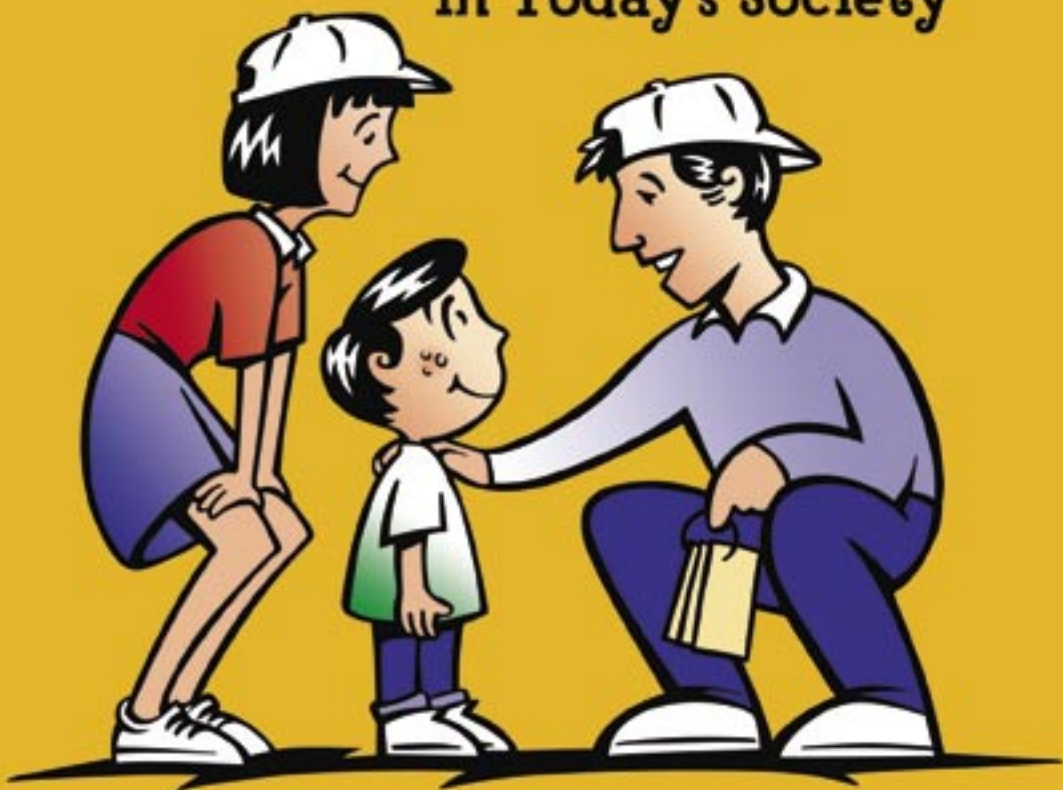


THE PARENT COACH

Includes a
complete set of
Parent Coaching
Cards

A New Approach to Parenting
in Today's Society



Steven Richfield, Psy.D.
with Carol Borchert

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**A New Approach to Parenting
in Today's Society**

**Steven Richfield, Psy.D.
with Carol Borchert**

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Dedication

This book is dedicated with love and devotion to my wife and colleague, Caryn, and to our two wonderful sons, Jeremy and Jesse. Thanks to the countless children, parents, and teachers who have provided inspiration and input to the development of Parent Coaching Cards over the past several years. It is because of your struggles and triumphs that this tool exists.

— Steven Richfield

This book is dedicated with love to my wonderful husband, Kevin, and to our two beautiful children, Alex and Anna, with whom we share the truest joys of life.

— Carol Borchert

About the Authors



Dr. Steven Richfield is a child psychologist whose work, for nearly two decades, has been focused on child development, parent education, and the emotional problems of childhood. He received his doctorate in Clinical Psychology from Hahnemann University in 1986 and his undergraduate degree in Psychology/Political Science from George Washington University in 1981. Dr. Richfield, a parent with two sons, used his on-the-job training as a parent and extensive clinical experience to develop a new parent training model, one that asks parents to switch from “parent cop” to “Parent Coach.” His resulting Parent Coaching program has received extensive national and international attention. Dr. Richfield lives in Plymouth Meeting, Penn, where he shares an independent private practice with his wife, Caryn. They are the parents of sons Jeremy and Jesse, both of whom provided much of the inspiration for the Parent coaching Cards.



