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**Presentation Transcript**  
**Character for Kids**  
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What do we want for our children? I was working with a family not long ago who had a thirteen-year-old son. And he's really intelligent. He's really witty. He's quite popular. In fact, he's the class clown. But he's failing the seventh grade. He's an underachiever. He could do the work, but he just won't do his homework. He's gotten in that habit of just not doing it. He won't bring home his agenda. You know, they have these things called *agendas* now that the kids have to fill all their homework in, and he's supposed to take it home everyday, which he doesn't, so they don't know whether he has any or not. And he's been telling them that he doesn't have any homework. He plays on the basketball and the football teams. He says that he wants to become a professional athlete, so he doesn't need to study. I mean, it just makes sense, doesn't it? Of course, he's driving his parents crazy because they're afraid he's going to fail. And they've tried all kinds of things, but he just stubbornly refuses to do *any* of his homework. And they've even talked about putting him in special ed. They're very afraid that he's just going to develop that character habit. And it *is* a character issue to them.

It reminds me of a proverb. It's Proverbs 20:11. It says:

**Prov. 20:11** – *Even a child is known by his actions, by whether his conduct is pure and right.* We think about people's character as adults, but we all know what kids are like. We know certain kids that are doing really well and others that aren't. And that's how we think about them.

So, even as little kids, we start to develop a reputation among other people. And all of us, as parents, we want our kids to grow up and have a good reputation. We want them to become responsible, hardworking people of character, don't we?

Kids don't come that way, do they? They don't know anything. They don't want to get up in the morning, and then they don't want to go to bed at night. They don't want to brush their teeth. They don't want to bathe. They want to eat sugary foods instead of vegetables. They don't know anything about appreciation or manners. They don't know anything about empathy for other people. They don't know about cause and effect – you

know, if you do this, that's going to happen. They don't know about that. They don't know that they will have to work to live. They think that everything just comes, because that's been their experience as they're growing up. They don't know any of the things that they're going to need to be responsible adults.

I was talking to my boss at the clinic the other day. One of the interns has a three-year-old son. And my boss and his wife went out to dinner with the intern and her husband and their three-year-old son. And he came back and was telling me that he and his wife were talking on the way home from the restaurant, and they were saying that they'd forgotten how hard it is to socialize with a child. You know, they're always working on this, working on that, and teaching them this and teaching them that. "No, you shouldn't say that," and "Use this fork." Very difficult. A lot of work.

How do we teach children all the things that they need to know so they can grow up and be people of character and have good reputations?

Let's go to another Proverb. This kind of reiterates the point I was making earlier. Proverbs 22:15. It says:

**Prov. 22:15** – *Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far from him.*

So, yeah, folly is bound in the heart of a child. They come without knowing much about how the real world works, so they tend to do things that are kind of foolish.

I had a boy that I was working with a while back – a fifth-grader – who would lie to his mother even though the evidence to the contrary was right in front of him. It was foolish, because he knew she was going to punish him. But he couldn't think of a good answer, so he'd just tell a lie even though the evidence was right there. That's foolishness.

Now, it says, "The rod of discipline will drive that far from children." But today, it's increasingly difficult to spank children, isn't it? And have you ever noticed that kids *know* when we can't – you know, like at the grocery store or a restaurant. Plus, if we spank kids when they're older, it causes a lot of other problems. There's sort of a narrow window where spanking works. If you spank them too young, they don't understand what's happening, and it makes them anxious. If you spank them when they get older, then all it does is make them angry.

**Eph. 6:4** – *And you fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and the admonition of the Lord.* That's kind of another way of saying, "If you want to bring your children up to be people of character, and know the truth of God, and to be converted Christians, then you better not make them angry while you're raising them up, because they'll turn away from what you believe and from you as they get older." And spanking does make teenagers and most elementary-age kids – especially the older ones – angry and resentful.

We have to learn other ways to work with our children that get the job done. So, how do we help our kids grow up into adults who have character and have a relationship with God? There are lots of aspects of parenting that have to be in place before children can thrive. And I'm only going to talk about *one* of them today. I'll talk about all of them eventually, but we're going to start with the issue of character development.

We just read a scripture that tells us that character is connected with the way we discipline them. We're going to show you how *we* teach parents to get kids to do what they want them to do without spanking them. And we're talking about kids from about four on through teenage.

