



# Preparing to Make Changes

*Be not afraid of moving slowly;  
be afraid only of standing still.*

—Chinese proverb

## GETTING STARTED

*I can't believe I'm admitting this, but my kid is driving me crazy. He's ten and basically a good boy, but the way he acts sometimes makes me wonder if he's had a brain transplant. I've tried sticker charts, grounding him, taking away privileges, even bribing him. They work for a while, then he starts doing the same obnoxious behaviors again. I'm running out of ideas and am at my absolute wit's end. How do I get my kid to behave—and stay behaving—while still maintaining my sanity? There has to be a better way!*

—Carolyn, a single mom from Seattle, Washington

“How many times do I have to tell you?”

“That’s enough! Stop it!”

“Why can’t you just behave?”

Sound familiar? Well, you’re not alone. One of the biggest concerns of parents is how to get their kids to behave. I know so not only because I’m a mother of three teenagers, but also a former classroom teacher, expert parenting columnist at Oxygen Media, advisory board member to *Parents* magazine, and parent workshop leader. Through the years, I’ve received hundreds of questions from distraught parents and have seen two main similarities in all of them.

First, parents almost always ask about the same bad behaviors. Getting kids to listen, bullying, whining, and talking back have topped their lists. Then they go on to complain about anger, anxiety, fighting, and on and on. I started keeping track and discovered thirty-eight key bad behaviors that seemed to trouble them most.

Second, parents want to know how to discipline their kids, not only to stop the bad behavior on the spot but also completely eliminate it—and do so without reminders, pleading, coaxing, yelling, threatening, and bribing.

I found I was repeating the same answers over and over and giving the same behavior tips again and again, until one

parent finally asked, “Can’t you write this in a book?” and that’s how *No More Misbehavin’* came to be. The letters you read in this book are real ones I’ve received from parents, and the answers are ones I’ve given countless times. There’s one big difference: although I will give you proven, simple strategies you need to change your child’s bad behaviors, I’m asking you to take one more step. Please don’t just read these ideas: commit to changing your child’s behavior by creating an action plan to help him succeed and then consistently using it until you *do* see change. That’s what I call a Behavior Makeover, and that’s what this book helps you do.

I’ll help you write each plan, but it’s you who must carry out it out. And if you do, here’s a guarantee: your relationship with your child will improve, your family life will be more harmonious, parenting will be more enjoyable, and your child will behave the way you hope he will. Those are big guarantees, and to achieve them will take work on your part. But isn’t that what parenting is all about? After all, we all have one big goal as parents: to raise our kids to be happy, well-behaved, good, and decent human beings. And that’s exactly what you’ll be gaining when you put into action your Behavior Makeover plans. Let’s get started.

## HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

All of the strategies you need to help you change your kid’s behavior are provided in this book. But after working with hundreds of parents with these ideas, I’m convinced there are a few supplies and ideas that will help your makeover efforts. I strongly recommend you follow the five key tasks of preparation each time you try a new makeover to achieve long-term behavior change:

- *Use a Makeover Journal.* Each makeover poses questions to help you think about your kid’s behavior. I urge you

to write your thoughts and action plan in what I call a Makeover Journal. It could be a nice leather journal or a plain spiral notebook; either is fine. But be sure to write in it consistently every day. You'll be able to reread your notations, see behavior patterns that you otherwise might have missed, and track your kid's progress. Even the most reluctant parents have found that using a Makeover Journal has been invaluable for their efforts.

- *Talk to essential caregivers.* Consult others who know your child well—family, grandparents, teachers, day care providers, relatives, coaches, scout leaders, Sunday school teachers, ministers, babysitters—to find out their perspective on your child's behavior. For instance: Does your child act the same way with them? What do they think is causing the misbehavior? How do they respond? Does it work? What suggestions do they have? When you develop any makeover plan, share it with them. The more you work together, the quicker you'll be in stopping the problem behavior. Consistency is a critical part of an effective makeover.
- *Track the targeted behavior on a calendar.* An important makeover tool is a monthly calendar. Find one that has space for you to write a few sentences each day about your kid's behavior progress. For instance, note the date the behavior began. Once the makeover begins, every day jot down the number of times your kid displays the misbehavior. If your behavior plan is effective, you'll gradually see a decline in the frequency of misbehaviors, and you'll know your plan is working.
- *Read the resources.* Following each makeover is a list of further reading. Some are for you, and others are for your child. They provide a more thorough background about the behavior and offer more helpful hints for your makeover. Read a selection or two each time you target a behavior to make over.
- *Form a parent support group.* One of the best ways to use this book is by discussing these issues with other parents. You'll

realize that other parents' kids have similar behavior problems as yours—which is always a bit comforting—as well as have the chance to hear their suggestions of what works or doesn't work in ridding bad behaviors. So form or join a group. Any size is fine; even one other parent will do. Just make sure you all enjoy one another and will commit to meeting regularly.

## **HOW EACH BEHAVIOR MAKEOVER WORKS**

All of the makeovers in this book follow a general plan that is simple to follow and easy to use. Here are the elements of each makeover:

1. A letter I've received from a concerned parent about a real problem with his or her child's behavior. These letters represent the most common and frequently mentioned behavior problems that I've received.
2. A one- or two-sentence Behavior Tip that provides the essence of a successful approach to changing this behavior.
3. A major section of strategies that have been shown to improve each specific behavior problem. These techniques are culled from empirical research produced by the best professionals, scholars, and practitioners in the field of child development and psychology. Please study these methods carefully and see which ones might apply best for your child.
4. The Behavior Makeover Plan, which shows you how to apply these guidelines to your specific situation. This section is the *key* to creating your own action plan to change your kid's behavior. It asks you to reflect on your own behavior problems, past and present, to help you create the context and make the connection between you and your kid. It will help you understand what's working and

- what's not working in your reactions as a parent to your kid's problem so far. Most important, it will ask you to work hard to understand why your kid is acting the way he is. It will encourage you to write your thoughts, responses, and greatest concerns in your Makeover Journal. Next, your job will be to make a plan based on reviewing the strategies in the first section and applying them to your child. Be sure to write this plan in your Makeover Journal.
5. The Makeover Pledge for each behavior problem. This pledge asks how you write exactly what you agree to do within the next twenty-four hours. Then do it. Research has proven that you have a 90 percent greater likelihood of success if you begin your plan within the next twenty-four hours. Don't wait!
  6. The Makeover Results, with space to record your child's progress for the next three weeks. Research shows real behavior change takes a minimum of twenty-one days of repetition, so don't give up too soon.
  7. Resources, which provide further reading on the problem behavior for parents as well as kids of varying ages.

### DID YOU KNOW?

Studies reveal that 85 percent of all parents of children under twelve years of age use spanking when they're frustrated, yet less than 10 percent feel that it is effective. Sixty-five percent of parents surveyed said they'd rather discipline their kids by using consequences and encouraging improved behavior. The reason they resort to spanking instead? They don't know more effective discipline approaches.