Carol Bochert received her bachelor’s degree in technical journalism from Colorado State University and has been working as a reporter, magazine writer, and author covering a variety of scientific and general interest fields including biomedical sciences, applied human sciences, human-animal bond in veterinary medicine and parenting. As the mother of two young children, she brings her own experiences to bear in *The Parent Coach* from the front lines of parenting. Carol also works extensively with groups of elementary-age children through volunteer opportunities including teaching, coaching, and community service. Carol lives in Fort Collins, Colo, with her husband Kevin and their two children, Alex and Anna.

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Foreword

Each year, I offer workshops for thousands of parents. In addition, during my career as a psychologist I have worked with many parents in my clinical practice. These activities, together with the very important experience of having raised two sons, have provided me with firsthand knowledge of the questions, challenges, joys, frustrations, satisfactions, and anxieties that are a natural part of the parenting process.

Interestingly, one professional in a well-publicized book advanced the view several years ago that parental influence on a child's development was overestimated. Instead, a child's inborn temperament and peer group were touted as having a more profound impact on the child's functioning than that of parents. While temperament and peer interactions are important factors, I, as well as most clinicians and researchers, believe strongly that these factors lag significantly behind the day-to-day influence of a parent.

It has often been said that while parenting is one of the most important and difficult jobs we face, it is one for which we receive little, if any, preparation or formal training. It is not surprising that as parents engage in the process of raising children, as they seek to nurture qualities such as self-esteem, self-discipline, motivation, social skills, responsibility, compassion, cooperation, hope, and resilience in their children, they search for information and material that will help them.

The quest for knowledge about parenting is evident by a visit to any bookstore. Parenting books fill the shelves. Sometimes the recommendations of one parenting expert seem at odds with that offered by another, adding to the confusion of parents. While all of us may yearn for a book filled with simple recipes, most realize that the challenges of parenting do not lend themselves to set

formulas, to a one-size-fits-all approach. Instead, we must recognize the complexity of parenting without allowing this complexity to overwhelm us. Parenting material should serve as a vehicle to transport us from a reactive to a proactive position in which we feel more knowledgeable, comfortable, and confident.

A proactive position goes far beyond a prescription of what to do once a difficult situation arises. Instead, to be proactive implies that parents anticipate challenging moments in a child's development, and they prepare their children to meet those moments with greater assurance and success. This preparation is characterized by teaching children skills and values that they can apply in their daily lives. Ideally, proactive parenting takes place in a calm atmosphere in which children will be most likely to benefit from their interactions with us. In contrast, a reactive approach is often in response to a difficult or crisis situation, a time when neither parent nor child is in the best state of mind to communicate or listen to each other.

While parents can identify many of the issues they wish to address in their child's development, they may feel at a loss of how best to do so. One father recently said, "Every time I try to start a conversation with my six-year-old son and nine-year-old daughter, I'm not certain how to do it. I feel after a minute they have already tuned me out." A mother reported, "My ten-year-old daughter is somewhat shy and hesitant. When I encourage her to try things, she gets angry with me and accuses me of not liking her and trying to rule her life. All I'm trying to do is help her be more outgoing, but, obviously, I'm making matters worse."

I have heard similar comments from countless parents, all of whom desire to be more effective in their parenting roles. *The Parent Coach* by psychologist Dr. Steven Richfield, together with the innovative Parent Coaching Cards that he developed, will serve as an

invaluable resource for parents of children of all ages and all temperamental and learning styles. Dr. Richfield introduces the notion of parents serving as “life coaches” with their children, substituting punishment and retribution with teaching and learning. A major focus of the coaching endeavor is to develop effective ways of coping by nurturing our children’s emotional and social skills.

As Dr. Richfield so eloquently notes, “Parent Coaches help their children anticipate problems, avoid hazardous situations, and develop and practice the skills necessary to meet and beat challenges. Parent Coaches approach parenting with a high degree of warmth, elevated expectations, and respect for their child’s autonomy, but also with firmness and tenacity.”

In a truly masterful manner, Dr. Richfield has articulated the major issues confronting children and developed cards that serve as a catalyst to assist parents in discussing these issues in a nonthreatening, nonjudgmental way. He has provided parents and children with wonderful material and metaphors for helping youngsters to remember and apply what they have learned. Phrases such as “thinking side”, “reacting side”, “cantaloupe skin”, “quit the clowning!”, “don’t take the bait!”, and many others will become a natural part of the family’s lexicon, influencing parent-child relationships and the lessons that our children learn from us.