Who do you suppose is the most effective parent? Well, that would be God. Right? He's our Father. So, how does God teach *us* what He wants us to know? He does tell us a lot of things, doesn't He? He tells us what to do to be safe, happy, healthy and successful in life, doesn't He?

I was watching TV a while back and there was a gentleman who came on one of these religious programs and said that he read the book of Proverbs – one chapter a day – for two years. Now, there's thirty proverbs – or thirty-one – so, he read the book of Proverbs twenty-four times in two years if he read a chapter a day. The result of that, he said, was he became a multi-millionaire. He said that there's all kinds of information in Proverbs about how to be a success in life. I think the point was, if you're always reading it, reading it, reading it, then stuff happens and you make the connection between what's happening in your life and what you're reading in the book of Proverbs. And you know what to do then.

God does tell us all the things that we need to know to be happy and healthy and successful, just like we want our kids to be. How does He tell us these things? Well, we just talked about it. The proverb says, "The word of God is the lamp that lights the way for us," so we can learn those things, doesn't it?

Let's go to Proverbs 1:7 and take a look at one of those Proverbs. Here is a father talking to his son, and he says:

**Prov. 1:7** – *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline. Listen, my son, to your father's instructions, and do not forsake your mother's teaching.* And then follows – that's the first chapter, right? Verse 7 and 8. Then follows a set of instructions through the next thirty chapters on how real life works. So it's written from a father to a son.

So what that tells us is, that parents are to teach their children how to be successful in life. We're responsible to show them how it works.

Let me give you an example of how this works. Let's go to Proverbs 12:4.

**Prov. 12:4** – *A wife of noble character is her husband's crown, but a disgraceful wife is like decay in his bones.* You know, a disgraceful wife is like what? Bone cancer? It's also true of husbands, by the way. What does this tell us about life? Well, what it tells us is, that you should take care when selecting somebody to marry. That's what it tells us. This is a high-stakes decision. And if we make a good choice, then we're going to be *much* happier than if we make a poor choice.

Okay, so God's teaching us that out of the Bible and our parents should teach us those things. And then, after God teaches us that – very carefully and very thorough – what does He do? Does He nag at us incessantly so that we never forget? Does He force us down a narrow path – kind of like a cow that you're getting ready to process at the butcher shop or the...what would we call that? Come on, all you ranchers. ...the meat packing plant. Thank you very much. No, He doesn't do that. He then, after He tells us what the rules are, He lets us make our own choices and learn from the choices that we make, doesn't He? He gives us free will. How much would we learn if He actually provided a good mate for all of us? Nothing. Probably wouldn't even appreciate it. See, it's through making our own choices that we learn what works and what doesn't.

I read a proverb that says, "Rebuke not the scorner." For some reason I thought that applied to everybody but me, and I tried to do that. And guess what happened? I got scorned! I mean, that's how it works, isn't it? God tells us what to do, and then He lets us learn from our experience. Bad choices in life bring incredibly painful consequences, don't they?

I worked with a sixteen-year-old who couldn't tell the difference between reality and hallucination – mentally ill. He can't go to school. He can't work. He can't be around his infant son. He can't carry on a normal conversation at certain times of the day. He can't leave his house without anxiety. He can't sleep at night without terrible dreams. He's terrified that he's going to lose touch with reality. And at one time, he was a normal kid. But his mother left him to himself. He lives with his sister, who is just a few years older than he is. And they did all the drugs they could do. He joined a gang. He got post-traumatic stress disorder from all the terrible things that he saw and did there. And he was wracked with guilt. And he suffered brain damage from all the bad things that were done to him. You know, you can only get hit in the head with a bat so many times before it starts to affect you. Short of a miracle, he's never going to get to live a normal life. That's sad, isn't it? But who made all those choices?

Free choice is the only way to develop maturity and character in people. God is so insistent and so determined to build character in us that He's willing to let a lot of bad things happen so that we can learn.

That sixteen-year-old...I think he's going to have to be healed mentally before he can go on to become justified and sanctified. I think he's set up for the second resurrection, when all the broken-hearted people will be healed and then have a chance, because he's certainly not going to get it now.

So all the terrible things that we see in the world – all the pain, all the anguish of heart – all that’s present with us because God has allowed us to make our own choices about things – and we make a lot of bad, hurtful decisions. And God is willing to put us through all that so that we can understand what works and what doesn’t spiritually, so that we can become committed to God’s way of life, because we learn that that’s the only way that works.

