

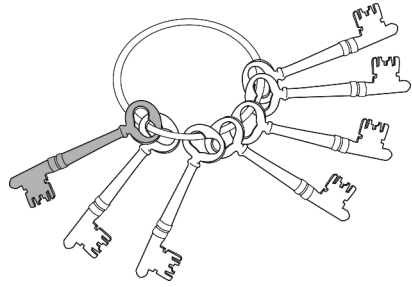
PART II

The 7 Keys to Co-operation

The 7 keys that make up Part II gradually develop parents' capacity to establish a home as a No-Fault Zone—a place where valuing every family member's needs equally and doing one's best to meet them replaces fault-finding, punishment, and reward.

- Key 1 ▪ Parent With Purpose** helps you align with your deepest reasons for parenting and your deepest desires for your children.
- Key 2 ▪ See the Needs Behind Every Action** takes the mystery out of why children act the way they do and introduces a needs-focused approach to parenting.
- Key 3 ▪ Create Safety, Trust, & Belonging** draws upon scientific research to confirm the crucial role that physical and emotional safety plays in children's development, and then shows you how to provide it.
- Key 4 ▪ Inspire Giving** invites you to identify your child's gifts, receive them gratefully, and encourage a mutual flow of giving and receiving.
- Key 5 ▪ Use a Language of Respect** walks you, step by step, through the process language of Nonviolent Communication, showing how you can translate all criticism and blame into respectful expression of needs.
- Key 6 ▪ Learn Together As You Go** encourages you to explore, investigate, and co-create with your children, with the confidence that there are many ways to do things and many strategies to meet needs.
- Key 7 ▪ Make Your Home a No-Fault Zone** reveals the true source of conflict and the path you can take to transform conflict situations into heartfelt connections.

Key 1 ■ Parent With Purpose



Key Concepts

- Choose your purpose.
- Choose to think in alignment with your purpose.
- Choose to act in alignment with your purpose.
- Choose to listen and talk in alignment with your purpose.
- Choose to encourage your kids' choices.

Three vital questions for parents:

What is important to you?

What are you parenting for?

What is your intention in interacting with your kids?

As the speed of life accelerates, everyone needs something solid to hang on to—some ballast for the high seas and a compass to navigate the dizzying array of choices you face every day. You need to know what purpose you are serving, what you are choosing *for*.

Your children also need to navigate through their own galaxy of choices, fueled by fads, ads, and ever-changing *must haves*. They also need a calm home port to anchor in when their lives are rough-and-tumble.

Parents who are able to define meaning and purpose for their lives, including their parenting lives, help meet vital needs for children, including stability, security, safety, and guidance in how to find one's own pole stars.

**You must be
the change you
want to see in
the world.**

—Gandhi

■ Choose Your Purpose

Pressures to work harder, achieve more, and have more are at an all-time high. Moms, dads, and kids, too, are speeding up to keep up, which means operating more of the time on autopilot and reacting quickly to circumstances, in a kind of crisis mode. Crisis mode is essential when there is real danger—during a wildfire, a flood, or an accident. In these times of peril, the body delivers adrenaline to make you alert and responsive. Your safety and your life depend on these automatic reactions.

In the past, crises occurred from time to time. Today, however, the pace of life, high performance standards, news media, and instant communication systems combine to create a heightened sense of crisis in daily life, not only for parents, but for kids as well. In short, families are suffering from crisis overload. Stressed parents in a rush snap at kids—and kids snap back (or they dig in their heels and hide out in their rooms). When you and your kids are in crisis overload, family life can become a battle zone characterized by mutual blame and perpetual arguments.

If you are operating on autopilot, you will probably feel like a victim of circumstances doing your utmost just to get through the day and all the while using habitual ways of thinking, listening, and speaking that add fuel to crises and conflict. When you are in crisis mode, it can be hard to recognize that at every moment you have choices about how to respond.

Nonetheless, from morning to night each of us is continually making choices about how to act, how to talk, and how to listen. Equally important, those who study our inner lives have gathered strong evidence that we also actively choose how we think.¹ This is why it is crucial for each of us to know what we are choosing *for*. When we know what we are choosing for and we become aware of the choices we are making, each of us increases our ability to respond to life in ways that support our choices. Clearly knowing what you are parenting for provides you guidance for making daily choices about how to parent.

1. Carlson, *You Can Be Happy No Matter What*; Krishnamurti, *Freedom from the Known*.

Responsibility is fostered by allowing children a voice and wherever indicated a choice in matters that affect them.