In addition to the very rich information and material that Dr. Richfield provides, what is evident on every page of *The Parent Coach* is his empathy for both children and parents and his perceptive understanding of the many challenges they face. To create such an impressive, realistic program suggests that he has drawn heavily from his vast clinical experiences, as well as his own role as a father. Also, his description of the ways in which the Parent Coaching Cards can be applied in the classroom setting underscores his appreciation of the need for parents and teachers to collaborate.

Dr. Richfield is to be complimented for offering parents such a creative, informative, and helpful approach as they engage in the process of nurturing the emotional and social development of their children. His book will be read and reread, and his Coaching Cards will be used again and again by parents. His work will enrich the lives of all families who are fortunate enough to read and apply his ideas.

Robert B. Brooks, Ph.D.
Faculty, Harvard Medical School
Author, *The Self-Esteem Teacher*
Coauthor, *Raising Resilient Children*

Preface

When I began the journey called parenting in 1989, I knew that many lessons awaited me. My parents faced an endless succession of tests and trials raising a family of four rambunctious boys with strong temperaments. The future psychologist in me critiqued the parenting decisions handed down, only to hear the refrain, “Children don’t come with instructions.” Although I dismissed these words at the time, they sank in deeper than I could imagine. These childhood experiences carved out an intense interest in parenting and an enduring need to develop some instructions.

Carrying that forward, I have been affected deeply by so many people in various walks of life who have touched me through their words and actions, offering support and conviction that children need practical self-control tools to contend with the challenges in our world. While this list is not exhaustive I do want to make special mention of Dr. Bob Brooks, Dr. Russell Barkley, Richard Lavoie, Dr. Harvey Parker, Dr. Myrna Shure, Dr. Barbara Ingersoll, Dr. Tony Attwood, Dr. Clare Jones, Dr. Saul Troen, Carol Gray, Thom Hartmann, Meredith Gould, Andrea Bilbow, Michael Schweitzer, Denise Yearian, Jack Canfield and Mark Victor Hansen, Connie Langland, Theresa DiGeronimo, Julie DeVillers, and Jeff Herman.

On a more personal note, several people stand out as members of the “coaching team,” without which the Parent Coaching Cards would never have made it off the drawing board. Marvin Melnikoff and my late father-in-law, Dick Packel, are the most prominent. Natalie Packel, Joe and Ruth Richfield, Bernie and Marsha Richfield, Sue and Neil Sukonik, and Paula and Cliff Goldstein also deserve my heartfelt appreciation. I’d also like to thank the many families who contributed their personal stories to make this book even more meaningful to its readers.

Steven Richfield
March 2002

Chapter 1

WHAT IS A PARENT COACH?



“Here, all mankind is equal—rich and poor alike, they love their children.”

Euripides, *Andromache* (c. 426 B.C.)

Introduction

Today’s loving parents, much like those of Euripides’ time, face many challenges as they anticipate the life journey they will make with their children. While the challenges may be different—disease was the greatest threat to children in the fifth century B.C.—parents throughout the ages have sought to guide their offspring through childhood with love and compassion and to help them become successful adults.

The difficulty for today’s parents, of course, is that the world is a much more permissive, fast-paced, and complicated place than it was 2,500 years ago. Our children face a barrage of adverse forces. Social land mines await them at school, on the playground, among friends and peers, on the sports field, and at home. Many children do not possess the skills necessary to navigate these minefields. Disappointments, competition, provocations, inequities, temptations, distractions, and many other pressures can easily jeopardize school-aged children’s efforts to keep their lives in balance. Do the following situations sound familiar?

- Your daughter is behaving like a typical teenager, and she isn't even nine years old yet. She's moody and mean to her siblings. She talks back and tells you to not do anything to embarrass her.
- Your son gets in trouble for clowning around at school. He interrupts the teacher, often falls out of his chair, disrupts other kids by talking to them at inappropriate times, and has difficulty staying on task.
- Your son loves soccer, loves playing soccer, and loves when his team wins. But everything changes when his team is losing. He may yell at the other players, get frustrated and angry on the playing field, or cry when the game is over.
- Your daughter has difficulty talking with adults. She can be reduced to tears simply by the thought of going to a restaurant and giving her order to a waitress. Her social awkwardness has you making excuses and talking for her.
- Your son loves to play with other kids but often scares them off because he becomes too bossy and intense.
- Your daughter suffers a complete and total meltdown and is irrational and unreasonable for hours if things don't quite work out the way they were planned—if, for instance, a movie is sold out.