Choices equal character building. Right? So, wouldn’t it make sense then, that if we teach our kids the right way, and then we let them make choices, that that would help them build character, too? Well, it actually *would* make sense. And it actually *does* work. And that’s the kind of parenting that we teach people all about. But there is one caveat. It doesn’t work to tell a three-year-old, standing at the curb, to stay out of the street because they could get run over, and then go in and read the paper. Because a three-year-old isn’t ready for that kind of choice yet, is he or she? So, parents have to control the exposure to choices, based on the child’s ability to make them.

So, everything that I talk to you about today should be set in your mind in an environment of age appropriateness. I’ll be talking about different things, and some of them will work for four-year-olds and some won’t. Some will work for teenagers, but not elementary-aged kids.

So what we’re going to talk about right now is the *use of consequences* to learn lessons about life. A consequence is just something that happens as a result of what you do. Getting an A on a test is a consequence of studying. Right? All consequences don’t have to be bad.

Now, the first kind of consequence that we talk to parents about is a *natural* consequence. What is that? Well, almost everything we do has a natural consequence to it. If I don’t get enough sleep, then I’m going to be tired the next day. That’s just how it works. If I don’t wear my coat in the winter time, I’m going to be cold. That’s just how it works. Tired and cold are unpleasant, so I’ve learned from these two natural consequences to get enough sleep and to wear a coat when it’s cold out. Nobody had to teach me that. I just figured that out for myself. It took me a long time about the coat, but I finally did learn that.

When you’re a parent, there’s no need for any action on your part when there’s a pretty immediate, natural consequence to things. Kid forgets his lunch money...if they go hungry a couple times, then they’ll get it. No need to take it to them. Right? They can figure it out for themselves. What happens if you take it to them? They don’t learn the lesson. They’re prevented from building character. What if your child forgets to take their lunch money? Well, they go without lunch, maybe, unless they can weadle it out of somebody else. Right? So then they have to pay back. If they’re smart enough to do that, then that’s okay. Nobody likes to beg stuff from other people, so that’s a consequence, too, isn’t it?

Here are some other ones that I’ve seen in my experience. A lady told me she was busy watering a house plant. (I think I’ve mentioned this example before.) And she looked in

it, and there was her kid's little computer game. She pulled it out soaking wet, tried the button and it wouldn't work anymore. It was ruined. She handed it to her son, who was looking at it with this horror-stricken look – he put it in there (who knows why kids do stuff like that). She handed it to him, and said, "I'm so sorry that your computer game got wrecked." Didn't buy him a new one. Didn't yell at him. Just gave it back to him the way it was.

I have another young guy that I'm working with, who blew up one on these hard mail boxes. He made a homemade bomb – told me how to make it – and it blew the front and the back off of the hardened mail box – both doors – the little one and the great big one that's on the back side. We were talking about that experience, and I think that earned him a trip to the D home, where he got to see what it was like to live with the other kids that do things like that. And he did not like that at all. So he's trying to figure out now how to stay out of the D home. I was asking him if he had a plan, and he said, "Yeah." He said, "You know, I have some friends, and there's this one kid that I hang out with that, and he *always* gets in trouble. And then there's another one who *never* gets in trouble. And then there's me. Sometimes I do if I'm with the kid that always gets in trouble. And there's this other guy, who...it just depends on who he's with, too." And he said, "We went to Cosco the other day. The two of us that always get in trouble, we decided we better stay outside, because.... So, the guy that never gets in trouble went in with the guy who always does. And the guy who always gets in trouble tried to stick a carton of cigarettes down his pants and walk out. He got caught." So pretty soon an assistant manager comes out to them, and says, "I think you better leave. Your two friends just got caught shoplifting cigarettes." So he said, "So I think that's going to work for me. All I have to do is stay away from people that can get me in trouble." That's pretty good! That's a good lesson. Good thought.

What was really funny was, one of the people that works at our clinic also works at Cosco, and she told me about that story, not knowing that my client was one of the ones sort of involved there. So, when he told me that had happened, I said, "Yeah, I already heard about that." And he just about fell off the couch. It was pretty hilarious. But I'm pleased with him. He has the ability to start learning cause and effect. If you hang around with people that are always in trouble, it's going to rub off on you. You're going to get in trouble with them. So that's good.

