

The Choice Chart



By Cara Day, M.A., C.E.C.

DAYCHILD.ORG

The Choice Chart

Dedicated to all the people along the way who have shown me that our lives are not made by our circumstances, but our moment-to-moment choices.

The Choice Chart

Table of Contents

Page

1	Part 1: The Basics and Step 1: Identifying the Behavior Type
6	Part 2: Step 2: Give a Verbal Redirection
9	Part 3: Never Behaviors and the Third Penalty
12	Part 4: Step 3: Isolate and Step 4: Mark the Penalty
17	Part 5: Step 5: The Payday Dinner Philosophy
21	Part 6: Step 5: The Payday Dinner Nitty-Gritty How-To and How to Introduce the Choice Chart to your Children
28	Appendix
34	Winning Ways to Speak with Children
43	What's Next?

All rights reserved. This book may not be reproduced in whole or in part without written permission from the author; except a reviewer who may quote a brief passage in a review, nor may any part of this book be reproduced or stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or other, without written permission from the author.

The Choice Chart

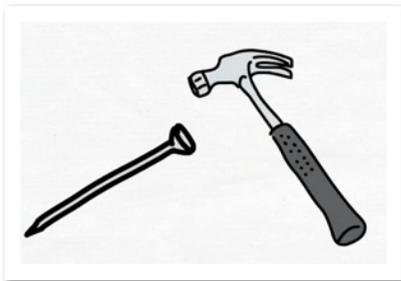
Part 1

I developed the Choice Chart about 12 years ago when my four children were 3, 5, 7, and 9 years old. I needed something that would work no matter where we were and no matter what we were doing. The Choice Chart does just that.

And the good news is that this system works whether you have one child, or a bit more. It works with children beginning around age 3 until they leave the house, or until they reach an age and a level of maturity when you just don't need it anymore. And, you would know when that is. Also, the whole program is modifiable to work for the individual needs of your family.

I have been presenting this system in the Happy Kids class since 2007 as well as teaching it to families through my private practice. Families love to share about their success with the Choice Chart. Overwhelmingly, they also share how much their children like the Choice Chart. One time I stopped using it for a month when we were moving. After we got settled, the kids starting asking, "When are we going to start the Choice Chart again?" The Choice Chart creates a consistency and predictability with discipline that children both enjoy and benefit from.

Before diving in, there's a caveat. You can't just implement the Choice Chart and expect an immediately beautiful family culture to emerge. This system has been taught in the context of a 7-hour class. The Choice Chart is only one hour of the class. And, now, you are experiencing it as one small part of a large body of information and ideas about building a beautiful family culture. This system is a tool.



The analogy I like to use is to imagine that you are building a beautiful home that is going to be everything you have ever wanted it to be. You have the vision, the plans, the workers, and the materials, and everyone is engaged. In this scenario, the Choice Chart is the hammer and the nails. It's not the whole house, but it's an essential part makes building the house a lot easier--and a lot more fun. It's a tool, when wielded by an able user, that can be the foundation of something really beautiful.



You might consider using the Choice Chart if you:

- Frequently repeat yourself before your children will do what you say
- Want to create more harmony between siblings
- Feel yourself getting worked up or stressed when redirecting or disciplining your children
- Feel at a loss at times as to exactly when a child should receive a consequence or not
- Feel at a loss about what consequence your child should have

The Choice Chart

You might consider using the Choice Chart if you:

Frequently repeat yourself before your children will do what you say
Want to create more harmony between siblings
Feel yourself getting worked up or stressed when redirecting or disciplining your children
Feel at a loss at times as to exactly when a child should receive a consequence or not
Feel at a loss about what consequence your child should have
Are often told by your children, "That's not fair!" or "He never gets in trouble, only me!"
Feel at a loss at times about how much to "lecture," reward, and praise children
Your parenting sometimes feels like a chore and you want to start having more fun as a family
Or, you want to have even more fun with your already fun family!

One more thing: I can't recommend going it alone with the Choice Chart if one or more of your children is often violent toward you, other family members, or their surroundings. It's not that you can't use it, it's just that I would want you to use it in conjunction with professional therapy.

So, here are the elements of the choice chart:

First, you have the rules.

Next, you follow a few simple steps.

And, lastly, you need your choice chart and some stickers. Or, if you think your kids are too old for stickers, just use a pen to mark the chart.

Our Rules

1. We cooperate.
2. We speak kindly.
3. We keep our hands, feet, and other objects to ourselves.

Parents make the rules. In this instance, I made the rules, but you are going to present them as your rules. Kids do not make the rules. You are ultimately responsible for your children. This is why you get to make the rules.

I made these rules for the first class I taught as an elementary school teacher, before my own children were here. At that time, I wanted to think of three or four simple, positively-stated rules that would cover any behavior that could be displayed in the classroom.



If you look at this picture, from 1993, you'll see my great 80s haircut and the rules on the far right wall behind the flag--they haven't changed!

The Choice Chart

As it turned out, the rules did cover everything, so these became the same rules used with my own children once they were born. These rules are the foundation of the Choice Chart system.

How to explain the rules to your children:

1. We cooperate.

This means we participate in our family with a cooperative attitude. The prefix “co” means “with,” so to cooperate means to co-operate, to operate together. When we are operating together, life is more fun. This means you are doing what helps the family, or the group as a whole, at any given time. Sometimes being cooperative will mean you are doing something you’ve been asked to do. Other times being cooperative will mean you stop doing something you are asked to stop doing. Being cooperative will help our family have more fun.

2. We speak kindly.

This means that we use a kind tone of voice and that we use kind words to express our feelings, even when we are upset. Being sad, frustrated, or angry does not give any one of us the right to speak rudely or in a mean way to someone in our family. Going forward, we will all speak kindly to one another.

3. We keep our hands, feet and other objects to ourselves.

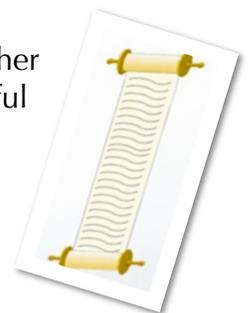
This means we will only touch each other in loving ways. We will not hurt each other with objects, or throw things, even if you think it’s just playing. This rule will help everyone in our family to know they are physically safe. Even when you are very frustrated, you may not hit, push, or be mean physically in any way.

Some parents and teachers make the mistake of creating a long list of rules. Another mistake is listing things you do not want your kids to do. Words are very powerful and you don’t want to have those words in your home

This list of rules: May quickly turn to this:

No hitting	hitting
No biting	biting
No yelling	yelling
No running	running
No teasing	teasing
No name-calling	name-calling and...
No leaving a mess	leaving a mess!

Don’t talk about what you don’t want to see. Use your words to create the culture in your family.



The Choice Chart

In the Appendix of this e-book there is a copy of the rules. You just have to print it out. By posting the rules, they become easy to learn and refer to.

Ok, so now for the steps.

The Steps

Here are the basic steps of the system. Each is equally important. All are modifiable.

Step 1 Identify the Behavior type

Step 2 Give Verbal Redirection

Step 3 Isolate

Step 4 Mark Penalty

Step 5 Reward with Pay Day Dinner (words go on the screen as I say them)

Then, a few more elements that you need to know:

How to introduce the choice chart to your children.

Why is isolation the consequence?

What happens at the third penalty?

What happens when we're not at home and xyz?

Ok, so let's get started with Step 1:

Step 1

A child in need of redirection will be exhibiting one of these three types of behavior:

1. Start
2. Stop
3. Never

A start behavior is something you want your child to start doing: take a bath, do your homework, clean up, set the table, get dressed, get in the car, help your dad, and things like that...

A stop behavior is something you want your child to stop doing, like: making unnecessary noise, whining, bouncing a ball in the house, complaining, incessant talking, watching television, or kicking the back of my seat...

A never behavior is something you never want your child to do. You will determine what your never behaviors are before you introduce the Choice Chart. This is so when you introduce the choice chart, you can discuss what your family's never behaviors are, so they can be known by all.



How does it work when we are not at home?

The Choice Chart

That's because what you do when your child does a never behavior, is different than what you do with a start or stop behavior. We will get to that in a little bit.