Kids try to find their way through these sorts of difficulties with varying degrees of success and failure. Parents, meanwhile, try to fulfill the many different roles necessary to help their children through such vagaries of childhood. Parenting requires the negotiating skills of a hostage mediator, the organizational skills of an executive secretary, the tutorial skills of an army of teachers, the listening skills of a psychologist, the problem-solving skills of a Nobel physicist, the financial skills of a corporate chief financial officer, the cleaning skills of Heloise, the cooking skills of Wolfgang

Puck, and so much more. Yet, today's parents often are not equipped to help their children develop the "coping with life skills" they need to succeed. Kids without these life skills often suffer from academic underachievement, social problems, damaged self-esteem, missed opportunities, and strained family relationships.

"If only kids came with an instruction manual," many a parent has quipped, only half-jokingly. Unfortunately, they don't, so how can parents help their children develop the self-control and social skills they need to successfully move through childhood and into the adult world? *The Parent Coach* and the Parent Coaching Cards introduce parents to the concept of parent as coach, on the same team with their child, and working together to help their child build the social tool kit needed to succeed.

Trying a New Approach—the Parent Coach

Children's lives are filled with many "decision points" that challenge their social judgment, self-control, and problem-solving abilities. It's easy for them to fall short in any of these skill areas, setting the stage for trouble now, as well as down the road. Most parents deal with such trouble in a reactive mode, focusing on punishment, discipline, and retribution. The Parent Coach approach is to help children develop coping skills in a proactive way that allows them to better deal with the demanding circumstances of everyday life and to prepare for the many challenges that lie ahead. Rather than waiting for problems to occur and then focusing on the fallout, Parent Coaches help their children anticipate problems, avoid hazardous situations, and develop and practice the skills necessary to meet and beat challenges. Parent Coaches approach parenting with a high degree of warmth, elevated expectations, and respect for their child's autonomy, but also with firmness and tenacity. The Parent Coaching Cards at the end of this book reflect the Parent Coach philosophy put in a practical,

accessible format for easy and fun use with children. While these cards and this book focus primarily on children ages 6 through 12, parents can easily adjust the messages and delivery for younger and older children.

What Does a Parent Coach Do?

The Parent Coach discusses and practices with his or her child the skills necessary to successfully cope with problem situations. To strengthen children's sense of trust and security, parents must let them know they are on their side and that they will help them figure out why things go wrong, not just punish them for misbehaviors. The Parent Coach style of parenting emphasizes the importance of a safe and nonjudgmental dialogue between parent and child. The child must feel accepted and understood, not criticized and lectured. To do this, the parent has to resist stepping into the role of disciplinarian, as this often causes the child to put up a defensive wall and tune out the parent. Finding the right coaching voice is as important as finding the right coaching style. Many parents overlook this key ingredient in communicating with their children. Children can be profoundly sensitive to a parent's tone of voice and volume. It's not unusual for parents to say the right things but to deliver the message with a tone of animosity. It's very easy to lapse into a punishing and blaming tone, which simply works against the nurturing but firm style the Parent Coach needs to have in order to effectively communicate with the child. Finding your voice involves both speaking from the heart and listening with a rational mind.

The Parent Coach focuses on the present as well as the future. While the parent may be in a real-time situation, such as dealing with a child refusing to do homework or a child using bad language to lash out at a sibling, he or she should use the opportunity as a chance to develop the child's inventory of emotional and social

skills. Much like an athletic coach keeps an eye on each player's performance, the Parent Coach watches the child to determine where coaching is needed; it may involve helping the child stay tuned in to conversations with friends, respect adults when they are on the telephone, or handle hurtful words from classmates with humor and dignity.

The Parent Coach uses words and body language to show the child that parent and child are on the same side. The old "I'm going to teach my child a lesson" is replaced with the new "What lesson can both of us learn?" This mutual learning is a very important part of Parent Coaching. The Parent Coach accepts the fact that he or she has much to learn as well. Children are far more receptive to a parent's attempts to coach life skills if they don't feel talked down to and if they sense that their parents are in this thing with them. Parents can further this feeling of being a team by sharing with their children stories from their own lives and how they solved problems or how they could have done things differently. Parents can use an "instant replay" of a difficult situation involving their child to look at what went wrong, what went right, and how the child could approach a similar situation in the future.

Social and Emotional Skills

The main goal of the Parent Coach is to develop and refine the child's coping skills. These skills can be placed under two general categories: social and emotional. Social skills include cooperation, sharing, judgment, perspective-taking, taking turns, manners, situation evaluation, conversational comfort, and others. Emotional skills include resilience, frustration tolerance, self-control, perseverance, generosity, and many more. Children are best helped in developing these skills by preparation and discussion, practice, and coaching by the caring adults in their lives.

