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Foreword

In *Build a Happier Family*, Frank J. Doberman, Ph.D., gives us the tools and confidence to achieve as parents. Doberman first recognizes that parenting is one part skill and one part determination. Doberman's book and DVD affirm the concept that we all can be effective and committed parents.

Doberman's first line in the introduction says "We all want to be good parents, and most of us are." But we parents who have children with special needs, who never expected or anticipated that our children would have disabilities, often wonder not only whether we are good parents to our children with disabilities but whether we are good parents, period. We second-guess ourselves on sibling relationships, spousal relationships, extended family relationships and community relationships. We also give little or no attention to seeing and meeting our own individual needs. Our drive to be "perfect" parents often can give our children, especially the siblings of our children with special needs, unreasonable or distorted views of family and community relationships. **We all too often forget that we, ourselves, are individuals first.**

On a personal level, we have been in a recently stormy relationship with Jessica's younger sister, who just this month graduated from high school. We do not and probably won't understand everything that has gone on to put such tension between us and her. We have been to a wonderful counselor, Paul, who has helped us tremendously. But when we talk about our sessions with Paul and our currently estranged daughter, we have come to realize that much of what Paul has taught us is effectively presented in Doberman's book and tape. If we would have had Doberman's resources we might not now be struggling so much with our daughter, whom we deeply love.

Doberman's 12 basic tools of effective parenting are 1) Plan ahead; 2) Protect and nurture yourself; 3) Be consistent; 4) Create and maintain routine; 5) Downplay negative behavior; 6) Pay attention to positive behavior; 7) Shift emotions into neutral; 8) Move in close when giving directions; 9) Make Contact: eye or touch; 10) Use a firm commanding voice; 11) Be courteous: the two-to five-minute alert; and 12) Make family a priority. Doberman asserts that these might appear broad and simplistic on the surface. **But what Doberman does so well is to blend these common sense tools with the concept of commitment to drive home the point that no tool is effective without consistency.**

Doberman's proactive approach to basic parenting acknowledges that effective parenting comes from developing basic skills that do not change if a child has special needs. Indeed, the consistency in parenting approach, regardless of a child's developmental or medical needs, goes a long way toward preventing disability-based discrimination within the home. His approach becomes even more meaningful when he gives us parents both encouragement and skills to carve out our own needs and place in the family hierarchy. Parents can take care of themselves, too.

Introduction

We all want to be good parents, and most of us are. We provide the love, food, shelter, guidance and support our children need to get started and stay ahead in life. We hope our nurturing will help our children to be competent and successful. Still, some children grow up better prepared to succeed and adjust to the constantly changing world we live in. They are not necessarily the product of better parents, but, quite possibly, the result of more effective parenting.

There are two essential elements of effective, positive parenting. They are crucial for raising considerate, competent and caring children. The first is the understanding and use of basic parenting skills; the second is committing the energy necessary to use these skills in a consistent and positive manner. This book will introduce the twelve basic skills of positive parenting. It will show parents how to find the time to use these tools while having the energy to become the parents they want to be, with happy, healthy and thoughtful children.

Though the situation or challenge of any specific family may be unique, the basic skills and strategies used by effective parents everywhere do not vary significantly. There are other constants too. We know that the responsibility of raising children is great; the energy required, tremendous; the patience, unlimited; and the time, without bounds. However, the rewards of parenting too, can be tremendous, unlimited and without bounds. Parenting can be fun, creative and fulfilling. It can also be difficult, but it does not have to be overwhelming. Use of the twelve tools discussed in this book and listed on the next page, will make parents more effective, putting an end to loss of control and the screaming and punishing that often accompany it.

The following twelve tools have been used with proven success in a variety of households. For working parents, the single parent, or the two-parent household, these skills make parenting easier and more rewarding. These skills are highly effective when used with children who present mild to severe behavioral or developmental challenges, as well as children who present average development. They recognize the need of parents to take care of themselves too. Parents report that these skills are useful for dealing with all members of the family, but for now we're going to concentrate on how they'll help to improve your relationship with your children.