Your never list might include:

- Touching dangerous things.
- Taking an unnecessary safety risk
- Defiance toward parents
- Violence toward anyone
- Destroying things
- Using swear words
- Saying "shut-up" or "stupid" or similar put downs that make your skin crawl

The never list can evolve as your children grow and new issues come up. The never list is also useful because sometimes you can add a behavior to the never list that you simply are just done seeing in your home--and watch it quickly disappear!

For start and stop behaviors, you have now reached your one chance for a brief explanation of what you want your child to think about before moving on to the next step.

You only want to provide this brief explanation if this is a new behavior for your child. You do not want to spend time re-explaining why a behavior is unacceptable, or why you want to see your child start a particular behavior if you have already done so before.

Here are two examples of what you might say if you think your child needs a brief explanation about his or her current behavior choice before you move on to the second step.



Let's say your child is in the family room and she is throwing all of her toys out of her toy basket. You noticed that a rule has been broken. The rule that's been broken is We Cooperate. You've mentally identified the behavior as a stop behavior because you want them to STOP throwing their toys.

Before redirecting your child, you may want to say, "When you throw your toys, they might break or they might hit someone. You're also making quite a mess that you will have to pick up. When you do this, I might decide to put your toys away until you can treat them with respect."

However, if this is not the first time your child has done this, which will usually be the case, and you have at some point already provided an explanation as to the expectation you hold that his behavior choice is not meeting. In that case, you would skip the explanation and go directly to redirecting your child.

The Choice Chart

Part 2



Another example would be if your child is not engaging at soccer practice or in a lesson of some sort. You noticed that a rule has been broken. The rule that's been broken is We Cooperate. Next, you would identify the behavior type as a start behavior. That is, you want your child to start engaging.

If it was the first time you have seen your child not being engaged with the lesson, you might check in with them and say, "Your coach (or teacher) has done their part in showing up. I have brought you here to participate. It is your responsibility to engage and do your best."

Again, if it isn't the first time your child has done this, don't explain it or discuss it with them again and again. You would simply redirect your child right after you have identified it as a start behavior with no further explanation needed.



So now that you've identified the behavior as a stop start or never behavior, and provided a brief explanation to your child about the behavior (if it was the first time they displayed it), you're ready for the next step which is to give your child a redirective warning.

When you redirect your child, you're going to tell your child what you want them to either start doing or stop doing. You're going to say it in a simple phrase, in one sentence, and you're only going to say it once. I'm going to tell you exactly how this sounds, but first it's super important that I mention something that is critical to this step. In fact, it's the key to the entire choice chart system, to peace and happiness as a parent, and to raising respectful children who both show and honor boundaries in their relationships.

OFFER

The signs of the season are upon us with the World Series in full swing (Go Phillies), pumpkin everywhere, and both college and pro football on the tube each weekend. I can even smell turkey in the air. Oh, and how could I forget the upcoming Presidential election that will take place in about two weeks. Skid I be so bold to say that this election seems like it has been a long, long process with political ads and candidates being discussed for about two years now. I'm looking forward to a new President who will hopefully lead us to better days.

Another sign of the season is the NFL Region II Conference held each October. I just returned from beautiful Ocean City, Maryland where MFFA hosted the conference this year. About 140 people congregated in the Ocean City Convention Center and Ocean Front Ribbons Hall for a meeting day beginning with the hotel fire alarm waking us about 3:40 a.m. the first night. There we stood outside the hotel for about an hour before we found out that a computer malfunction in a water pump caused the alarm. It was quite a site to see friends and colleagues in their PJs and robes as opposed to a suit or even business casual. Needless to say most of us didn't go back to sleep knowing that our day would begin at 7:30 a.m.

Suzette Moore chaired the Region II Conference this year. Suzette and her committee worked very hard preparing for this event. In addition to the committee, there were several volunteers to serve the attendees each day. I was approached by many of our colleagues during positive comments regarding the quality of the workshop and presentation, the facility ("WOW" was the word describing the hotel rooms), and the variety of vendor exhibits. The MFFA Committee hosted a hospitality suite each night to allow Region II members to network and have some fun. It was great seeing Ed Green, our NFL Region II Director, enjoying the World Series game dressed in his Phillies shirt. (Did I already mention "Go Phillies?") For those of you who couldn't attend the conference this year, I understand plans are already underway for the Region II Conference in Pennsylvania next year. Thanks to Suzette and all volunteers for a job well done.

A few weeks ago a group of representatives from the MFFA Board had the opportunity to visit the Goshen National Hotel and Convention Center in National Harbor, Maryland (Prince Georges County). NFLP has selected this location for the 2015 NFLP Conference and Products Exposition, and the MFFA Board and General Membership has agreed to host. Certain items of NFLP and hotel management gave us the grand tour of the Goshen National. The Convention Center is easily accessible from all rooms, and there are 7 restaurants offering a variety of food and fun, in addition to shops and a unique shopping district right outside of the hotel. Our nation's capital is across the river and can be seen from the front lawn where we plan to hold the Cook's Feast. As you know, seating order is just one of the attractions when visiting our great State of Maryland. There are water-taxis available to various locations, including the Titanic Memorial, Marine Veterans, Georgetown, and the Nationals' Baseball Stadium. I assure you that serving on the many committees needed to host such an event will be an exciting and rewarding experience. MFFA will be calling on you to volunteer as 2015 draws closer.

X *Your Child*

If you take only one thing away from the Choice Chart, take this: We teach people how to treat us. This true in our adult life, and this is true when we are parenting our children. If you teach your children that your children that you will say something more than once, they will take you up on that offer, every day.

And there you will be repeating yourself, over and over again. And you'll end up have a very different parenting experience than you would have had otherwise, whether you have only one child, or you have a bunch of kids.

The Choice Chart



2007

I have four kids, all spaced about 20 - 22 months apart. They are normal kids who have done every normal kid thing you can imagine. They're not angels, they're not perfect, they have tested me and humbled me to the fullest, every step of the way, for the past 20 years.

By teaching your children that you're only going to say things once, you preserve a lot of your parental energy for other things. If you discipline your children with ineffective methods, you're going to be exhausted as a parent. You're going to be exhausted in your marriage or partnership, too.



You're going to have a lot less fun as a parent and you're not going to have the parenting experience you could have had just by teaching your children that you're only going to say things once. Once you have this firmly established, your hardest work is done.

The Choice Chart provides you with a system of what to do when they don't do what you say the first time you say it. Kids aren't going to do everything on the first time, no matter how consistent you are--they're kids! They're supposed to be annoying and they're supposed to test you! That's why they are here--to learn and grow through experimentation. You are their experiment!



With the Choice Chart, when they don't do something the first time, you have something you can do that is consistent and it creates a lot of fairness for children. Children love the Choice Chart because they see that it is more fair than disciplining without it, or with a less effective method.

My grandfather, who passed a few years ago at age 95, had six grandchildren, and my 4 kids were his great grandchildren. One day he commented to me that my children do what I ask them to do the first time that I ask them to do it. He said that they listen to you, they do what you tell them to do, and you do it so quietly, and there's so many of them!



It was interesting to me that he made a commentary on this because, well, 1, he didn't comment on many things, 2, that he noticed it, and, 3, that he was kind of complimenting me in his usual old, Russian, stoic way. It meant a lot.



The Choice Chart

Saying things only once was something I wanted to establish with my children so I could have more fun with them and also because I had four children! When you have one child, you have more of an option about repeating yourself, simply because there are less children around.

I don't recommend repeating yourself even with only one child, but it is more of a possibility for the parent of only one child to do this. When you have a bunch of children, it's just a bad plan. There's not a lot of in-between when you have a lot of children--you either are calm, organized, and you are effective, or you basically have a first class ticket to the loony bin.



The sheer number of children I had caused me to come up with something that would work, would work well, would work all the time, would work for other people who were with my children, such as family members and their dad, so that we all could be consistent with them.

Ok, that was a really long tangent. But it was an important one. Now, back to the steps.

Step 2: Give a verbal redirection.

After you have mentally noted whether this is a stop, start, or never behavior, it is time to give the verbal redirection. Give the redirection in a firm, loving voice that is kind, but makes it clear that you mean business.



Do not add a tag question to your verbal redirection, such as, "ok?" will you? alright? yes? is that ok? Women tend to do this more than men, but both are capable of it. Tag questions weaken communication. Be clear.

This is the one sentence or less phrase that is going to tell your child exactly what you want them to start or stop doing.