—Haim Ginott

Clarify Your Purpose

The first, all-important step for each of us is to determine what we want and what we're parenting for. The following three exercises are offered to help you clarify your purpose for parenting. Please take your time with the exercises and see what you discover about yourself.

Exercise 1: What do you want for the long term?



Focusing on the long term puts present actions into perspective and often brings what is most important to you into sharper focus. Two questions can help you get clear what you are parenting for.

Two Guiding Questions:

What qualities do I want to see in my children when they are adults?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____

What kind of relationship do I want to have with my children, not only now but in the long term?

What do I notice when I sit with these questions and my answers?



Exercise 2: What will you do?

Please review the qualities you listed in Exercise 1 that you want to see in your adult children. Now apply your list to yourself and you will see more clearly exactly which traits you want to be modeling for your children now.

For every quality you listed as something you value and want to see in your adult children, turn it around to reflect the quality or values you want to live. For example, if you said that you want your adult children to be honest, turn it around and say *I value honesty; I want to tell the truth*. If you want your children to care about their health, say *I value health; I want to care about my health*. These statements can be touchstones to remind you of your purpose and your practice.

Statements of Value

1. I value _____ .
2. I value _____ .
3. I value _____ .
4. I value _____ .
5. I value _____ .
6. I value _____ .
7. I value _____ .

Statements of Intention

- I want to _____ .
- I want to _____ .
- I want to _____ .
- I want to _____ .
- I want to _____ .
- I want to _____ .
- I want to _____ .

Next, let your statements of values and intentions lead you to more specific actions you can take to support each value.

Specific Actions I Want to Take

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____

Explore Together: *Choose Your Purpose*

Exercises 1 and 2, above, can be used for children eight years of age or older to help them find their own purpose. Younger children, or anyone in the family who prefers, can make collages or drawings to show how they see themselves in the future, what is important to them, and what actions they can take to live from their values.

When all members of the family have finished these activities, share them at a family meeting.

Option: You can compile each family member's purpose into one family collage, mission statement, poem, or other creative format. (See Part III, Topic: Family Meetings, for more activities you can enjoy with your family.)

Exercise 3: What is working?



No doubt you are already taking actions that serve your intentions. The following exercise is to draw your attention to what you are already doing that works to support your intention and create the results you want. Acknowledging and celebrating what works is one of the powerful, life-enriching practices parents can use to contribute to their own clarity, self-support, confidence, and balanced perspective.

What am I doing now that supports my values and intentions?

1. _____
2. _____

When thinking and thought become more and more automatic, perception becomes less and less adapted to the particular situation.

—David Bohm

3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____

The secret of
life is three
words:
change
through
relationship.

—J. Krishnamurti

■ Choose to Think in Alignment With Your Purpose

Our thought processes determine what we see, what we experience, and how we act. They filter and frame our interaction with the world and everything in it, including ourselves and our loved ones. You might wonder, how do I choose my thoughts? Don't they just happen?

Thoughts arise, and moment by moment you choose which you invite in and entertain. You are the editor of your thoughts, and you can learn how to direct them to support your parenting purpose.

Anyone who chooses to focus on thoughts of who's right and who's wrong, what's fair and what's unfair, who's bad and who's good, will inevitably spend essential time and energy analyzing, judging, blaming, and criticizing. When you give your energy to analyzing, judging, blaming, and criticizing, you are in a sense voting for conflict. The consequence is that by assuming a conflict-ready stance, you distract your own attention from understanding and meeting the needs that your children are expressing through their behavior.

If you entertain thoughts that people are doing things to you—for example, that your child (or anyone else) is *manipulating* you, *taking advantage of* you, *ignoring* you, or *disrespecting* you—you will often feel annoyed, irritated, and angry. However, when instead you think in terms of the needs that you and your child are trying to meet in every action taken, then you are more likely to feel compassion and connection. And you are much more likely to take action that contributes to your child's well-being as well as your own.

Your thoughts about your children determine how you see them and how you treat them. If you see your children as untrustworthy, you will tend to limit opportunities for them to make decisions and learn about trust. Also, when you say to your children, *I can't trust you*, they are likely to take that message to heart. (See the text box on this page.) If instead you see your children as capable of handling life, you will convey your confidence, treat them with respect, and give them lots of opportunities to make decisions for themselves. Imagine the best for your children; give them the gift of your confidence.