The Twelve Basic Tools of Effective Parenting

- 1) Plan Ahead
- 2) Protect and Nurture Yourself
- 3) Be Consistent
- 4) Create and Maintain routine
- 5) Downplay Negative Behavior
- 6) Pay Attention to Positive Behavior
- 7) Shift Emotions Into Neutral
- 8) Move in Close When Giving Directions
- 9) Make Contact: Eye or Touch
- 10) Use a Firm Commanding Voice
- 11) Be Courteous: The Two-to-Five Minute Alert
- 12) **Make Family a Priority**

- 1) Planning ahead: Instead of reacting to and focusing on the consequences of a child's behavior, planning and thinking ahead allows the parent to make changes in the child's environment which will make it easier for the child to display desirable behavior.
- 2) Nurture yourself; be a parent, not a saint: Recognize your skills and strengths and have the confidence to use them to achieve reasonable goals. If you act below your expectations, recognize it and try to do things differently next time. Remember, children are resilient.
- 3) Be consistent: Consistency gives you a sense of control and provides the time to formulate more effective and novel approaches to problems as they arise. But the goal of consistency must be in balance with the flexibility needed to adapt to change.
- 4) Routine and Ritual: Any routine, regularly occurring activity of the family can be given special meaning. For example, a meal, religious observance or a bedtime story can be made meaningful with just a little effort. Rituals bring the family together in shared experiences.
- 5) Downplay negative behavior: Think of your voice and attention as delicate tools to be used with care and precision, not as a hammer you pound with all your might.

- 6) Pay attention to positive behavior: Try to praise and attend to the behavior you value. Use the rule of five: Give five times more attention to positives than negatives.
- 7) Shift emotions into neutral: A message to stop or change behavior delivered under control will be more easily heard, followed and viewed with importance. Save the excited, high-energy communication for behaviors you value that are positive and which you wish to keep strong.
- 8) Move in close: Decrease the distance between you and your child when giving a direction. This will indicate to the child that you are committed to the process, and it will reduce distractions. Take care not to look threatening as you approach.
- 9) Make eye contact: Try to establish eye contact by bending to your child's level. This will strengthen the connection between the two of you and help you to read the child's reaction to your request.
- 10) Use a firm, commanding voice: Remember that your voice is a powerful tool that can often communicate as much meaning as your words. Don't shout, but reinforce your words with non-threatening gestures.
- 11) The two-to-five-minute alert: Be courteous, talk to your children the way you would wish to be spoken to yourself. Giving children clear guidelines and expectations before they are in a situation or required to change behavior, increases the chance that they will display positive and desirable behavior.
- 12) Make family a priority: Making time for our family is the most precious gift we can give our children. Without time together, a family cannot create the safety and support that form the basis of effective relationships and a sense of well being.

Why are these strategies useful in such a variety of situations and with a wide range of children?

Parents have told us that these basic, common-sense ideas are useful and effective. "Do not apologize" for the simplicity or lack of complexity of these ideas, they say. "We continually need support to remember and use the basics. It is even more important if we are raising children whose development s different, or who are willful and oppositional, or highly active and impulsive."

For new parents, the basics are very important, however they have proven equally useful to parents of older children, who recognize that their most successful parenting was carried out when they remembered to consistently use the basic tool and skills.

Even though we like to believe our lives are unique and our children are one of a kind, the experiences of most families and children are much more similar than different.

We all respond best to kindness and courtesy. Children are no different, but they are more vulnerable. They rely on their parents for this important nurturing. This makes parents very powerful. We all use our behavior to help us gain pleasure and comfort, and to reduce pain and discomfort. We tend to be self-preserving and our behavior generally has meaning to us. Our basic biological needs are similar to the needs of others.

Most adults and children will respond with predictable positive behavior, to strategies that offer a sense of mastery over their world and which preserve and nurture self-esteem. They will also respond with predictable negative behavior, to strategies that limit control and injure self-esteem.

At times, some children and some adults may display behavior that is different from usual expectations. When this happens, the difference is generally seen in the intensity or duration of the behavior, rather than in the display of a totally new and unique pattern of response. For example, most children will display temper, only some will rage without control. Most children will be oppositional and willful at times, but only some will be difficult all the time.

Children's behavior may also vary based on the rate of the child's biological growth and maturity. Most children will follow a similar developmental path, even though the pace at which they move through the various stages of growth may be different.

It is because we are all more alike than different, that the use of the tried- and-true basics will help you to move with confidence and great reward toward a positive future with your children.