For start behaviors, say: "Please brush your teeth." Or, "Please get started on your homework."

For stop behaviors, say: "Please stop making that noise." Or, "Please stop annoying your brother."

Only say it once. If they don't do it, or move to do it, or acknowledge you in some way, giving you some indication that it's going to happen or it's happening, or if it's a stop behavior, if they don't stop right away, then you go on to the next step, which is to say, "You have a penalty."

That's all you say. *You don't say anything else.* You don't say:

"You have a penalty, I told you to stop doing that! I can't believe you still did that, even after I told you to stop. You know you're not allowed to do this. You got in trouble for this yesterday. I can't believe we're having this conversation again," and so on.

The Choice Chart

And, we know, as parents, how easy it is to get caught up into that cycle of “I’m right, you should be listening to me,” going through ancient history and all of these types of things. So, you save ALL of that energy, too. You just say, “You have a penalty.” It’s four words, that’s all they get from you. Remember, you are saving your energy for the FUN stuff you want to do with them. Don’t give life to this nonsense. Don’t give life to anything you don’t want to see again.

Never behaviors

Ok, so what about the never behaviors. Well, for that, it’s a little bit different, because there is no redirection. Your child gets an immediate penalty.

It sounds like this:

We do not swear. You have a penalty.

We do not hit. You have a penalty.

We do not say “stupid.” You have a penalty.

For never behaviors, there is no verbal redirection. There is an immediate penalty because your child already knows that this behavior is ALWAYS unacceptable.

If your child does not comply with the start or stop redirection, which you have only said once, they get a penalty. Don’t repeat yourself or say the warning again! Just say, “You have a penalty,” and go to the next step.

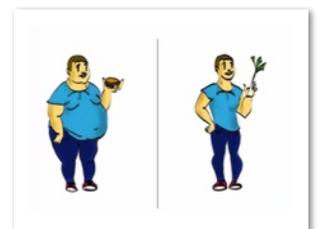
The Choice Chart only works if you SHOW your children you mean what you say, every time you speak, especially when you are just starting out with this.

Because you will have explained the Choice Chart system to your children before you start using it, they will already know what it means when you say, “You have a penalty.” And at that point in time, the next step begins.

Part 3

Part 3 is about the 3rd and 4th steps of the Choice Chart system, which are the isolation time, and marking the penalty. You’ll remember from earlier that the first part of this is to say, only once, “You have a penalty.” After you say this, your child will serve their penalty in isolation.

Before I talk about how to isolate your child, I’d like to talk for a moment about two elements that are critical for becoming a master parent. Perhaps you’ve been on a diet before. To be an effective parent, you need to go on a Word Diet.



The Choice Chart

Most parents talk wayyyyy too much.

They repeat themselves, effectively saying that what they say the first time means nothing.
They repeat themselves after they say, "I'm only going to say it once."
They become emotionally triggered and begin lecturing or posturing.

When you're on a word diet, you use as few words as possible to say what you want to say. If needed, pretend like you're going to be charged a dollar for every word you use that isn't absolutely essential!

The suggestions for what to say and how to say it in this video series, all represent the word diet. The word diet will become your second nature with practice. All you need to do to master it, just like anything else, is to create an awareness around it. In time, you will have mastered the word diet.

This brings us to the Spock parent. You know Spock, from the original Star Trek series, he is unemotional and logical. When your child starts misbehaving or there is a situation which may escalate, it's time to become a Spock parent. The Spock parent always uses a word diet, so the two go hand in hand.



Word Diet + Spock Parent = Sanity

The Spock parent calms his or her body, voice, and volume. In this mode, you become even more calm, creating a relaxation response within yourself as you begin to redirect your child.



By doing this, you're not going to fall into the trap of escalating your child's behavior--or your own response to your child's behavior.

Once you are able to fully implement the Word Diet and Spock Parenting, you will get back your parental energy. This is energy that is better spent loving and goofing around with your child.

In Part 5, I will share with you how the choice chart works when your child receives a penalty when you're not at home--whether you are at Disneyland, on an airplane, at a store, or at Grandma's house! But first, we will talk about what you do when you *are* at home.

Ok, so your child has done something undesirable, or isn't doing something you want them to do. You have mentally identified the behavior type as a start, stop or never behavior, you verbally redirected your child by telling them in one simple phrase what you wanted them to start or stop doing, they continued the behavior, or did not start the new behavior you requested, so you said, "You have a penalty."

Or, your child displayed a never behavior, so you skipped the redirection and simply said, "You have a penalty."

The Choice Chart

In either scenario, it is now time to isolate your child.

Remember, NO MORE TALKING. Don't talk about why you are isolating them, don't remind that you said you were going to give them a penalty, don't tell them how upset or disappointed you are, don't lecture them about how they should be more respectful. DON'T TALK.

Why is isolation the consequence?

Isolation is the consequence because the gift of personal accountability and personal growth comes from sitting with the uncomfortableness of our choices. It also mirrors the consequence used in our society.



As adults, if we behave unacceptably, we are forced to serve community service, we are fined, or we are put in jail. In adult life, when we cannot control our emotions and resulting actions, we are isolated from all of the people who have learned to control theirs.

In addition, through isolation you:

- Do not give your child a moment of attention for behaviors you do not wish to see.
- Do not reward your child by giving in or by giving them power over your emotions.
- Show them that love and the fun stuff happens out of isolation.
- Show your child that you will expend the energy to say what you will do and to do what you say.
- And, you give yourself and your child an adequate break from the current environment.

These are gifts you give your child. When this is done lovingly and consistently, your child develops a strong self-respect and a quiet confidence. With self-respect, all of life's wonders can be enjoyed.

OK, now for a VERY IMPORTANT element of the system—Three Strikes You're Out.

This is mirrored after the three-strikes law in California, and it works. Here's how:

The first penalty = 30 minute isolation
The second penalty = 30 minute isolation
The third penalty = Child is "out" for the rest of the day

If you are at home, they go in their room—for the rest of the day. Hopefully you are having regular family dinners and this is a cherished time of your day. The child who has received three penalties, does not get to participate in family dinner. They also miss out on any other family fun that day and night. (Be sure to have plenty.)

The Choice Chart

They don't get to eat what the family is eating and they do not get to pick what their alternative meal is. Serve them a sandwich of your choosing with milk or water. And, they can eat it at the counter.



I can count on one hand the number of times all four of my children combined have earned 3 penalties. That's four children on whom I inflicted the Choice Chart for about ten years, for a cumulative total of about 40 years.

And that's because, if you follow this system, it works.

Once you have successfully implemented the Choice Chart, you will rarely get past the first or second penalty. Your kids will know you mean what you say, and life will be a lot more fun for them and you. But consistency is the key. If you are not ready to be consistent--DON'T START

Part 4

Part 4 covers the 3rd and 4th steps of the Choice Chart system, which are the isolation time, and marking the penalty. We will also find out what to do if your child won't go in and stay in their isolation place to serve their penalty. But first, some additional things you need to know about isolating your child and why isolation is the consequence with the Choice Chart.

Isolation = 30 minutes

The length of the isolation is 30 minutes, for children 6 and up. Thirty minutes gives you each a real break. It's a meaningful amount of time that your child will not want to lose in the future. For younger ages, such as children aged 3 to 5, I recommend 10 - 15 minutes.

Isolating your child for one minute per year of age, as is commonly recommended, isn't long enough. It doesn't give them or you a break, and it's hardly a consequence.



The Choice Chart

Isolation location = bedroom, laundry room or shower

The isolation location is most commonly your child's bedroom. They can do what they want in their room with the exception of no technology. Technology includes any screen TV, smart phone, ipads, game boys, and similar things. These types of devices are not really recommended to be in the bedroom at any time, because they impede learning, family time, and the development of important social skills. If the bedroom does not work for isolation for some reason, a laundry room or the shower can work well. Being fully clothed in a dry shower is sure to provide inspiration for new behavior choices!



No talking, or the time starts over

Next, there's No talking during isolation, or the time starts over. If your child is calling to you, yelling, or otherwise trying to talk to you, you say, "Your time starts when you are quiet." Only say it once.

Remember, if you keep repeating yourself, they are getting a pay-off for their behavior—the pay-off is your attention. You can say, "I will let you know when you can come out."