I was talking to another little guy the other day – I think he's a fifth grader – and he was telling me that he got a hundred percent plus three on his spelling test. And I said, "What does that mean?" And he said, "Well, they always have three bonus questions." I said, "That's kind of like extra credit?" And he said, "Yeah." He said, "I got them *all* right." I said, "How did you do that?" He said, "Well, I used to always get Fs on my spelling, so I just started writing the words ten times each the night before the test." He said, "Works every time." He's got it! He understands what to do. Right? He's learning.

But those are all examples of natural consequences that occur. If you bomb mailboxes, it's a federal offense, and you're going to wind up in jail eventually. If you leave your computer in a potted plant, and your mother waters everyday, it's going to get wet. It's

going to ruin it. Just kind of like the sun going up and down. It just happens. You don't have to do anything. It just takes care of itself.

What's a *logical consequence*? A logical consequence is an artificially created consequence that fits the situation. Everybody who brushed their teeth this morning gets dessert tonight. So, what does that teach you to do if you want dessert? You're going to start brushing your teeth. Right? Now, what is the *natural* consequence of not brushing your teeth? Teeth can fall out. Get bad breath. We had a kid when I was in middle school we called "fungus fang." He hadn't brushed his teeth in so long, they were actually green. I mean, all those things come into play there. But, if you don't want your kid to be called "fungus fang" at school, you can say something like, "Everybody who brushed their teeth this morning gets dessert tonight." Now, what is the *logic* there? Well, the logic is, that sugar is bad for our teeth, but those people who are taking care of their teeth can get by with eating some once in awhile. That's the logic. It's connected.

They've done a lot of research on this, and they know that if the consequence logically connects to the behavior it's trying to extinguish, the kids have a much better chance of getting it. "If you don't brush your teeth, I'm going to take your cell phone away." Well, that might work, but it doesn't connect. It's not related to the behavior. What we're trying to do is teach our kids.... When we talk about teaching them about character, we're really talking about teaching them about cause and effect. You know, if you do this, then that's going to happen. So, if the consequence logically connects to the thing that they're doing that we don't like – or that we like, depending – then they have a much better chance of understanding it and getting the lesson.

"Feel free to watch TV after you've done your homework." Work first, then play. You know, if you start watching TV right away, then you probably won't quit. So there's a definite connection between TV and homework, because they both take time. Right?

If a teenager is cursing at their parent, and the parent grounds them for a week, what connection is there between those two things. It might get them to stop, but there's a lot easier way to do it than that. "I don't like you talking to me like that. Please go away until you can be respectful." And every time that happens, you just do that – and just keep doing it, doing it, doing it – and it logically fits, doesn't it? And what's the lesson? If you're always trash talking people, they're not going to like you. I mean, that's true, isn't it? It certainly is. So, that's a good way to deal with that. People don't like to be around us if we swear at them.

And there's always the people that are out sitting in the audience, when we talk about these things, that say, "Well, that's not enough punishment for disrespect." It's not any punishment. It's not any punishment at all. This isn't about punishment. It's about getting them to *stop* swearing. That's what it's about. So, we have to ask that hard question. Are we trying to teach them to be respectful? Or are we trying to get even with them? Is it punishment or education? Vengeance or character building?

I have another thirteen-year-old – we seemed to be plagued with thirteen-year-olds right now – who won't do his schoolwork either. This is another one. And he's been spending his evenings on the phone. His parents said, "Feel free to talk on the phone after you do your homework" – just like we taught them. And this kid is really smart – or really stubborn – so he rushes through his homework, or he doesn't bring it home – doesn't bring his agenda home – and says, "I don't have any," so then he's free to talk on the phone. So that wasn't working. So they told him that he could not talk on the phone until his grades went up. Well, that could be a whole semester to wait, or it could be the six-week grading period, but what they did – we engineered this thing so that it would be more effective – he has to have his agenda signed every Friday by every teacher, and there's even a plus or a minus by their name. And that means he either improved or he got worse. Let's see, somebody, I think, said he'd put a zero in there if he'd stayed the same. But it's got to be all pluses. And if he gets his agenda home on Friday with all pluses and all signatures, he gets to talk on the phone for the next week until the grading period comes up again.

