Point.

This tip is particularly helpful for single parents. We know that single parents usually have even less time and energy for repeating instructions and trying to persuade their children to obey. Some parents are so tired by the end of the day that they fall into the trap of not following through at all. Unfortunately, children then learn that they don't have to respond to Mom's or Dad's words and just ignore the instruction.



**LEARNING TO
RESPOND
QUICKLY TO
DISOBEDIENCE
TAKES PRACTICE.**

One dad asked his nine-year-old daughter, Denise, several times to come down from the den to clean up the patio. He raised his voice and made several more pleas, but she continued to watch TV, saying, "In a minute," or "I'm coming,"

with her eyes still glued to the TV.

Finally, he went to the den and clicked off the TV.

"That's not fair!" Denise exclaimed angrily.

"What do you mean 'Not fair'? I must have asked you six times."

She looked up at him, "Yeah, but how do I know when you really mean it?"

Few children are that honest, but that's what's really going on inside their heads. They are simply thinking, *I think Dad [or Mom] is going to want me to come downstairs soon. I can tell because he's mentioned it a few times. I need to be on the lookout so I know when he really means it.*

Learning to respond quickly to disobedience takes practice—for you *and* your child. Practice is important. Give children many opportunities to obey as they're learning the new Action Point. Practice in places and at times when you can work through the process. During our seminars, we're often asked "the grocery store question." It usually goes something like this:

“What should I do if my child acts up in the grocery store?” Using an Action Point well is a skill that requires practice, but it’s best to practice in controlled places. The grocery store isn’t the place to practice. It’s the final exam. If you practice enough at the park and at home, your children will respond properly in the difficult places, too. Children need to see what the changes are and that they’re truly going to last.

Step 5: Use Your Action Point Regularly and Consistently

Children will occasionally test your Action Point to see if it’s still in place. Don’t disappoint them. Firm boundaries provide security. We sometimes find that children obey quickly at home, but don’t listen out in public. They sometimes believe that the rules of the game are somehow suspended outside the house. They’ve been watching, and they know that their parents, for one reason or another, won’t follow through right away. In public, their parents use sweet voices instead of the firm ones that work at home, or the parents give several warnings when others are around instead of disciplining right away.

Don’t let the fact that you’re in public deter you from enforcing a tight Action Point. It’s worth it to stop what you’re doing and teach obedience. You may feel uncomfortable or even a little embarrassed, but it’s important for both you and your children to learn how to respond in any environment.



**UNTIL YOUR CHILDREN
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The telephone may be another indicator to your child that rules of the game are temporarily suspended. One mom said, "When I get on the phone, my children fight or get wild. My son complains and whines in ways he never does otherwise." It's amazing how smart kids are. They know if their parents will respond more slowly when on the phone. It's a great opportunity to test the limits to see what Mom or Dad will do.

The solution during these moments, of course, is to teach children that obedience training is more important than looking good in public and more valuable than finishing a phone conversation. Until your children understand obedience, stop what you're doing and show them that your Action Point is tight no matter what the circumstances may be. If obedience is important to you, it will become important to your children also. So be consistent with your children in using Action Points. It's hard work, but your family will reap many benefits in the end.

Step 6: Offer Deserved Praise Liberally

As you work on your Action Point, remember that a tight Action Point works in a positive way, too. Immediate praise for work well done is very motivating. Offer much praise to a child who obeys quickly. It's very important to catch children doing the right thing. Not only do you want to affirm behavior, but you want to encourage the character development that you see. Use phrases such as "You're becoming very obedient" and "I like the way you're learning to obey." Praise goes a long way in building good habits.

In some families, kids learn that if they wait long enough, Mom or Dad will sweeten the deal with some kind of bribe. After repeating an instruction several times, Mom might say, "If you get in the car quickly, I'll let you choose the music we listen to." Or, "If you come to dinner now, you can watch a video later." Or, "If we leave the park now, we'll go get some

ice cream.” Why would children obey the first time when they know that waiting will bring some kind of reward?

There’s nothing wrong with anticipating positive benefits, but if that’s the only way you can motivate your children to action, you are not teaching them obedience. You are simply encouraging their selfishness by promising another benefit if they do what you want them to do.



**A TIGHT ACTION
POINT IS A WAY OF
ALLOWING LIFE TO
TEACH THE DIFFICULT
LESSONS THAT BRING
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IN A TEEN’S LIFE.**

Applying Action Point to Specific Challenges

Teenagers

The concept of an Action Point is important for teenagers, too. As children get older, discipline changes. Teens are in that God-given stage when they are choosing values and applying them to life. For this reason, teenagers often need more dialogue and fewer demands. Does that mean that a tight Action Point is only for young children? No. A tight Action Point is helpful for the teen who can’t keep his word, is lazy, or is irresponsible.

A tight Action Point is a way of allowing life to teach the difficult lessons that bring about character in a teen’s life. For example, if your daughter is ignoring her responsibilities or being unkind to others in the family, she needs to experience the consequences of her actions. After all, a boss won’t tolerate rudeness or disrespect. If we’re preparing our children for life, why should we tolerate this in our homes? A tight Action Point helps teens grow up more quickly and address weaknesses that are hindering their success.