Also, if they kick the door or wall, swear, or do any other behavior they would normally get a penalty for, their time starts over. Depending on how annoyed you are at this point, you may decide to just go ahead and give them a second penalty--right then. That's up to you!

Word Diet and Spock Parent = No emotion

Once again, your demeanor in steps 1 to 3 of the Choice Chart system is critical. It's important to have a firm, loving parent voice. This should be a voice that your children recognize once they hear it. It's not mean, raised, frenetic, panicked, controlling, or angry.



This was inspired by one of my favorite scenes in *Pretty Woman*... "Big mistake, Big!"

It's calm. It's loving. It's firm. It is void of emotion. It is matter-of-fact.

Most parents expend a lot of energy and emotion when their children are not listening to them. This is a BIG mistake. It's exactly what your child wants, and it's the pay-off they get for being out of alignment.

Remember to only give your children your emotions when you are engaging in the many other wonderful things you do as a family. That's the time to reward them with your passion, emotion, and energy. Your child MUST learn that you mean what you say and that you do what you've said you will do. And that means, the first time you say it.

The FIRST time!

The Choice Chart

Ok, so inevitably, some might be asking asking, what if my child will not go to their room on their own AND/OR will not stay in their room? What can I do then?



If you are at a point where you do not have verbal control of your child, and they will not go to or stay in their room, the time is now for you to fix this. Remember, if you do not have this ability now, your enjoyment of life with your child will diminish significantly once they are as big or bigger than you.

This is because they will make daily life a struggle. Or, they will leave you, either by physically leaving the home, because they can, or they will “leave” by numbing themselves with drugs, alcohol, sex, or all three. They will have started down what can become a long path of pain, that can take many years, if not the rest of their lives, to recover from.

If your children will not listen to your directions when they're little, they are not going to just magically start listening to you at some point later on. It doesn't work that way.

Time starts now. You can gain a natural authority with your children by following the guidelines in the Choice Chart series. You just need to make the decision to do it. Excellent parenting is a decision.

One family I coached that consisted of grandparents raising 5 grandchildren aged 4 to 13. They had the issue of children not going and staying in their room. We devised that they would say to the children, “If you go to your room on your own, you can keep the door open during your isolation. If I have to help you, then your door will be closed. Please make your choice.”

So, they used the door being open as a bargaining chip, and it worked. The kids did not want their door closed, so they went on their own.

For me, I always wanted the door closed when my children were in isolation, and since I had established a natural authority with them, they keep it closed. Again, you need to think about your children, your unique situation, and make it work for you.



I have also had many parents ask me if they should hold the door closed if their child is coming out or trying to open it, or put a latch at the top of the door, on the outside.

Either will work, it just depends on what you are comfortable with. Try to pick a solution that saves your parental energy, and is safe for your child.

Now your child is in their isolation place, serving their penalty, so it is time to mark the Choice Chart.

The Choice Chart

Ok, here's a completed choice chart. You will see a place for your family name, and the month. On the left, you see your children's names. To the right of that, the days of the month, from the 1st to the 31st. You can use the same chart, even if the month has only 30 days. Just ignore the 31st.

In the Appendix of this e-book, there are choice charts for families with 1 - 4 children. If you have more than four children, you can combine one or more of the choice charts designed for people who have 1 - 4 children, to add up to the number of children you have.

You can customize the word document with your children's names and you are ready to get started. The word document version is available by clicking on the link in the description of the Choice Chart video series at Daychild.org. You can also simply print the blank pdf in this e-book and handwrite your children's names into the choice chart.



Next, you will want to get the smallest round stickers you can buy. Teacher supply stores have these in abundance, they are hard to find elsewhere. Of course, they are easy to get from amazon. On Amazon, just type in "Super Spots rewards stickers" and there will be a great pack of stickers that will last a very long time.

Ok, so now your child has received a penalty and it's time to mark the choice chart. This means you put a tally mark into your child's box for that day. You put one tally mark for each penalty. Use a pen. This is so no one can erase a penalty at a later time.

Penalties cannot be erased. Once you say it, it's done. Don't negotiate out of it. Even if you later think you made a mistake by giving the penalty, just change what you do going forward, rather than back-tracking.

Also, adults mark the choice chart. I already tried letting kids mark the choice chart--it didn't work, so you don't have to try it. I won't get into all the things that happened when I tried to let kids mark the choice chart.

Remember, and remind your child, that every day they start with an empty box—a clean start! It feels great for a child to know that every day they get a fresh start.

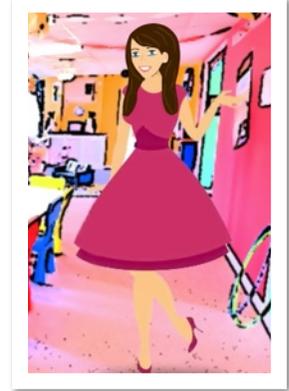
When you reach the time of day that you have chosen for putting the stickers on the chart, put a sticker into the box if your child received no penalties. If there is even one penalty, they do not get a sticker for that day.

The Choice Chart

Another unique element to the Choice Chart system is that there is No lecturing or forced fake apologies once isolation is over—you just start the love and fun. Often times, parents want to use the end of the isolation period to tell their child once again why what they did was unacceptable, etc. Or, they force their child to say sorry to them or to someone else who was transgressed. Don't do this! When your child's isolation is over, walk to their room and say, "Yea! This is awesome, you get to come out now. Come see what we are doing." Give your child a hug. Be loving and playful.

If you, yourself, were upset by the last penalty, take some time while your child is isolation to center yourself, so you can greet your child with love when they are done with their isolation. If you want to learn some ways to center yourself as a parent, you can learn how in our free e-book, *The Chit-Chat*, available at Daychild.org. You just click it, and it's yours!

You might be wondering, "When do I talk with my child about their misbehavior if I'm not supposed to do it just before or after the penalty?" It is very important that you do this, so let me share some options.



Remember, YOU are the party. Invite them to your party!



One way is to discuss the behavior in general terms with your whole family when you are at the dinner table, or at another time when your whole family is together. This is especially true if it's a behavior that your other children sometimes display as well. This is very effective. Another great way to address behavior is by having a chit-chat. Again, you can go to Daychild.org, to check out the free e-book that describes exactly how to have a chit-chat. A chit-chat can last a few minutes, or an hour! And you can use it to discuss any topic where you want to see real change occur.

To summarize, you've isolated your child, marked the penalty chart, and greeted them in a loving way when the isolation ended. If they earned 3 penalties, they sat out for the rest of the day and had a sandwich for lunch and/or dinner. And, you marked three penalties in their box. The next morning, or at whatever time each day you have chosen to put the stickers on, you put a sticker in the empty box if your child received no penalties. If they have even one penalty mark, they do not get a sticker.

We put them on in the morning before walking out the door for school. This means that a "day" is from the morning when we walk out the door for school, until the next morning until we would walk out the door to go to school again. During the summer or vacations, we still put them on in the morning, usually by 8 a.m. You can decide what your "day" is based on your life, it just needs to be at about the same every day, so kids know what earning period they are in, so they know when their "fresh start" begins.

Now, you are ready to learn how the Choice Chart works when you are not at home, as well as the last step, The Payday Dinner.

The Choice Chart

Part 5

The great thing about the Choice Chart is that if you are consistently implementing it at home, it then continues to work no matter where you are. With four kids, we were on the go a lot, to their sporting events, school-related activities, visits with friends, and family, and vacations, both short and long. So, I had to create something that worked no matter where we were.

Even though you leave the physical chart at home, the Choice Chart still “comes with” you and you can still fully implement it. It just looks a little different. The main difference between being out and being at home is how the penalty is served. Everything else remains pretty much the same.

When you’re out and about you still:

- Identify the behavior
- Give a verbal redirection
- Say, “You have a penalty.”

At this point, you have a decision to make:

Will my child serve when we get home, or the next day?

or

Will my child serve right now?

Where you are and what the penalty was for will help you make this decision. You will have to make this decision on the spot, so I will give you some great examples of how to modify the penalty in a number of different circumstances so you can see how it looks and feels.

First, let’s cover what you do when you are going to go with the first option, “Serve penalty at home”, which is to have your child serve the penalty when they get home, or the next day, if you will be getting home very late.