So, what's the connection there between the phone and the homework? Well, the phone was taking up homework time. Right? So, that's the logical connection. Do you see how that works? He has a very short-term reward, and he knows that he has to work all that week to keep the phone. And if he doesn't, bang. It's gone again. So he's got to work really hard that week to get it back. So either way, he's working hard all the time. If he slacks off, the phone's gone. He's has to work to keep it. Has to work to get it back.

Kids fighting in the back seat of the car while you're driving them. They know that you can't take your hands off the wheel. Right? So how do you deal with that? Well, I know this one parent who said, "You guys are getting pretty hot back there. Why don't you get out of the car and cool off." Once they got out, she rolled down the window and said, "I'll be waiting for you at the corner," and drove away, parked up the street and they had to walk to catch up. So, okay, what's the connection? Well, you guys are getting hot back there. It's unpleasant. We don't like to hear it. You guys are in too close a quarters fighting. So, get out. Cool off. And then walk to catch up. Logical. It's not natural. It's logical.

I had a little guy whose mother would pick him and his little sister up everyday from school, and then they would stop at the grocery store to buy the food they were going to eat that night. And sometimes he wouldn't get in the car. He was in the second grade, and he wouldn't get in the car. She said, "This is all just about power. He knows he's got me. I can't catch him. I can't leave him there" – because you wouldn't want to leave your kid in a public place like that unattended. "What am I going to do?" I said, "Well, you've got to win this. So what *are* you going to do?" Well, what we figured out was, that he would be hungry, because he hadn't had dinner yet. So, I instructed her to lock him out of the car, call a friend on a cell phone and order all his favorite fast food dinners, and have her deliver it to the car, and they sat in there and ate it while he watched. Pretty soon he was really wanting to get in. And when he did, he got fed. That only had to happen one time, and he gave up on that.



Now, this is a real-life experience from *my* past. My good friend, Bryce, was rolled out of the car about twelve-thirty at night by his friends onto his front yard, nearly unconscious drunk. And early in the morning he woke up in his own vomit, shivering and dehydrated. He staggered into the house, went to bed. In the morning, he couldn't find his wallet. He thought he'd been robbed. After he got his new driver's license and all his new credit cards and all that stuff, his parents gave him his wallet back. See, you have to put the pieces.... They knew he was out there on the lawn. They went out and got his wallet and left him in the yard! I don't think, while I knew him, that he ever got that drunk again.

Okay, so, those are logical consequences that you create when there is no immediate natural consequence. That's probably the core of the whole program – how it works. And the reason I like it is because it's just what God does. It's just exactly what God does to us. He has all these consequences and we have to learn by how things work out.

I want to talk to you about why “go away” is better than grounding when the kid is your son who is talking disrespectfully to you. Let's go to Ecclesiastes 8, and verse 11.

**Ecc. 8:11** – *When the sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out, the hearts of the people are filled with schemes to do wrong.* So the Bible makes a connection between the speed at which a sentence is carried out to what we learn from it. There's been a lot of studying done about spanking, and they've found out that it's most effective when a little kid is caught *in the act* doing something they shouldn't do – and they get swats for it right then. Doesn't work as well if you wait till later.

So, when your son is talking disrespectfully to you, and you right then say, “I don't like this. Go away until you can be more respectful,” it's immediate. And if it's consistently done, then it's what you really need to solve the problem.

I think I might have talked before about the rat in the cage that's being conditioned to touch the blue button and not to touch the red one – just an experiment about behavior. Every time he touched the red one, he got a very mild electric shock. And every time he touched the blue one, a little yummy rat treat rolled down a little chute for him to eat. So how long do you think it took him to learn that he could touch the blue one all he wanted and he should never touch the red one?

Now, notice, a lot of people think, “Well, this kid's being real disrespectful. He needs to be grounded *forever!*” Well, that isn't really what works. And I'm going to explain to you why. When they give that rat a shock, they don't electricute him. There wouldn't be any learning there – just kill him. They don't shock him until he's unconscious for an hour. They just give him the mildest little shock. And what that does is, it gives him lots of chances to learn. Red, blue. Red, blue. Red, blue. He just keeps going and finally he figures out you get the rat treats from the blue one, not the red. And that's the way kids learn, too. So, if you have a kid that's being disrespectful to you, and you just tell them to go somewhere else until they can be nicer *every* time, eventually, they'll get tired of getting told that, and they'll change. And you give them lots of chances to fail and learn the lesson.