Environment Is More Important than Genes

The new field of epigenetics studies how environmental signals affect and even control the activity of genes. It claims that the operations of the cell are primarily affected by and molded by the cell's interaction with the environment, rather than by its genetic code. The environment of a child—made up of family interactions and the behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes of parents—directly affects the child's subconscious mind and behavior, perhaps throughout their lifetime. This is because children's subconscious is very suggestive to what parents say—and the subconscious takes in all information as fact. When parents make comments to children, like *you're lazy* or *you're mean*, these comments are downloaded into the subconscious memory as the truth and then shape the behavior and potential of the child throughout their life, unless an effort is made to reprogram them.¹

1. Lipton, *The Biology of Belief*.

■ Choose to Act in Alignment With Your Purpose

Kids will learn the most from what they see you do. Your ability to take action in alignment with your purpose, action that will take you where you want to go, will teach them the most about how to make good choices that take them where *they* most want to go.

A critical action for parents in these high-stress times is to recognize there are limited hours in the day, days in the week, weeks in the year, and that one cannot do everything. Many parents are overbooked with their own activities and commitments, and then there are the school and social requirements and activities for their kids. This centrifugal force propels kids into little satellite worlds of their own, with their own momentum, concerns, and increasing consumer choices.

If family time together is important to you, every commitment you're tempted to make outside the home needs to be looked at to determine whether it contributes to you getting this hard-to-come-by time. If it doesn't, don't commit. Make the tough choices to keep family life alive when kids are young. Use your creativity to keep it interactive, fun, and meaningful, and your kids are likely to look forward to it too.



Explore for Yourself

Based on your parenting purpose, answer the following two questions:

What activities are central to your purpose?

What activities are not?

■ Choose to Listen and Talk in Alignment With Your Purpose

The way you listen determines whether any interaction you're having will turn into an exploration and discussion or a disagreement or fight. When you listen to your kids, what are you listening for? Are you listening for errors, missteps, and mistakes, or information that can clarify and help you better understand your kids and their challenges? Are you an open and receptive listener, or are you inclined to take things personally and become defensive? Are your triggers cocked and ready to fire if you hear certain ideas that aren't pleasant to you, or can you hear ideas different from your own with respect and curiosity? Does listening mean being silent until it is your turn to talk, or does it mean an active, silent attempt to hear how things look from another person's point of view?

You have choices about how to listen. If you think that you don't, perhaps because you are feeling too sad, hurt, discouraged, anxious, frustrated, or angry, it means that you need to give yourself empathy or find someone to listen to you. Trying to listen to your child when you are full of intense emotions is difficult. Take responsibility for those intense feelings and find someone who can hear you so you are available at a later time to hear your kids. (See Key 5 for more about empathy and self-empathy.)

Habitual ways of speaking often get in the way of establishing respect and co-operation, at home or anywhere else. These familiar ways of communicating contribute to a tremendous amount of pain in the world, including conflicts that arise every day in families.

These are some common characteristics of this way of communicating:

It labels: *You're mean. She's bossy. He's dumb. I'm lazy.*

It judges: *I'm right. You're wrong. We're good. They're bad.*

It blames: *It's her fault. You should have. I'm to blame.*

It denies choice: *You have to. You can't. I can't. They made me.*

It makes demands: *If you don't do what I say, you'll be sorry.*

The greatest revolution in our generation is that of human beings, who by changing the inner attitudes of their minds, can change the outer aspects of their lives.

—Marilyn Ferguson

In Key 5 we introduce a different way of using language—a way that focuses on feelings and needs and gives choices other than labeling, judging, blaming, and demanding.

Tell the Truth About Choice

A parent tells her child, *You have to get dressed right now*. Mom keeps up the reminders even while daughter continues to jump on the bed instead of getting dressed. Clearly, the child doesn't *have to* get dressed. More accurately, there will be consequences if she doesn't.

Parents talk about their own lives in the same way: *I have to take Timmy to school. I have to pick up Kelly after work. I have to go to the gym. I have to get to work. I have to cook dinner. I have to go shopping*. How does it feel when you say these things? What messages about life do your children receive when they hear how much you *have to* do? The truth is, you don't have to do any of those things. It's just that there will be consequences for whichever choice you make.

Consider telling yourself and your kids the truth about choice. When you catch yourself thinking or saying, *I should* (or *have to* or *must*) *eat more healthily*, or *get more rest*, or *have more fun*, or *just listen to the kids without reacting*, ask yourself if this is something you want or something you've been conditioned to believe you should want. If you want it, tell yourself the truth about it: *I want to eat more healthily. I choose to get more rest. I'd like to have more fun. I really do want to listen to the kids without reacting*. Notice how you feel when you tell yourself the truth about choice.