The first option:

This is useful when you know you will be home later and your child will have a chance to serve it then. After your verbal redirection and their non-compliance, simply say to your child, “You have a penalty. You will not get to do xyz with us when we get home, and you will be serving your penalty.”

The Choice Chart

It's important for kids to know that their actions are not going to ruin it for everyone else, and that ultimately the child making the poor choices will be the one who misses out. It's always good to add in something extra fun for your other children when you have given someone a penalty. You want them to see that they miss out when they make poor choices, as is true in adult life.

Now let's cover the second option, "Serve penalty now", which is when you are going to have your child serve their penalty while you are still out, in an alternative way, since they cannot go to their usual isolation place.

The second option is for when you want...

1. Your child to suffer the consequence now because you believe it will help them make better choices for the rest of the day.
2. You don't see a good time later in the day or the next day for them to serve the penalty.
3. You simply feel waiting until the next day is too long and so the penalty will lose its effect.

You may want your child to serve an alternative penalty when you are someplace you have spent extra time getting to, or you are somewhere you have spent money to experience, or you have a limited amount of time to be where you are.

On a special outing:

Special outings typically mean you have:

Spent time getting there

Spent money

Have a limited amount of time for the outing



It's not realistic that you are going to leave a place like Disneyland after you've just spent a million dollars to get in—so don't threaten that. It's also not always convenient to sit somewhere for 30 minutes when you want or need to be walking around.

One option is to have the child skip the next two rides, or the next two activities you'll be doing. You can say, "Sorry, you lost the next two rides due to the poor choice you made." or "You will sit out for this ride due to your poor choices. That is your penalty. I hope you will decide to make better choices for the rest of the day."

If your child is the only child who is there, you may just want to sit somewhere for 30 minutes, or go to a gift shop or some other activity you don't think your child will enjoy. Tell them it is their penalty. Of course, they don't get any treats.

The Choice Chart

An alternative penalty at Disneyland would be to say, "When we eat, you do not get to order what you want." When it's time to eat, let everyone else order what they want from the menu, but the child with the penalty gets grilled cheese, or whatever you pick for them. Make sure everyone else gets a milkshake, too.

However, if your child or family has issues with food, such as being overweight or there is a history of eating disorders in your family, you will want to steer clear from anything that has to do with withholding food from a child or giving it to them as a reward. If this is the case, go to a gift shop instead and let everyone pick a small treasure, and the child with the penalty misses out.

And, remember to mark the choice chart when you get home, even though the penalty has already been served.

If you are at the beach or a park, the child who received the penalty can sit on the sand for 30 minutes while everyone else plays. Again, if your child will not listen, you can say, "If you sit cooperatively, it's 30 minutes. If not, it will be an hour. You pick."

Notice that my language is short, concise, and choice-oriented. Don't take away their power. Remind them they are in control of their fun.

If your child is especially disgruntled, you need to be prepared to leave, no matter where you are. You can say, "If you do not listen, we will leave. When we get home, you will be in your room for the rest of the day while we _____." Think of something fun to do with the rest of your kids. Again, if you have an only child, think of something fun you can do by yourself and tell your child what it is.

At another person's home:

Another time you may want your child to serve an alternative penalty is when you are at someone else's home. When you are at Grandma and Grandpa's or your friend's house, the uncooperative child can miss out on something there which can count as their penalty. Or, if you want, your child can still serve an isolation when you get home. That is always up to you to add kind of a double consequence. Consider your child's overall behavior of late, and go from there.



The Choice Chart

One time one of my children was misbehaving at my grandparents' house. The kids used to love to pick the oranges from their huge orange tree, partly because I let them climb a ladder to get the ones on top. On this day, a day on which I had not planned to pick oranges, I had the uncooperative child sit in my grandmother's big, boring, beautiful living room where they were not allowed to touch anything. I took the rest of the kids outside, impromptu, to pick oranges off the tree.



Being an excellent parent often involves creativity. The kids who got to do the tree were elated and the one who was left out definitely felt the pain of the simple, on-the-spot penalty.

Of course, another alternative, depending on the circumstances, is to leave. Say to your host, "I'm so sorry _____ is making poor choices. We have to leave. We will come again when _____ is ready to be a respectful guest. I am sorry." Leaving in this way would count as three strikes.

While running errands or similar outing:

Similarly, alternative penalties work well when you are out and about running errands. If you are at the store, and you need to give a penalty to one child, you can buy everyone else a small treat. The child with the penalty does not get the treat and gets a penalty mark at home. Say to the child with the penalty. "I'm sorry you have to miss out this time. Next time, I know you will be full of good choices and will get to have fun with us."

While you are driving:

Now, let's talk about penalties while you are driving, which is always a great concern. You might want to make misbehavior in the car a never behavior, since it is also a potential safety hazard for all of you. Either way, once your child has earned a penalty in the car, tell the child they have a penalty. They can serve it when they get home.

Alternatively, you can have them miss out on something during the outing, or make up something special for everyone else on purpose so the child can be left out of it, such as stopping for ice cream on the way home and the child with the penalty misses out.

If they earn two penalties on the way home, you could decide to give them an hour of isolation once you get home. Even when the chart is not present, act as if it is.

Use the same language no matter where you are—"choices, penalty, isolation." The choice chart is effective everywhere, at any time.



The Choice Chart

One of my brothers, who is not a parent, once had my sons at the park when they were 5 and 7. My boys were starting to fight over the tire swing, so he quickly thought to say, “If you don’t figure it out without fighting, you’re both getting a penalty.”



They immediately started cooperating to work out it, and he heard one of them say, with great concern to the other, “We’re going to get penalties!” My brother came home excited to share his victory.

Share your system with grandparents and other family members so they can use it when needed. The 3rd penalty will happen rarely—if ever!

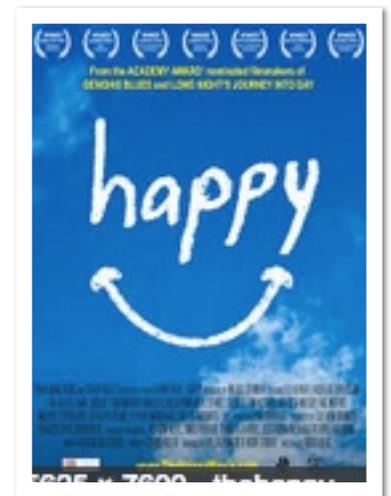
This system is very simple. However, just because something is simple, does not mean that it is easy. The self-discipline required to follow through with discipline will come back to you every day, in every way. The word “discipline” has the word “disciple” as its root. To disciple is to teach. You are teaching your children the meaning of your words, every day. You are your child’s first and greatest teacher—and they are counting on you!

Part 6

The fifth, final, and very fun and important part of the Choice Chart system is the payday dinner. First, I’ll share the philosophical reason for the payday dinner, then the nitty gritty how-to. This includes my beliefs on money as it relates to choices in life and why I do not give children allowance.

The philosophy behind the Payday Dinner

First, it has pretty much been shown through extensive research that money does not make us happy, that is, if you couldn’t tell that just by looking around. One of the best things I have seen or read about happiness is the simple documentary called “Happy.” You might want to check it out. It’s also great to watch with kids aged 10 and up.



The Choice Chart

Yet, living within your means and having enough extra money to experience the things you want to experience in life does create the feeling of having choices. And, I believe that having choices does allow us to create more happiness in our lives, so by association, having more money holds the possibility of creating more happiness.

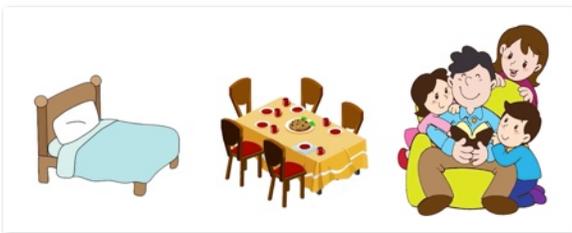
More choices = Possibility for more happiness

There's a lot more I could say on this, but that's the simplest way to put it for the purposes of the Choice Chart. So, unless you live in a non-commerce society, money is at the root of many of the choices we are able to make in life. In most cultures, if you work hard and make good choices, you will be able to earn more money. If you also have the skills to manage that money, no matter the amount, then the money you earn can help you create a life full of choices.

The Choice Chart uses this fact. This is what I teach my children. The Payday dinner is one part of that.

But first, a few words on chores and allowance.