I have some people that told their freshman son, “If you get an A+ for the year, we’ll give you a cell phone.” Well, he got a B+ and they shook his hand, and said, “Good work,” and didn’t get him a phone. Didn’t work because it was too long to wait. I think they told him that in October, and the cell phone wasn’t going to come until the end of May. And he wasn’t capable of doing A work. He gave it his best shot. So he got discouraged. So, we got them on the other program, where if you bring your agenda home this Friday, signed by each teacher and affirming that you are improving your grades, we’ll go down and get your phone *this* Friday afternoon. Of course, he’s already checked out all the services. He knows the pros and cons of every one of them. He’s figured out how many texts he’s going to be able to get without getting surcharged and all that. His parents...I believe they cut a picture out of a magazine of the phone he wants, and it’s on his bulletin board in his room. So this week it’s possible for him to get a cell phone.

Okay, now, once he gets it, he has to keep that agenda signed. Right? And if he doesn’t, he’ll lose it. Now here’s what his dad said to me, “What if he loses it and he never gets it back? I’m going to be paying X number of dollars a month for nothing.” I said, “Is that really true? It’s going to be sitting right there where he can see it and he can’t use it. That is the cheapest tool you’ll ever buy to help your son succeed in college. But I don’t think it’s going to sit there. I think he’s plenty smart enough. All he has to do is show improvement. So how many times will he have to lose it before he learns that he has to do his work to keep the phone?” It would depend on the kid, I think, wouldn’t it?

But do you see what goes on immediately? It’s week by week. So it’s not long term. You lose it for a week. That’s no big deal. “I’ll just work hard and get it back.” That is why it’s important to have immediate and consistent rewards and negative consequences. It has to happen every time.

Now, we talked about immediate and consistent. Let’s talk about delayed and inconsistent. That can work, too. It kind of sounds like I’m contradicting myself, but let’s talk about the dog that begs at the table again. If your dog begs at the table, how do you get him to stop? There’s two ways you can do that. You can *always* feed him so that he knows he doesn’t have to beg. He just walks up and you give him more food than he can eat so it keeps him busy. Or, you can *never* feed him and eventually he’ll give up and go away. But, if you feed him inconsistently, then he’s encouraged to beg harder, because there’s a *chance* he can get something good. Right? That’s what most of us do, isn’t it, with our dogs, or pets, or whatever – or our kids. Sometimes we do things and sometimes we don’t.

But, if you turn this around, with kids, it actually works. I’m going to give you another example to show you how. Let’s go back to the thirteen-year-old whose parents took his phone away. They also, because he got in another problem, won’t let him go anywhere after school. And all he has to do to get his phone back, and to be able to out and ride his bike and go with his friends, is show *some* progress every Friday – or any given Friday – and then he’s free for a week. But he’s so stubborn that he’s still not doing his work. It’s like, “I don’t care. You can’t make me do my work. I’ll show you.” And I’ll grant you, there’s some other underlying problems there that make him feel that way. One day his

dad said, “You know, I feel so sorry for you because you don’t have any social life. And we’re going to give you your phone back for two days just because we love you and to give you a break.” And he liked having it back so much, he started doing his work. It was unexpected. It was inconsistent. And it was delayed. And yet that week he brought home a good agenda. You do the same thing with a dog that begs in reverse. You cannot only extinguish bad behavior, but you can use that *sometimes* to generate *good* behavior.

Okay, when would you apply a *logical* consequence? What is the criteria? Well, we have a way that we do this in our clinic. When there’s a *natural* consequence you don’t have to do anything, because the natural consequence is going to take affect. If he doesn’t take his coat to school, he’s going to be cold. So, hopefully, he’ll remember the next time to take it.

What if your kid won’t go to bed at night? Well, you can say, “I’m going to go to bed so I’ll feel good tomorrow morning.” And then you can go to bed at the regular time. Then, the next morning, after they stayed up way past their bedtime, you can wake them up early, and say, “Boy, I feel great because I got eight hours of sleep! How do you feel?” Then drop it. How long do you think they’ll stay up? Then what’s going to happen? They’re going to get sleepy, grouchy.

