



**DISCIPLINE THAT
CONNECTS**

OVERVIEW

4 *messages every child longs to hear*



a note from the authors

Dear Parent,

You have great intentions for your kids. But between your great intentions, and all the stuff that happens when you discipline your children, sometimes things go wrong. They react angrily. You do, too. Things get ugly more often than you'd like. You get advice. You go online. You buy books and keep trying, praying, and wondering: Is any of this working? Am I ruining my child? Will we ever have the close relationship I've always hoped for?

We totally get it. As parents of three high-strung and challenging kids, we lived this and then fought hard to remedy it. We also learned a lot in our previous careers with high-risk teens (Jim), and sensory and behavior challenged kids (Lynne), and we're excited to offer you this summary of our twenty-five plus years of experience. This ebook was written to help parents shift their thinking and transform their families by introducing the basics of the Discipline That Connects® approach.

Parents who learn these ideas report:

- » *"My kids know when they need a time-out and they take it themselves."*
- » *"There is joy in our home again."*
- » *"My kids get along with each other better than ever!"*
- » *"I'm a nicer parent!"*
- » *"It's so much more natural to talk about God."*
- » *"My kids are making kinder, wiser choices!"*

If you would like to say these things about your family, dig into this ebook!

Your focus will shift from behavior change to heart change as you

communicate to your children:

- » You are SAFE with me
- » You are LOVED no matter what
- » You are CALLED and CAPABLE
- » You are RESPONSIBLE for your actions.



These four powerful messages grow out of what the Bible says is true about God's children. Our prayer is that you'll find hope in these pages! We would love to continue partnering with you as you seek to cultivate a strong, connected family, and lead your family with grace!

Jim & Lynne Jackson

Co-founders of Connected Families

Note: Names of parents and children in the following ebook have been changed to protect their privacy.





introduction

Jeni wants her ten-year-old Tyler to be more obedient and responsible. What parent doesn't want this? So when Tyler disobeys and doesn't take responsibility to clean up the kitchen as assigned on his chore chart, she enters the all too common battle of wills to get him to do his job.

"Tyler, please clean up the mess in the kitchen."

No response. Tyler is glued to the Xbox.



Jeni raises her voice, "Tyler! Listen to me! You know the rules. There are no screens until your chores are done, and you've left the kitchen a mess again!" She has Tyler's attention, but

he knows from experience that if he stalls long enough, mom might give up. Besides, he hates clearing and cleaning dishes more than any of his chores. He stays glued.

"Tyler, are we going to have to go through this again?" Jeni scolds. "You put that controller down right now and clear and rinse the dishes, or I'm taking the Xbox away for a week!"

Tyler senses that Jeni means business and responds, "You could at least let me finish this level." He slumps off his chair as Jeni follows him into the kitchen to be sure he gets a good start.

Satisfied that he knows she means business, Jeni leaves Tyler to finish, thinking to herself, "That was easier than last time. Maybe he's finally starting to feel responsible for his jobs."

Based on what we observe with moms and dads like Jeni, it seems parents believe that if they work hard enough to get kids to behave, their kids will somehow embrace the value of obedience and responsibility. On the surface this might seem logical, but unfortunately, this approach usually builds more resentment than responsibility.



what if we've got it backwards?

In her effort to give Tyler a sense of responsibility, Jeni actually chiseled away his sense of responsibility. By nagging until Tyler gave in, Jeni communicated a subtle but powerful message, "Tyler, you are *irresponsible* and need *me* to motivate you." By focusing on getting Tyler to *behave* responsibly, Jeni missed the most important goal, which is to communicate to Tyler the message, "YOU are responsible." **She focused on behavior first, hoping the beliefs would follow. Jeni got it backwards.**

What if, on the way to helping her son behave responsibly, she first focused on the *beliefs she wants to instill*? For example,



what if Jeni made sure not to rush through dinner, but worked to connect well with Tyler while they ate, and affirmed how

much she enjoys being with him? She'd reinforce the belief, "*You are loved.*" What if she had noticed that on previous nights Tyler grimaced as he rinsed dirty dishes, and she acknowledged that it's hard for him? She'd communicate the message, "*You are understood.*" What if during dinner she asked Tyler if there were other chores he'd prefer over doing dishes, and gave him the opportunity to suggest a new plan? She'd instill in Tyler a belief that he is capable and responsible.

Would this help things go differently next time Tyler needs to take responsibility for his chores? We think so, because we've seen it unfold this way for over twenty-five years with thousands of parents and kids.

When parents put their best efforts into sending the messages that their children are safe, loved, capable and responsible, kids tend to live out these beliefs as they walk through life.

what messages are you sending?

The “messages” parents send kids when they act up powerfully shape their beliefs about themselves. By “messages” we mean not just what is spoken, but what is experienced. For example, if a struggling child is met with a gentle tone and a loving glance, the message sent might be, “You are loved. You matter. You are understood.”

Conversely, when a struggling child is met with a furrowed brow and loud exhale, before a word is ever spoken, that child receives a message about himself. The message is likely, “You are a problem. You are a disappointment. You are a nuisance.” Despite a parent’s good intentions, **the messages children receive are often the opposite of what a parent wants to communicate.**

When parents are diligent over time to communicate messages of love and grace to their kids, rooted in God’s truth, those children are empowered to believe they are significant and important contributors in this world, and they tend to behave accordingly.



4 powerful messages kids long to hear

In this overview we will expand briefly on **four powerful messages that parents can focus on as Biblical goals when discipline challenges hit the fan.**

The first message: **"You are SAFE with me!"** When parents address misbehavior with God's grace and peace, kids sense that their parents are for them, not against them. They feel secure, and this is when they will learn the best.