I don't pay for kids for chores. In our home, we all do what needs to be done when it needs to be done. I ask different kids to do different things at different times and they don't get paid to do any of it. They do it because they get to live in the home and enjoy all the benefits of living here free of charge. It's our home. We messy it and we tidy it together. I don't have a chore chart delineating set chores for set children, although for some that works really well, and if it works for you, then go for it, it won't detract from the choice chart.



The Payday Dinner takes the place of allowance in our home. This is because I am not going to pay the kids for chores, but I am going to pay them for being cooperative members of our family. For me, this mirrors the reward that comes to people in adult life when they work hard and are a cooperative, contributing member of society. I am always looking for the mirror. That is, how does what I'm doing as a parent mirror what happens in adult life?

So, when things need to be done, I just say, "Thomas, please take this trash out." Or, "Kenzie and Addison, you have the dishes tonight." Or, I'll say, "Someone needs to swiffer and someone else needs to pick up all the stuff that's laying out. You guys figure it out." Usually they have preferred chores and can negotiate it between themselves.



Although rare, I've even had one child pay the other child to do their share!

The Choice Chart

Sometimes, if there's a lot that needs to be done, I make a list of the things and tape it up. I get everyone and say, "Ok, we are all going to complete this list. Who wants to pick first?" They all want to pick first, so they can pick their preferred chore or what they perceive to be the easiest chore. The first child takes the pen and crosses off what they are going to do, then the next, then the next, then the next, then me, and we all keep going back to the list until it is complete.

Even if it's just you and one child, you can use this type of chore list. Or, the two of you can work as a team and cross each item off together.

I haven't had problems with someone not doing their share because the negative social feedback they would get from the rest of us would be enough to make them want to be a contributing member. When we are finished, everyone feels great and of course the house is in better shape, so everything feels more fun. If someone was disgruntled and causing problems for some reason, of course, they would get a penalty, which would be served AFTER they completed their chores. They know this, and this is what squashes any grumbling.

If someone is needing support or has had a particularly tough day in some other way, I might say, "I'm going to team with Addison today, because I can tell he needs some extra love." The other kids are fine with this, because they know I will do it with them when they need it.

The nitty-gritty how-to for the Payday Dinner:

You can have a Payday dinner every month, or every week, or even every day if needed. We did it every month. However, if you are just starting out, or if you have younger children, a month may be too long to wait to have it work as a motivator. You may want to start with one week in the beginning, then extend it. For a younger child, or a child who is very impulsive and needing quicker reward, you can pay out every night until they learn to delay gratification a bit longer. Delaying gratification is an essential life skill, and a fundamental part of raising happy kids, so look out for an upcoming video on just that topic.



Decide what night you will have the payday dinner. If you have a family calendar, put it on the calendar, so everyone knows the dinner is coming. When my kids see it on there, the hum begins, "Payday dinner is Thursday..." "Did you see payday dinner is Thursday?..." etc. They look forward to it.

Before the day of the dinner, count up the stickers for each child and write the number next to their name on the chart. Decide what amount of money you will give per sticker. I give \$1 per sticker up to age 12, then \$2 per sticker 13 and up. This is the amount of money I'd like my children to have given their ages.

The Choice Chart

A younger child might only need the sticker, and does not care about money. Or, a shiny quarter per sticker may do the trick. Or you may decide to buy them a specific toy, treat, or outing you agree upon when they achieve a certain number of stickers. Make it work for you. Do the minimum amount that motivates your child and fits for you, modifying as your children get older.

Get the money and put it on the table with the chart. When you're just starting out, it's important to get cash so your kids can see it. With four, I had to go to the bank because I usually needed a significant amount and wanted to have just the right bills to give each child.



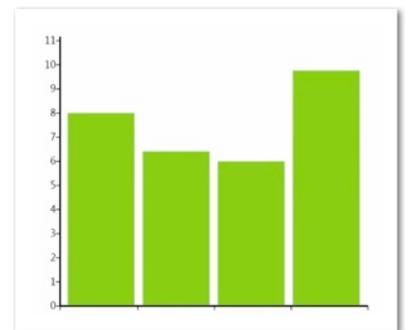
So, if my child can earn one dollar per day, how much money should I expect him or her to earn each month with the Choice Chart?

On average, you can expect a child to earn about \$15 - \$25 per month. Although the pattern does not always follow age, as a child gets older, they should earn more, meaning they should be earning fewer and fewer penalties.

Put the cash and the chart on the center of the table before dinner. This is very visual for children and becomes part of their memory traces around the Choice Chart all month long. After we had been doing the Choice Chart for a year or so, I stopped getting cash and instead took their bank books to the bank and did the deposits there, letting the teller write in their books. Then, I would just put the bank books and the deposit slips on the table.

They liked looking at their balances and watching them grow. Sometimes they'd spend it, sometimes they'd save and save, and then open a CD. It's their money. It's not a college fund and while I do discuss their spending and saving choices with them, I do not control what they do with it. Letting your child have a bank account they control (in addition to the account you create for college or other purposes) creates many great opportunities to teach your kids about earning, saving, investing, and spending money.

After everyone is done eating, it's time for Payday. Pass out the money or bank books. Let everyone see what they earned. While it's not a surprise, since they can see the chart all month long and know what they are earning, they still love seeing the final amount in their hands. The Payday Dinner is not a time to go back and rehash any bad days. It's a time to say, "Here you go," and move forward. Don't let anyone be negative toward a child who may have had a rough week or month.



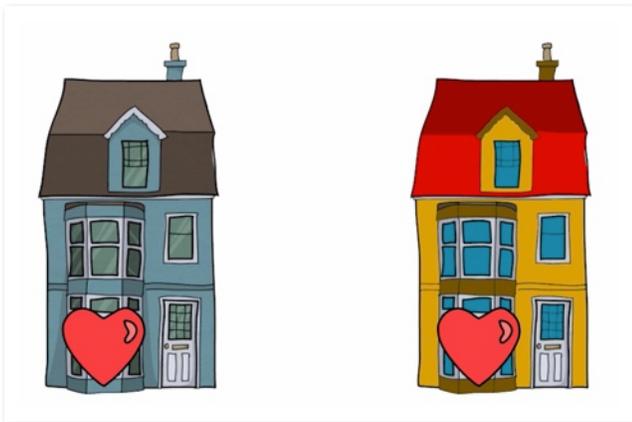
The Choice Chart

Celebrate each other's successes and enjoy your meal. Use a family meeting or an individual chat to talk about issues, not the payday dinner.

Now, here are some ideas about how to introduce the Choice Chart to your children so you can start using it. Decide when you want to start. If possible, pick a time that you can be with your children for a few days in a row at home, with no work or school, such as on a Friday afternoon. Plan a low-key weekend filled with regular family stuff at home when both parents are there. If you are single or there is rarely a time when both parents are home, pick a day that makes sense for you.

Both parents should sit down with all of the children at the same time to introduce the Choice Chart. If your child is 3 or 4 years old, you don't have to introduce the choice chart, just start doing it. If they are 5 or older, you will want to introduce it in a more formal way, so your children will know what is about to happen to them!

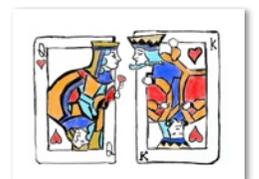
If you are married, it is important that both parents introduce the chart together. Wait to find a time so this can happen. If you are single, or if you and your spouse are rarely home at the same time, just introduce it a time that makes sense for you.



If you are not married but your children's other parent will also be implementing this system and you get along well, then introduce it together at either home. Many families who have two separate homes both used the system with great success.

If you are not married and the other parent will not be using the Choice Chart, that's ok, it can still work beautifully in your home.

Begin by explaining how much you love your family and what having a family means to you. Explain how you want to have even more love and fun together as a family. Let your children know that you have come up with a way to help everyone have more fun. You can say, "We made you so we could have fun with you. And now, we want to start having even more fun as a family. So, we are going to talk about some rules, consequences, and rewards, that will help us to do that going forward."



Show the rule chart. Explain what it looks like and what it sounds like to be in line with each rule. Talk about it for the adults, too.

