

Personal Responsibility Parenting: Table of Contents and Chapter One

INTRODUCTION 5

1. MASTERING PARENTING CHALLENGES..... 6

2. EFFECTIVE FAMILY COMMUNICATION 12

3. WHAT HAVE YOU FACED IN YOUR LIFE? 16

STEP 1. TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOURSELF..... 19

4. BEING RESPONSIBLE TO YOUR CHILDREN 20

5. YOUR PARENTING CHALLENGES..... 25

6. THE STAGES OF BEHAVIOR CHANGE 35

7. POSITIVE PARENTING WEEKLY ACTION STEPS..... 41

STEP 2: DEVELOP PARENT COPING SKILLS..... 50

8. PARENT COPING SKILL 1: SITUATION ANALYSIS..... 51

9. PARENT COPING SKILL 2: RATIONAL PROBLEM SOLVING 54

10. PARENT COPING SKILL 3: DEALING WITH LOSS AND GRIEF..... 64

11. PARENT COPING SKILL 4: THE WELL-BEING FORMULA 69

12. PARENT COPING SKILL 5: USE INFLUENCE EFFECTIVELY..... 75

STEP 3: UNDERSTAND YOUR HISTORY AND VALUES..... 86

13. THE IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY LEARNING 87

14. FAMILY STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES 91

15. CREATING FAMILY MAPS..... 104

16. YOUR FAMILY DEVELOPMENT PLAN 107

17. EMOTIONAL CHALLENGES AND PARENTING..... 114

18. PARENTING AND TRUST 120

STEP 4: MAINTAIN A POSITIVE FAMILY CLIMATE122

19. COPING WITH SETBACKS 123

20. MAINTAIN YOUR SUPPORT SYSTEM..... 127

21. YOUR PARENTING TESTIMONY 132

1. MASTERING PARENTING CHALLENGES

Mastering parenting challenges is one of the most important tasks in life. When we create a family environment that provides security, support, guidance and affection, each family member has the foundation for creating the life he or she desires. What do we mean by *Personal Responsibility Parenting*? We mean you do everything in your power to create or restore a home environment where all family members live together in relative harmony, solve life challenges, and young people develop healthy independence and self-direction. When your family achieves this, it affects everyone's life in a good way, and has a positive influence on everybody around you. This workbook gives you tools to use as you work to create fulfillment for your family. Is this easy? No—but whatever parenting challenges you face today, you can begin to change things for the better. Many other parents have overcome similar challenges. You can too!

Modern families come in all shapes and sizes. This workbook focuses on parenting challenges for families with one or more parenting adults, and one or more middle and high school age youth living together. Adults providing parenting may be parents, grandparents, foster parents, Uncles or Aunts, or guardians. When we use the terms "Parents" or "Parenting" in this workbook, we mean everyone who has responsibility for raising children or teenagers. We use the words "son or daughter, children and teenagers" to include biological children, adopted children, foster children, or grandchildren who are in school but still living with adults.

We Live in An Age of Parenting Challenges

Many parents get caught in ineffective parenting patterns and emotions they feel powerless to change. Family challenges can diminish the quality of our lives. Many of us have to face divorce, family conflicts, addictions, financial challenges, affairs, depression or anxiety, or child behavior problems at home, in school or in the community. It's easy to get discouraged and feel alone. From time to time, most of us face unexpected life setbacks; we may feel great pressure to compete for success, or just survival. Some of us, and many young people turn to alcohol, drugs, cigarettes, food, sex, or other ways to take the edge off of life. Before we know it, we may find ourselves living in an environment different from what we want and need for our family.

Some parenting challenges and behavior have their beginnings during our own growing up years as we adapted to family challenges. Each family passes on unique strengths as well as deficits. Parenting challenges can begin subtly and sneak up on us. Often, they represent a number of choices we made one at a time. These choices seemed right at the time but ultimately didn't work out. And, children bring their own challenges to our families, with their unique personalities, temperaments, and

choices. The world is changing rapidly and young people today face dangers and difficulties we never dreamed of. As parents, we may want to control the choices our children make. However, our efforts to control backfire, as they grow older.ⁱ



The first idea we ask you to consider in this workbook is that as a parent of middle or high school age children, the control you have is over you and your parenting choices, not over your children and their choices. As you take full responsibility for you and your choices, you can have the biggest positive influence on other family members. This workbook is called *Personal Responsibility Parenting* because we ask you to focus on your choices and behavior. This allows the children you care about to take more and more responsibility for their choices and behavior, both positive and negative. When you use this self-control wisely, you can make great progress in Personal Responsibility Parenting.

You are probably familiar with the Serenity Contemplation. It powerfully summarizes what we're saying.