So, how do you know when to *make* them do something, or you nag them to do it, or when do you apply consequences? Well, the criteria we use is, when it affects *you* in a negative way, then you apply a logical consequence. I know one little boy who liked to sleep in and the only problem is, it makes his mother late for work, because she has to take him to school. So that affects her, right? So she has to apply a consequence. If she didn’t, she could let the school deal with it. He could deal with the school about being tardy. Of course, there’s a caviat there, because in New Mexico, if there’s too many absences or too many tardys, parents can get put in jail. So that would be an issue. He was making his mother late for work, so finally she said, “I really don’t like it that you’re making me late for work.” Now, a kid can understand that, right? “I’m going to get you and your clothes in the car tomorrow, and you can decide if you’re going to get dressed while we go or not. You can go to school in your pajamas or you can go to school in your clothes.” I think she only had to do that once.

So, what you’re doing is, you’re teaching your child that it’s okay to take care of themselves. “I don’t like it when you talk to me like that, so please go away until you can be more respectful.” That’s self care. Right? “It bothers me when you fight in the car. Please get out.”

Bad grades, most of the time, don’t affect parents negatively, so you might want to offer a *reward* based on positive behavior. So that’s a way to deal with that.

We had a third grader who wouldn’t go to school. He was obese. His mother was very small. She couldn’t literally physically get him into the car, so he had the upper hand. So his mother said, “If you don’t go to school, I might go to jail. So, I’m going to call the police on you. I’d rather you go to jail than me.” I don’t think she actually said that, but

that was the implied threat. So sure enough, the next day, he didn't want to go to school. She called the county sheriff. And they sent out this *gigantic* sheriff, who gave him a gruff tongue lashing and took him to school in the back of a squad car. One of our counselors was there when he got to school, and she said that the second the officer opened the door, he shot like a bullet out of the squad car and into the school. There's been no more school refuser after that.

The girl who came in late from her date. She was supposed to be in at midnight. Didn't get home til one. Didn't call. This is an example by a man named Jim Fay, who wrote one of the books that we recommend. I'll give you that later. They waited up for her. When she finally got home, they ran over to her. They hugged her. They kissed her. They said, "Oh, we're so relieved you're safe! We didn't know what happened to you. We love you so much. We just couldn't bear the thought of losing you! Whew! Let's go to bed." Two weeks later she wanted to go out again, and they said, "Oh, we couldn't stand that kind of stress. Stay home." She did it to herself, right?

Okay, now, this sounds all rosy and good, right? But there are a couple of problems that come up here. There are two ways that this gets short circuited by parents. Taking them their coat when they forgot it. Doing their homework for them. Nagging them to take their lunch money. They never get to learn the lessons if we're always doing it for them, or reminding them. We need to get out of the reminding business if we want kids that have character. All that does is keep them helpless, immature and irresponsible.

You know the little obese guy that wouldn't go to school? He's nine years old and he can't tie his shoe laces. Who do you think does it? Mama. That's right. So she is creating a child who is helpless. But she's learning.

The second thing that short circuits this thing is anger. If you get angry with your kid, that short circuits all the learning, because every kid knows that when an adult is angry, they have a problem. You do, too. If you see somebody that's pitching a fit, the first thing you think is, "This person has a problem," and you stop thinking about yourself. So we don't want them to think about *us*. We want them to think about *themselves* and what they're doing and how it's affecting them.

You know that lady that gave her son the little soaking wet Gameboy back? She didn't have to get angry with him. She just said, "Oh, I'm so sorry that you wrecked your toy." So she gets to be sympathetic, on his side and maybe even help him try to figure a way to prevent that from happening in the future. And he's thinking about what a dumb thing it was for him to leave his Gameboy in the plant where it got wet.

So, it's really hard for us, if we've been used to getting angry with our kids, to stop doing that and just let the consequences do the work and let the kids do the thinking. Because that's how they build character. It's just what God does with us.

Well, that's a brief sketch of what we do to help parents teach their kids responsibility and character. There are two books I could recommend. One, I already alluded to is

called *Parenting With Love and Logic*, by Cline and Fay. You can even look on their Website – the Love and Logic Website. I believe it's [www.loveandlogic.com](http://www.loveandlogic.com), but I'm not sure. You can Google it and find them. And the second one is *Boundaries With Kids*, by Cloud and Townsend. Two excellent books that talk about this whole process of building character.

As I mentioned in the beginning, this is just one piece of parenting. It's not everything. We see kids all the time whose parents do all of this stuff and there are still big problems, because the parents are not applying the other necessary things. And I promise we'll talk more about those things later.