The Choice Chart

Over the years, many people have asked me what they should actually say for each rule. So, here is what I would say:

The first rule is: We cooperate. This means we participate in our family with a cooperative attitude. The prefix “co” means “with,” so to cooperate means to co-operate, or to operate together. When we are operating together, life is more fun. This means you are doing what helps the family, or the group as a whole, at any given time. Sometimes being cooperative will mean you are doing something you’ve been asked to do. Other times being cooperative will mean you stop doing something you are asked to stop doing. Being cooperative will help our family have more fun.

The second rule is: We speak kindly. This means that we use a kind tone of voice and that we use kind words to express our feelings, even when we are upset. Being sad, frustrated, or angry does not give any one of us the right to speak rudely or in a mean way to someone in our family. Going forward, we will all speak kindly to one another.

And the third rule is: We keep our hands, feet, and other objects to ourselves. This means we will only touch each other in loving ways, and we will not hurt each other with objects, or throw things, even if you think it’s just playing. This rule will help everyone in our family to know they are physically safe. Even when you are very frustrated, you may not hit, push, or be mean physically in any other way.

Explain that the rules apply to everyone in the family because these are the rules that will help the family to be strong and to help each person have high levels of integrity and self-respect.

If you have typically been someone who yells at your children and you will be working on not doing that anymore, let your children know this. Explain that one verbal redirection will be given and that you will say nothing else. Let them know that if they do not respond right away to the redirection, they will go to their isolation place for thirty minutes.

Our Rules

1. We cooperate.
2. We speak kindly.
3. We keep our hands, feet, and other objects to ourselves.

The Choice Chart

Be sure to let them know where the isolation place is, and what your expectations are for their behavior on the way to isolation, as well as during isolation. When I say, "You have a penalty," you are to walk immediately to your bedroom (or designated place). Clarify for your child(ren):

- You are not to argue or talk back to me, or do any other behavior that could earn you another penalty.
- If you choose to be uncooperative once I have said, "You have a penalty," you will get another penalty, right then. In that case, instead of 30 minutes, it will be an hour.
- If you continue, you'll get a 3rd penalty, and you'll be out for the rest of the day. So, it's in your best interest to be cooperative.



Explain that if they do not cooperate with the isolation, they will have another penalty. If you've made any adjustments to the Choice Chart Behavior Management System, communicate those.

Explain again, that if they receive a third penalty, they are out for the rest of the day.

Show the choice chart and stickers to your children. Tell them that for each isolation, they will get a tally mark in their box. Let them know that only adults can mark the penalties.



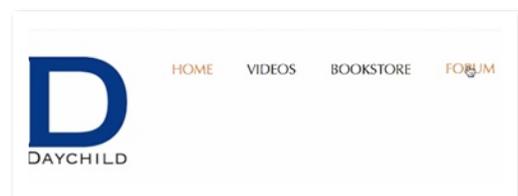
Let them know that every day they have a fresh start, a new chance to earn a sticker. Explain what time of day you have chosen to put the stickers on and that they get to put their sticker on.

Explain the value you have decided on per sticker, whether it's a quarter, a dollar, an earned treat. Explain how this money will be given at the payday dinner, either once per week, or once per month, whichever you have decided to start with. If your children do not already have a bank account, it's fun to go together to open the accounts. You would just need to do this before the first Payday dinner.

Post The Rules and the empty Choice Chart for the month. You don't have to start on the first day of the month. Just start when you want to start. Have a pen and the stickers handy. Keep their bank books in a safe place and put them on the table at each payday dinner, and depending on how old and how responsible your children are, be sure to collect them after for safe-keeping, or help your child select a safe place in their room to store their bank book.

Let the fun and love begin.

To access this free video series, go to www.Daychild.org. To ask Cara a question specific to your family or a general question about the Choice Chart, or any other topic, go to our forum on our website and join the discussion!



The Choice Chart

Appendix

A. The Rules

B. Choice Charts for:

- a. 1 child
- b. 2 children
- c. 3 children
- d. 4 children

C. Winning Ways to Speak with Children

Our Rules

1. We cooperate.
2. We speak kindly.
3. We keep our hands, feet, and other objects to ourselves.

The Choice Chart

Month of _____

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	

The Choice Chart

Month of _____

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	

The Choice Chart: Month of _____

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	

The Choice Chart: Month of _____

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	

Winning Ways to Speak with Children

This mini-ebook is an excerpt from the appendix of *The Chit Chat*,
a full-length ebook soon to be available at Daychild.org.

By Cara Day, M.A., C.E.C.

DAYCHILD.ORG

*Winning Ways to
Speak with Children*

Dedicated to Annelise, Mackenzie, Thomas, and Addison Day for
always creating opportunities for me to find just the right words to love you best.

Winning Ways to Speak with Children

Table of Contents

An excerpt from the appendix of *The Chit Chat*

Page

1	Introduction
1	General Do's and Don'ts of the Winning Ways to Speak
2	Words for Rejoining
2	Words for Praising
3	Words for Loving
4	Words for Connecting
5	Words for Empowering
6	Words for Shifting
7	What's Next?

All rights reserved. This book may not be reproduced in whole or in part without written permission from the author, except a reviewer who may quote a brief passage in a review, nor may any part of this book be reproduced or stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or other, without written permission from the author.

Winning Ways to Speak with Children

Introduction

The words you use, how they are put together, combined with the open, expansiveness of your eyes, your tone of voice, and the warmth of your body language help determine the quality of your communication with your children. This is what they are going to remember. They are not going to remember whether the floor was clean, or what kind of car you chose to drive them around in. They are going to remember how your face looked throughout their childhood, how easy your smile came, and how you handled yourself at life's most challenging moments. I wrote these lists because a couple who attended a Happy Kids class I presented said to me during the class, "But what are the actual words you say?" This had also come up frequently in coaching sessions with parents. It was then that I realized that many parents struggle with finding the right words, even if they are already adept at staying calm and centered. I spent the next year writing down everything I said that help creates our family culture. This mini-e-book is the result.

The questions and phrases in this ebook are grouped into sections, although many overlap. The lists can also be used as a tool for centering. This means you can quietly read one or more of the lists to yourself as a way to get into a space of being ready to listen, empathize, empower, and guide your loved one. Post the pages you are concentrating on in your closet, by your desk, or anywhere you regularly look. Read through the questions, take a cleansing breath, and begin your day as a parent. Use it as often as necessary to recenter. Put some of your favorites on sticky notes in key places, or on the notepad in your phone. Sometimes I print a question or phrase out very small, in 6 or 8 pitch, and tape it to my smart phone as a reminder about something I'm working on at the time or with a particular child or person in my life.

General Do's and Don'ts of the Winning Ways to Speak

Things to do:

- Ask open-ended questions. This means the question cannot be answered with only a yes or a no.
- Make eye contact. Take cleansing breaths as needed while you speak with your loved one.
- Most of the questions in this mini-ebook can be followed up with, "Tell me more about that." Sometimes, several times. Get as much as you can from the questions.
- When the person you are talking to says, "I don't know." Say, "What would it be if you did know?"
- When a child is afraid of punishment or judgment, say "There's probably not a lot you could say to me that I have not done or felt myself. I can almost guarantee that. I'll help you no matter what."
- Telling children regularly, "You are safe. I'm not going to give up on you. This is a safe space for you. I will always help you," will help them start and keep sharing.
- Center and re-center on creating connection, as needed, throughout any discussion.
- Only say things that are true, kind, and needed.

Things to not do:

- Explain how you are older and/or wiser and know more.
- Look at your phone or take a call during a conversation.
- Express exasperation that you are having the conversation again, if it is a repeat topic.
- Talk about yourself or your own experiences without asking permission first.
- Ask your child, "When will you ever learn?" or similar language.
- Use put-downs or zingers.
- Hold the need to be right.
- End the conversation before they do, without good reason.

Following these guidelines will help you avoid common pitfalls that stifle communication and cause children to get out the brick and mortar.

Winning Ways to Speak with Children

Rejoining

Words for when:

- You see your child after you have not seen them for a little or long while.
- You want to give your child an open-ended chance to share.
- You want to ask your loved one how their day was without saying, "How was your day?"

Tell me something new.

Tell me something I don't know about you today.

What's new with you today?

What's the best thing that happened today?

What great thing happened today?

Tell me a funny story from today.

Tell me something you think might surprise me about today.

Tell me about you.

What wonderful thing happened today?

What could have been better about today?

What would you have done differently today, if you had a little time machine?