"May I find the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

You can begin today to make the changes needed to improve challenging parenting problems. This workbook helps you understand your goals and objectives for your family, make plans to meet your needs, and create the family environment you want. This means changing strategies that don't work, and finding new, constructive ways of

living. You can master the parenting challenges you face and resolve the powerful fears that underlie them. By facing negative parenting patterns, you can move beyond parenting troubles and arrive at levels of family satisfaction you've never reached before. You can reduce chronic family distress and invest your energy in more rewarding pursuits.

How to Use this Class

This workbook is an invitation to undertake a journey in personal growth. The journey from parenting challenges to emotional and behavioral freedom is difficult. Most of us are not able to do it alone. You need a map and guides who know the territory. There will be more twists and turns than you anticipate. But you can make it! If the workbook helps you understand yourself and your parenting challenges and solutions more clearly, it serves its purpose. If it can help you make the changes you desire, you can avoid some of the suffering that goes with parenting challenges.

The workbook gives you a process to follow in moving from Parenting Challenges to Parenting Fulfillment. You complete a number of class assignments that are explained as you go along. These include exercises and testimonies you share with the class. Complete all assignments to get the full benefit of the class. As you share this process with other parents, you learn from each other and receive support and encouragement. Middle and high school youth in your family may go through their own workbooks in a class with their peers. Some of your assignments involve the children and teenagers in your family, and some of their assignments may include you. In this way, each person in the family takes responsibility for him or herself at an age-appropriate level, while working together to create family harmony and fulfillment.

Steps to Personal Responsibility Parenting

The workbook is organized into four steps listed below. They help you understand yourself, what you want for your family, and the family environment you grew up in. You use this learning to develop new parenting attitudes and skills. Then you can have a positive influence on the children you care for as they prepare for adulthood.

STEPS TO PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY PARENTING	
1.	TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOURSELF
2.	DEVELOP FAMILY COPING SKILLS
3.	UNDERSTAND YOUR HISTORY AND VALUES
4.	MAINTAIN A POSITIVE FAMILY CLIMATE

Class Privacy

Privacy is an important dimension of the class. Class privacy doesn't apply to situations involving concern about suicide, threats to harm others, child abuse, or doing things that endanger you or others. In these situations, the facilitator will communicate with appropriate authorities. He or she won't discuss private details of your life. Privacy in the class includes respecting the privacy of other participants. This can be summed up with the phrase "When you leave, don't repeat whom you see here or what you hear here." We ask each of you to commit to keep private information shared by others in the class.

Introduce yourselves and tell others why you are in the class, how you feel about being here, and what you'd like to get out of the class.

Class Objectives

It isn't necessary to wait till parenting challenges become overwhelming before taking positive action. The sooner you do something about family troubles, the better. The class offers you:

1. Knowledge about how parenting challenges develop and can be changed
2. Exercises to assess the parenting challenges you face
3. Descriptions of parents who have faced and overcome parenting challenges
4. Problem solving tools for developing new parenting strategies
5. Support from other parents who face their own family challenges
6. Practice in applying constructive family communication and behavior patterns

You Can Overcome Parenting Challenges

You may be wondering, "Do I have what it takes to overcome my parenting troubles?" The answer is yes! Moving from ineffective parenting patterns to behavioral and emotional freedom requires a gradual change in your attitudes and behavior. This book gives you a framework to understand the problems you face, set priorities, and make positive choices. The class requires only that you put forth the effort you are capable of, one day at a time. You are already engaged in this change process because you have started the class. Give yourself credit for the effort you are making. You will find that you do have the ability to overcome problems, outgrow old patterns, and transform your family life.

Richard's Behavior Crisis

Richard trembled as he recalled a confrontation with his 16-year-old son, Scott, the previous night. "Scott came home very late, and when I confronted him about this, he swore at me. I lost it and almost slugged him." Richard was shocked by the intensity of his anger. He wanted to understand his out-of-control feelings before he did something he would regret.

During Richard's childhood, his parents constantly fought about his father's frequent travel as a medical salesman. Richard was also given responsibility for his younger brothers. As a child, he tried to counsel his parents to create a happy family situation, but his efforts to help failed. Richard came out of childhood feeling rejected and unworthy as a son. Richard married Suzanne, who was unprepared for the commitment of marriage and raising Scott. This forced Richard to take over most responsibility in the family. His marriage failed, and Richard was left alone with Scott. He wanted Scott to have all the opportunities he missed during his own childhood. Scott's rebellion threatened Richard's need for appreciation from his son. When Richard attempted to control Scott, this only hardened this teenager's normal quest for autonomy.

Richard had to allow Scott to define his own life. To let go of Scott, Richard had to face grief from his own childhood. As he recognized the power of his unfinished childhood experiences, Richard gradually ceased trying to control Scott. As a result, Scott no longer needed to push his father away so forcefully. Richard began to value and care for himself directly. For the first time in his life, Richard began to consciously plan ways to fulfill himself.

Endnotes

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