Divided-household Parenting

Single parents are often frustrated by the fact that the other parent disciplines differently: “My son goes away for the weekend, and it takes him several days to recover when he returns.” (Actually, it’s not just a single-parent problem. Sometimes parents in traditional families say the same thing: “I do well with my daughter during the day, but when Dad comes home, things tend to fall apart.”) A number of factors contribute to this dilemma, but a tight Action Point can be part of the solution. Because kids learn how to respond to each adult, you are not dependent on another parent’s actions in order to build healthy routines with your children.

Ideally, it’s best for both parents to discipline their kids in a similar way. But when that isn’t possible, the extra effort you spend developing correct patterns of relating with your children will pay off. It’s especially helpful in these situations, though, to explain why you respond the way you do. In the face of accusations of meanness or strictness, you might say, “I am making choices about how to relate to you, and I choose to respond this way because I know what will make you successful in life. I’m trying to teach you how to obey because, when you learn obedience, you learn many other skills that will help you to be a successful person. I’m not just disciplining you because you irritate me or to get a job done. I’m disciplining you because I want you to develop the character you need as you get older.”

Helping Your Children Obey Others

After your children have learned to obey you, take time to teach them how to obey others. Your instructions have become clear cues that you mean business, and your children know it. Unfortunately, other adults don’t always know how to give instructions. Attempting to be kind and gentle,

for instance, they may give instructions that your children perceive to be suggestions. One mom said, “The Sunday school teacher told me that my son wouldn’t obey her when it was time to clean up or line up. I stood by the door and watched the next week, and I realized why. The teacher would say, ‘Jerry, can you clean up now?’ or ‘Jerry, would you like to line up at the door, please?’ I realized that Jerry was hearing these as options, not as instructions.”

In this case, Mom sat down with Jerry and explained what she saw. “Jerry, Mrs. Mathers feels like you don’t obey her at Sunday school. I can see that she has a different way of telling you what to do. Here’s what I want you to do. When Mrs. Mathers says, ‘Jerry, do you want to come over to circle time?’ what you need to hear is me saying, ‘Jerry, come over to circle time now!’ You need to learn to obey Mrs. Mathers even if she gives instructions differently than I do.”

Mom could try to change Mrs. Mathers, but this is a great opportunity to teach Jerry more about following instructions. He needs to understand that different people do things differently, and he needs to recognize an instruction even if it’s disguised as a question, suggestion, or opinion. Once you’ve worked on creating a tight Action Point in your home, your children will be able to transfer what they’ve learned to other places.

It’s Worth It

A child’s job description is to learn obedience. Your job as a parent is to teach it. It takes time and effort, but it’s well worth the sacrifice. As you work to tighten your Action Point, you can now see acts of disobedience as significant opportunities to teach your children about self-control and responsiveness to authority. Teaching obedience is important, and a tight Action Point is a great place to start.

Here's a quick summary of Action Points:

- ❑ An Action Point teaches children when they must obey.
- ❑ Action Points vary among people who discipline.
- ❑ Children learn to respond to each person's Action Point.
- ❑ Being consistent with a tight Action Point is hard work, but it's worth it in the end.
- ❑ There are six steps to creating an effective Action Point.
 1. Recognize the cues you use to tell your children it's time to obey.
 2. Eliminate negative cues.
 3. Explain your new Action Point to your children.
 4. Train yourself to respond to disobedience more quickly.
 5. Use your Action Point regularly and consistently.
 6. Offer deserved praise liberally.


DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR CHAPTER 1

1. Why do we teach children obedience?
2. Read 1 Samuel 15:22. According to this verse, what does God think about obedience?
3. Describe some examples from the Bible where God demonstrated a tight Action Point.
4. What are the advantages and disadvantages of using anger to motivate your Action Point?
5. What are some cues that indicate you are about to get to your Action Point, and how long does it take for you to reach it?
6. How can we balance a tight Action Point with the biblical concept of grace as we discipline our children?

Home Improvement

*The Parenting Book
You Can Read
to Your Kids*

Dr. Scott Turansky and Joanne Miller, RN, BSN lead the National Center for Biblical Parenting and speak nationwide on issues related to parenting.



Scott and his wife Carrie have five children and two grandchildren. He has a unique practical, biblical approach to helping families.

Joanne and her husband Ed have two sons. As a pediatric nurse, public speaker, and author, Joanne helps parents reach past behavior to the hearts of their children.



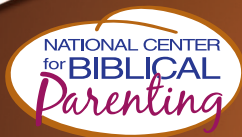
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— frustrated mom of three

This book contains eight principles every family needs. You’ll learn practical, hands-on ideas for helping your kids deal with their anger, constructive ways to end discipline times, and keys that will help children change their hearts, not just their behavior. Turansky and Miller offer tried and true strategies in a refreshingly new family-friendly format.



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