

**Personal Responsibility Parenting (Criminal Justice System
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1. MASTERING PARENTING CHALLENGES

Mastering parenting challenges is one of the most important tasks in life. When we create a family environment that has security, support, guidance and affection, each family member can create 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 make a home environment where all family members can live together in relative harmony and solve life challenges. In addition, young people can develop healthy independence and self-direction in the home.

When your family achieves this, it affects everyone's life in a good way. It has a positive influence on everybody around you. This workbook gives you the tools to use as you work to create happiness 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 children or teenagers 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 anyone who has responsibility for raising children or teenagers. We use the words "son or daughter, children and teenagers" to include biological children, step children, adopted children, foster children, or grandchildren who are in school but still living with adults.

Parents in the Criminal Justice System

This workbook is written specifically for people who are involved in the Criminal Justice System. We have worked in the Criminal Justice System for many years. We understand some of the unique challenges and hardships you face in trying to be a good parent when you are in jail or prison. Or, you may be on probation or parole, or in a Drug Court Program, and trying to get your own life back on the right track.

No matter how many obstacles you have to overcome, you and your children will benefit if you become the best parent you can be from this point forward. You have probably made mistakes with your children, as we all have. But, today is a new day. We encourage you to make the most of it. Your children may not respond to you

immediately, but your efforts will lead to good things. We have seen it over and over again. Little miracles can and do happen. All you have to do is do your part.ⁱ



This is not a “how to” parent workbook. There are plenty of good workbooks like that out there if you need one. This workbook focuses on you. It is about your choices and your behavior toward your children, and how to make the parenting changes you want and need to make. If you are in the Criminal Justice System, you have a lot to deal with as a parent. To begin with, you may be physically separated from your children because you are incarcerated. There are plenty of other challenges for you as a parent in the Criminal Justice System, as you know. These may include:

- ✓ Not being able to see your children often enough (or ever) because of physical distances between you.
- ✓ Not having custody or visitation rights.
- ✓ Back child support you owe.
- ✓ Depression, anxiety or other emotional problems.
- ✓ Working on your own recovery from alcohol or drugs.
- ✓ Your inability to provide financial support for your children.
- ✓ Conflicts or difficulties you have with the other parent(s) of your children.
- ✓ Having to rely on the other parent(s), grandparents, or relatives to care for your children.
- ✓ Having your children living in foster care or adopted families.
- ✓ Not taking care of your children properly when you were with them.
- ✓ Being worried about the choices your children are making in your absence.
- ✓ Feeling badly and guilty about your past failures as a parent.

In using this workbook, you have the chance to address these and other challenges and to make changes for the better. You'll have support from other parents who face similar challenges. Support from others can make all the difference. None of us do that great a job solving our parenting problems without the help of others. Other people can often see things that you are blind to. You can learn from their experiences, and vice versa.ⁱⁱ

All Parents Have Challenges

Parenting problems confront every family in one form or another. Parents everywhere get caught up in poor parenting patterns and negative emotions they feel powerless to change. Family challenges can harm 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. Then, before we know it, we may find ourselves living in an environment different from what we want and need for our children and ourselves.



Some of our parenting challenges and behavior have their beginnings during our own years growing up as we adapted to our family challenges. Each family passes on unique strengths as well as challenges. Parenting challenges can begin gradually and sneak up on you. Often, they represent a number of choices you made over time. These choices seemed right at the time but ultimately didn't work out.

Children also 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 often backfire, as our children grow older.

Focus on Your Choices, Not Theirs

The first thing we ask you to consider in this workbook is that as a parent, the control you have is over you and your parenting choices, not over your children and their choices. When you take full responsibility for you and your choices, you can have the most positive influence on your 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 start today to make the changes needed to overcome your challenging parenting problems. This workbook helps you understand your goals and objectives in your relationships with your children, make plans to meet your needs, and begin to create the family relationships you want. This means changing approaches that don't work, and finding new and better ways of living.

You can master the parenting challenges you have by taking a look at your negative parenting patterns. You can move toward positive relationships you may have never reached before. You can also reduce chronic family distress and spend your energy in enjoying your family.

How to Use this Workbook

This workbook is an invitation to 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 more clearly, then it serves its purpose. If it can help you to make the changes you want, 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 to you as you go along. These include exercises and testimonies you share with the class. You must complete all assignments to get the full benefit of the workbook.

As you share this process with other parents, you will learn from each other and receive support and encouragement. Children and teenagers in your family may go through their own workbooks in a class with their peers in school, or through a community agency. 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 full responsibility for him or herself at an age-appropriate level, while working together to create family harmony and fulfillment.

Steps to Personal Responsibility Parenting

This workbook is organized into the four steps listed below. They help you understand yourself, what you want for your family and children, and the family environment you grew up in. You use this information 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 concerns 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 your class.

Introduce yourself 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 until your parenting challenges become overwhelming before you take positive action. The sooner you do something about family troubles, the better. The class offers you:

1. Knowledge about common parenting challenges and how to change them.
2. Exercises to assess the parenting challenges you face.
3. Descriptions of parents who have 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 using positive 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 poor parenting patterns to behavioral and emotional freedom requires a gradual change in your attitudes and behavior. This workbook gives you a framework to help you understand the problems you face, to 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 reading the workbook. 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 was on parole after serving two years in prison for drug possession. His Mother took care of Richard's 13-year-old son Scott while Richard was in prison. Richard was trying to set some limits on Scott who had gotten used to doing what he pleased while Richard was away. Richard trembled as he recalled a confrontation with 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. Richard knew if he messed up on parole he would be revoked and have to go back to prison to finish his sentence.

After high school, Richard had married Suzanne, but she was unprepared for the commitment of marriage and raising Scott. This forced Richard to take over most of the responsibility for the family. His marriage failed, and Richard was left alone to do the best he could with Scott.

Richard got deeper into cocaine to cope with the breakup of the marriage. Scott rebelled against Richard. When Richard attempted to control Scott, this only hardened this teenager's normal quest for autonomy. When Richard established his own recovery from drugs, he could gradually stop trying to control Scott. As a result, Scott no longer needed to push his father away so forcefully. Richard began to consciously plan ways to take better care of himself, and to be a good father at the same time.

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