

BELIEFS THAT EMPOWER PARENTS

More important than the beliefs you have about child rearing are the thoughts you have about yourself. If you have difficulty using child-rearing skills or if they don't seem to be working, your beliefs about yourself may be getting in the way. To discover thoughts that can cause glitches in taking action ask yourself:¹

- When my children misbehave, what do I think about myself?
- When did I first have this disturbing thought about myself?
- How do my children “make me” feel when they act up?

Directions: Mark any of the following thoughts that come to you when your children misbehave. Then, mark any of the beliefs you would like to have when your children upset you.	
Change Thoughts That Hurt into	Beliefs That Help Parenting Skills
___ I am bad, inadequate, or not good enough.	___ I am still a good parent when my child misbehaves.
___ I am weak, unimportant, or not in control.	___ I can take action to respond to my child's misbehavior.
___ I may be abandoned if I upset my child.	___ I can take care of myself while my child is upset.
___ I have to keep others happy or I'm a failure.	___ I am still a good parent when my child is upset with me.

Negative beliefs that interfere with parenting skills are not actually caused by your child but were instilled from early life experiences that cause two opposite reactions:

- Yelling, blaming, or losing control often come from trying to avoid the awful, helpless, inadequate feelings that occur when your children do not do as you've asked.
- Sinking, unlovable feelings that happen when children are angry suggest that you may have little ability to avoid thoughts that hurt and find that they overwhelm you.

CHANGING NEGATIVE BELIEFS

The first step to changing negative beliefs is to identify positive thoughts you want to have about yourself when your children misbehave. When your children are not causing difficulty, positive beliefs may seem completely true. It will be harder to have this belief when children disobey. To begin to change thinking patterns that rob you of your confidence, start keeping a journal of upsetting incidents.

Journal of Changing Beliefs		
Directions: Use the questions and table above to identify the negative belief that each situation triggers. Write a positive belief that you would like to have in its place and affirm this regularly.		
Upsetting Incident	Negative Belief	Positive Belief
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child refused to answer question about homework. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I'm powerless. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can take action that will help my child respond.

¹ See EMDR: *The Breakthrough Therapy* by Francine Shapiro (Basic Books, 1997) for further ideas on how thoughts affect emotions.

EMPOWERMENT

You don't have to wait to acquire positive beliefs about yourself to act powerfully, but you may have to act powerfully to begin to realize that these beliefs are valid. The latter "wakes up" an inner confidence that makes discipline effective and reserves time for enjoying children. The power that is discovered is "power from within" or empowerment of personal abilities, flexibility, and self-control. It is not "power over," which elicits hidden resentments and domination. Truly powerful parents can:

- Listen to their children's complaints and dissatisfactions because they judge themselves by their own standards, not by their children's or others' opinions.
- Consider their children's ideas before making rules and decisions because they extract useful ideas from opposing views without being unduly swayed.
- Stand by their convictions and also admit when they are wrong.
- Control their own lives and, therefore, do not have to control their children's lives.
- Permit their children to have different interests and beliefs from their own because they do not need a clone to confirm their own identity.
- Allow their children to make mistakes because they know they have gained wisdom from their own.

POWER WITH

"Power with" is the power of strong equals to suggest and to listen. A powerful spouse takes time to work through any disagreements over child rearing without giving in or insisting on her way, knowing that a higher truth can be reached by thoroughly understanding the other person's position. She encourages her partners to listen by listening first! When she sees her spouse's taking unconstructive action, she insists on taking time to discuss their differences, focusing first on understanding his efforts before questioning them. A powerful spouse can handle two particularly difficult challenges:

Stepparents:

- Do not take over for spouses who allow themselves to be bullied or manipulated. Instead, they act as a sounding board to help partners clarify their rules and limits and help them think of actions that they are willing to take to enforce decisions.
- Do not step in as an authority until their partner's leadership is firmly established and the stepchildren have bonded to them. They are comfortable allowing the birth parent to do the majority of the discipline and mainly assumes this role when he or she is physically absent.
- Offer a special relationship to their stepchildren as a guide, mentor, or wise friend because they are not encumbered by an authority role.

Divorced spouses:

- Make a special attempt to maintain a relationship as parents. This may mean redoubling all of the above efforts in order to act in best interests of the children.
- Put aside past resentments and desires to change the ex-spouses. Understanding is the priority and is used to reach satisfying solutions.

Armed with the above beliefs that you are a good, powerful, loveable person and information about all the ways you can require cooperation, encourage obedience, and reduce anger, you will succeed in being the parent you have always wanted to be.