Explore for Yourself

To get clear about the choices you have, make a list of *Things I Choose*. Some examples of things to include on this list are: what I wear, what I eat, how I spend my time, who I spend my time with, and how I spend money.

Next, make a list of *Things Others Choose for Me*. Others can include parents, family, employer, community, church, or government. When you have completed this list, take a moment to consider each entry to see whether, in fact, you do have choice in these situations. For instance, if you say that your parents decide how you spend your holidays, consider the choice you have to go along with your parents' ideas or to do something else.

Explore Together: *What Do I Choose?*

Each family member makes his or her own lists of *What I Choose* and *What Others Choose for Me*. Share your lists with each other. Share what you notice about these lists and what feelings come up during this activity.

■ Choose to Encourage Your Kids' Choices

One of the actions you can choose to ensure more co-operation than conflict in your home is to encourage your kids to make their own choices whenever possible. Their choices and the lessons they learn from them will be the best teachers they have in their lives. Parents overlook needs for choice at great peril—their own and their children's.

Choice is at the core of human experience at any age. This deep longing to choose our own purpose, beliefs, and actions, no matter what age we are, is fought for and defended in every home, particularly by children whose parents overlook their vital need for autonomy. Opportunities to make choices typically increase with age and experience. The total dependence of infants gives way, day by day and with increasing momentum, to a desire to make choices for themselves—choices about what and when they want to eat, explore, and express themselves. The maturing process is about growing the ability to make choices for oneself, and it is crucial for their development that kids at early ages have many opportunities to make choices and to learn from them.

To appreciate what a child experiences when choices are absent, just notice your own responses when someone says to you, *You can't! You must! You have to! Do it because I said so!* or *If you don't do it, you'll be sorry!* Do you want to co-operate? You can bet that your kids have the same reaction to these messages that you do, and probably twice as strong because they haven't had dozens of years to get accustomed to them.

There are several reasons parents think and do for kids rather than give kids choices about how to think and do for themselves. One reason is that they want to see things done in a certain way—neatly, efficiently, and precisely. Another reason is that it takes more time and patience to let kids do things for themselves. Rushed and harried the way most parents are these days, they find it easier and quicker to just take responsibility and do whatever needs to be done.

What is required for effective change is continuity of sincere effort to release and let go of inefficient thought patterns from the past.

—Doc Childre

All this thinking and doing for kids limits their opportunities to make choices and to get things done using their own brain and muscle power and creates resistance and conflict. Without these opportunities, it is difficult for them to see themselves as capable and competent in their world.

One mother we know remembers sharing opinions with her parents and hearing back, *Oh, you don't believe that! You shouldn't think that!* At an early age she learned to keep her opinions to herself, and even as a grown woman she still doubts that anyone will appreciate them. Such limitations on a child's way of seeing the world can have severe consequences in adult life.

Help your kids become aware of the range of choices they have and convey your confidence that they can handle more choice about their lives. To further exercise their choicemaking muscles and to learn what works and what doesn't, invite them to participate in making rules, agreements, and plans that affect them. Let your kids know that they can rely on you to help them make adjustments when needed and that you are willing to learn along with them as they go. (See Key 6 for more about learning along with your kids.)

When you talk with your children about choice, be aware that many young people, especially adolescents, feel confused, irritated, or angry when they hear adults talk about making choices. Most kids know that parents, teachers, and other adults make most of the important decisions for them, and their choices often seem limited to just two—to comply with the decisions that come down or to rebel against them. Most kids' experience is of living in the midst of a seemingly endless number of rules and expectations that often don't make sense to them and don't honor their desire and ability to make choices for themselves. They might not believe that they have any control over meeting their own needs. They may need a great deal of empathy for the gap between the autonomy they would like to have and the limited number of choices they have been offered by adults in the past.

Summary

Choose to choose. Determining your purpose for parenting is the first step to reduce conflict and create a flow of co-operation at home. From that point on, it is a matter of learning skills and making daily choices about how to think, listen, act, and talk. We hope this key has expanded your awareness of the areas of your parenting life you have choices about. We also hope that you feel inspired to introduce your kids to an ever-widening range of choices—so that they sense themselves as full participants in their lives, and so they will enter adulthood as competent and confident choicemakers.

Daily Practice

Take time daily to reflect on your purpose.

Remember your intention for your interactions with your children.

Notice *shoulds* and *have tos* and translate them to *things you want* and *choices you make*.