What are you going to take away from today?

What are you going to do differently tomorrow because of today?

Who or what challenged you today?

What's a goal you have for tomorrow as a result of today?

Praising

Words for when:

- You want to give your child specific feedback about choices they are making.
- You want your child to know that you notice him or her.
- You want your child to feel your love verbally.

Important note: Instead of saying, "Good job," or a similar phrase when your child is on track, describe what they did and the specific or likely outcome of the choice they made. This is the type of praise that will have meaning for your child, will likely lead to more effective choices, and will help them learn how to give this same type of praise to others.

You got everything you had to get done first, and now you can enjoy playing.

You helped clear and wash the dishes, everything is cleaned up, and we are ready for tomorrow.

Your room is tidy. You know where everything is and you are taking good care of your belongings.

You chose not to argue back with him. You avoided escalating the situation and that is helping our whole family.

You showed courage in talking with her. No matter the outcome, you can know you did your best.

You are full of good choices. The choices you are making are helping everyone to get along and do better. Thank you.

Winning Ways to Speak with Children

Loving

Words for when:

- You want to show your child how excited you are to be their parent.
- You want to increase the loving feeling in your home.
- You want to express love and gratitude to your spouse or partner in front of your children.

I love you
Thank you...
I love it when you...
You make me smile so much!
You make my heart go pitter-pat when you...
You are so great!
You are a magical part of our family--thank you!
I'm so lucky to have you in my life.
You are so great--I can't believe you're mine!
That was super. I think you're wonderful.
Wow. Look what you did!
Thanks for loving me.
Thanks for loving me through this.
I love the way you love me.
You give the best love.
We have such a great family.
This is so much fun.
I can't wait to snuggle you when I get home.
Thank you for helping our family.
I can't believe what a lucky duck I am.
You're making our family great.
You are such a fun person.
You are the BEST. (Men especially like to be told this.)
I can't believe I get to live with all these great people.

Look at us, having so much fun.
I looked forward to seeing you all day.
You're a GGT. (Guaranteed Good Time)
You crack me up.
You are my gift.
Look at us! We are so awesome.
I feel so happy inside.
Look at you! You're shining.
We are such a great team.
Oh my goodness, you'd better hug me.
Wow, now we're on a roll.
I love being with you.
Who wants to give me a squeezey hug?
This is such a special day.
I love our family. I'm so glad you're in it.
Wow, look at all this love.

Winning Ways to Speak with Children

Words for Connecting

Words for when:

- Your child is wanting to share information or a story
- You are wanting your child to share information or a story
- You are in a potentially emotional discussion with your child, or you are discussing an issue or problem
- You are wanting to create a safe space for your child to share openly
- You want your child to be gentle with him or herself and not judge the way they are feeling or what they are experiencing

Tell me more.

I'm curious about that. What else can you tell me?

Can you dig a little deeper? I want to know more.

I'm not going to give up on you. I believe in you.

I want to know more about you. Tell me something else.

I can see you are struggling, be gentle with yourself.

Why do you think you're going through this right now?

What gifts do you think might come from this experience?

How can I best love you right now?

In what ways are you settling or selling yourself short?

What will it take for you to take the next step?

What would it look like if you removed all judgment?

What would the highest version of you say about this?

Let's write down everything on your mind so it can be more clear.

Let's talk about the worst thing that could happen. Chances are it won't be that bad.

On a scale of 1 - 10, how _____ are you? (upset, engaged, anxious, hopeful, etc.)

Let's brainstorm options for the possible outcomes.

Tell me what's going on for you right now.

You seem frustrated and I want to get your thoughts.

What's in front of you right now?

You seem weighed down. What's causing that weight?

Tell me about something that's important to you right now.

Why are you feeling so happy?

You seem angry and I want you to feel understood.

If you feel unsure about something, I can help you think of ideas or make a decision.

I can help you solve a problem if you want me to.

You seem sad and if you want I can help you figure out why.

You seem overwhelmed and I'd like to help you get a handle on things.

I know you haven't done this before. What about it feels a little scary for you?

What is one thing you can tell me so I will understand you?

What kind of love do you need right now?

I'm going to love you through this. What's the first thing I can do to love you right now?

How do you feel about tomorrow?

At what other time have you felt this way?

Why do you think this is happening?

What's holding you back?

How can you be the space for this?

How could you allow room for this, too?

What can you do about that?

What's going on in there?

Winning Ways to Speak with Children

Empowering

Words for when:

- You want to help the people you love move past limiting beliefs they may hold about themselves, others, or the world.
- You want to help the people you love move past habitual thought patterns that may be keeping them from greatness.
- You want to show your family that you are willing to dig deep with them, not just stay at the surface with things that are important to them or are affecting them.

What can you do about this situation?

What is something you could do that might seem like the opposite of what you've been thinking?

What would you do if you had no fears around this situation?

If your best friend was in this situation, what would you say to him or her?

Can I describe it to you from my perspective?

Would you like to hear my thoughts on this?

Can I challenge you a little bit on this?

If it's ok with you, I'd like to share my feelings on this with you.

Can we explore that a little more?

What are you really trying to say here?

What's holding you back?

What really bothers you about doing that?

What would it take to get over that obstacle?

Let's think about your values and see how this lines up with them.

What would it mean for you if you overcame this?

What could you do differently?

How have you overcome a similar challenge in the past?

Let me ask you about that idea. Where did it come from?

How is your idea working for or against you?

How emotional are you in this situation?

If this situation comes up again, how do you think you will handle it?

What do you mean by _____?

Talk to me about what it means to _____?

How true is that belief, really?

How has holding that belief affected you?

How might you let that belief go?

How can you put that into action, right away?

What's your first action step going to be?

What's another way to look at that?

What might be the completely opposite point of view about this situation?

What might a good friend say to you right now?

Think of a few other possible ways to look at this.

What would someone else you know that you respect say about what happened?

What do you really want to come out of this?

Winning Ways to Speak with Children

Shifting

Words for when:

- Your child is at a point where a situation is likely to escalate and they may get “in trouble”
- You notice you are escalating and want to help yourself maintain your emotions
- You want to empower your child to make a change in their words or actions, right in the moment
- You want to offer your child an opportunity for your child to avoid receiving a penalty (see Choice Chart, page 7).

Your mind is very powerful. Think of something positive right now and see if you can shift yourself.

Check in with yourself. What do you need right now?

Get control of yourself. Take a breath and know you are safe.

Please listen so you can understand.

Please stand in the focus position.

Look at me, please.

Please give me your full body attention.

Please keep your body still and listen to what I am saying to you.

Think about what is going to happen if you cannot shift yourself right now.

If you want, we can have a do-over. Let's start over right now.

Ask yourself how this is going to work out for you.

If you continue with this, you will be _____, and we will all be _____.

(for example, “in your room” and “out here playing the game.”)

Think about what it is like right now for all of us who are interacting with you.

What is your contribution to this situation going to be?

How do you want to show up right now?

What can you do to be your best self right now?

Press your pause button and let me know when you are ready.

Take a moment for yourself please. Let me know when you feel better.

Get ahold of yourself and make a choice that is going to make you feel better.

Shift yourself so you can feel good.

Shift yourself so you can make a good choice.

You can make a new choice, right now, right away.

Are you helping our family to be strong right now?

Please think about the choice you are making.

Please come up with a choice that is going to make you feel great.

Please decide where you are going to go to be able to make good choices right now.

Please decide who you will be near in order to be able to make good choices right now.

Please think about a boundary you can put on right now that will help you be your best self.

Take some time for some silence right now please.

Please remember you can make a new choice right away and start having fun again.

Remember it is a choice to feel good.

Remember it is a choice to be your best self.

Remember your choices will determine how this is going to work out for you.

I am here to help you. I am not going to give up on you.

How can I help right now?

The Choice Chart

What's next?

The Choice Chart is just one part of many resources that are or will become available at Daychild:

Behavior Management Series:

The Choice Chart: A behavior management system that WORKS

The Chit-Chat: A course toward new agreements

Winning Ways to Speak with Children

Winning Ways to Speak with Babies and Toddlers

Behavior Specific Modification Strategies

Manners First

Acknowledge and Validate

Executive Functions and Communication

The Longest Relationship: The Sibling Bond

Like our page on [Facebook](#) and [Pinterest](#) to receive new releases.