Each child is unique in how he or she approaches and reacts to the world, but parents usually know their child's "trigger points" (often with greater awareness than the child) and when their child is about to be challenged. Trigger points are situations, events, people, or even words that can set off a child's "reacting side." Identifying common trigger points is a good place to start with Parent Coaching; other skills can be woven in from there. Some common "Triggers to Trouble" are listed below. If possible, you can discuss these triggers with your child or identify other triggers that commonly develop into problems.

CHECK OFF YOUR TRIGGERS TO TROUBLE

- Finding out that I won't be able to do something I have really been looking forward to.
- Seeing other kids having fun doing something that is against the rules.
- Feeling annoyed by the behavior of another kid.
- Not wanting to do something I have to do.
- Losing at a game or not performing as well at something as I think I should.
- Feeling jealous about something involving another kid.
- Not being able to accept the mistakes of others.
- Feeling very bossed around by someone else.
- Finding out that someone used something of mine without my permission.
- Feeling pushed aside by a friend.
- Having to switch gears from doing something fun to doing something serious.
- Not getting something that I want.

Triggers to Trouble often occur because a child's reacting side takes over from their "thinking side." Parent Coaching mainly involves helping children develop the skills they need to keep their thinking side in control, so that they can react to situations rationally and with deliberation. For instance, Trish, mother of eight-year-old Shelby, frequently uses the **When Words Pop Out, Watch Out!** card. Reading and discussing the card with her mom helped Shelby to better understand how wrong words won't help her get what she wants but can often lead to an undesirable outcome, like a time-out.

Getting Started in Parent Coaching

This book and the Parent Coaching Cards in the back can be used in many different ways. Ideally, the parent should read the book to get a good handle on the Parent Coaching approach and the content of the cards. However, many parents are eager to get going with practical tools that can have immediate effects on the behavior of their children. It may help to read this chapter and the "Thinking Side and Reacting Side" chapter before moving on to the cards that you are keen to use.

Notice, too, that most chapters contain real-life examples from families who have used the Parent Coaching Cards since their introduction in 1998. You'll also find lots of examples of "Chalk Talk," where parents play out scenes with their children ahead of time. A Chalk Talk is similar to what a sports coach does before a game, drawing plays on the board and showing players where they need to be and what they need to be doing. Parent Chalk Talks help your child think about situations and how they might be handled. Chalk Talks give your child an opportunity to practice with you before facing the real thing, and they also let you give your child practical input about different tactics, words, and strategies to handle especially challenging situations.

The Parent Coaching Cards are practical, portable, emotional intelligence tools that can help children address hot topics that are affecting them in the moment. Older children may wish to read the cards on their own and then discuss the ideas with you. For a younger child, you may want to read the cards with the child, discussing and clarifying the cards' messages and action words.

The Parent Coaching Cards in the back can be removed and put on a ring to keep them together. The text found on the cards is also included in each corresponding chapter. Your child may wish to color in the drawings on the cards—that's a good place to get him or her interested in a discussion.

You may want to start with a card that addresses one of your child's main trigger points or just with a card that piques your child's interest.

The Parent Coach and the Parent Coaching Cards will help you prepare your child for the day-to-day challenges of growing up by stocking his or her life tool kit with the social and emotional skills that are necessary for a happy, successful life.

PARENT COACHING TERMINOLOGY

Parent Coach: A parent who combines consistent emotional support with a belief in the child's capacity for growth, who has a clear sense of which skills will best help the child cope, and who exhibits reasonable control over his or her own unhelpful reactions.

Parent Coaching Cards: Social and emotional skills cards that help kids deal with the pressures at home, school, and in other social situations so they don't get trapped into behaving badly and suffering the consequences.

Thinking Side: The part of a child's mind that allows observation of himself or herself in social situations and development of appropriate actions and responses. The thinking side helps kids avoid getting trapped by circumstance.

Reacting Side: The part of a child's mind that responds impulsively to the world around him or her, sometimes appropriately and sometimes with undesirable consequences. The reacting side is like a magnet for tough times because it reacts to "traps."

Chalk Talk: The conversation a parent will have with a child to practice different social scenarios or to replay an event that has already occurred to help the child understand and improve his or her ability to respond appropriately to similar situations in the future.

Power Talk: Words and phrases children can use to build their self-esteem so that they can better handle situations or individuals who seemingly have power over them.

Traps: Situations in a child's life that typically trigger the reacting side.