The second message: **"You are LOVED no matter what!"** Connecting and empathizing with kids when they misbehave represents God's grace-filled love for us.

The third message: **"You are CALLED and CAPABLE!"** Our kids were created by God as unique masterpieces. Sometimes their unique talents show up even when they misbehave. We can bring out the best in our kids, especially when they struggle.

The fourth message: **"You are RESPONSIBLE for your actions!"** Learning to nurture responsibility helps kids understand the natural impact of their actions and guides them to make right what they've made wrong.

When parents embrace the Discipline That Connects® principles, children grow in wisdom and true responsibility for their lives. Read below a brief overview of the four messages. Dig deeper by purchasing our book [Discipline That Connects®](#) or taking our online course by the same name.





**DISCIPLINE THAT
CONNECTS**



1

“you are
SAFE
with me”

Our brains are designed to protect us from anything threatening, especially if it is large and comes at us fast and loudly. (Picture a large, roaring animal running at you.) It is important for our survival that we quickly a) aggressively defend ourselves or, b) run away when we are threatened (fight/flight response).

This self-protective mechanism works against us in discipline situations, however. Parents often try to regain control by rushing in (fast), towering over kids (large), with strong commands to “Stop it! Right now!” (loud). This sends our kids into fight/flight responses, and shuts down their frontal lobe. If we want our kids to learn anything helpful when they’ve misbehaved, we must approach them in a manner that is the opposite of fast, large, and loud: Slow, Low (get out of intimidating postures and calm your body) and Listen.

Kristi's 4-year-old daughter Sierra was intense, and so were their conflicts! Kristi wanted to embrace the Discipline that Connects messages, and started by rehearsing a new script to guide her thinking at crunch time: "Jesus responds with grace, love, and mercy



as he teaches me from my mistakes. I am going to do that for Sierra." She began to narrate for Sierra her own process for calming down, "I'm pretty frustrated right now." After deep, slow breaths she'd respond with a gentle smile, "Ok, now I'm ready to talk with you about this."

Within a few weeks Sierra's defiance decreased significantly and she began following her mom's example. Her kindergarten teacher commented, "She's an intense little girl, but I've never seen a child calm herself down so well! She just starts talking to herself."

When we show up in tense conflict situations with "slow, low, and listen" at the forefront of our minds, we communicate to our children, "You are SAFE with me."

SLOW

- » Saying, "Let's talk later when we're calmer."
- » Simply slow your words down - it's much less threatening to a child.
- » Take a bathroom break to pray and read the appendix of your [Discipline That Connects book](#).

LOW

- » Get down on your child's level with hands in pockets instead of hips.
- » Draw with your child or play catch while discussing the problem together.
- » Take 10 deep breaths/prayers: "I breathe in God's grace. I breathe out God's love."

LISTEN

- » Praying, "Lord, what's the opportunity here? What does my child need?" and waiting to engage until you feel a sense of calm in your heart.
- » In a relaxed way, ask your child, "What's going on?" and "How do you think you could solve it?"

1 "you are **SAFE** with me"



DISCIPLINE THAT
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2 “you are LOVED no matter what”

If parents express love only when children behave well or need comfort, they communicate to their children that love is conditional. Kids may learn to perform to get love, and that can be a very *unhealthy* life pattern. When children believe that love is *earned*, their emotions and sense of value tend to rise and fall with

their performance. They may even make compromising choices to gain approval or attention. This is not what we want for our kids.

But when parents express love, even when their children struggle or misbehave, they effectively communicate that their kids are so valuable that they are loved *in spite of what they do*. Expressing love and kindness during these challenging times is the only way to truly convince our children that they are loved *unconditionally*.

As parents show their kids that [“tantrums, defiance...or any other misbehavior”](#) can not separate them from their parents’ love, it internalizes the idea that **nothing can separate them from the love of God either** ([Romans 8:38-39](#)). For



Misbehavior is the “golden opportunity” for unconditional love.

it is in discipline that parents have the greatest opportunity to show them that their

love -- and God’s love – is “wide, long, high and deep enough” ([Ephesians 3:17-19](#)) to envelop them, even when they misbehave.

There are many ways in which unconditional love can be communicated when kids mess up - a gentle smile, a hug, light humor, or simply conveying love with heartfelt words. Another powerful way to communicate love is expressing sincere empathy.

Empathy is about putting yourself in your kids’ shoes, and feeling what it’s like to be them. Once you identify your child’s emotions, you can become a mirror and simply describe what you see, “You’re sad...” or, “You’re angry because...!” When you identify your child’s emotions, it helps him or her to do the same, so those emotions can be expressed more appropriately. Modeling emotion-identifying phrases to your kids teaches them the words to use as they hear you use them: “I’m really mad!” or “This makes me sad.” Empathy also communicates the powerful messages: “You are understood.” “You are not alone.” and “I am for you.”

When children feel understood they often want to make a wiser choice. Even when consequences are still needed, kids are much more receptive to those consequences because they feel loved. The next time the situation occurs, they will be just a little closer to being able to express, “I’m really mad!” instead of name-calling or hitting.

When your kids act out or throw a tantrum, try empathy. It will encourage you to react more calmly, help your kids to build emotional maturity, and most importantly communicate to your kids that they are loved unconditionally....no matter what!

2

“you are **LOVED** no matter what”



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“you are
3 CALLED
and
CAPABLE”

A powerful way to connect deeply with your child’s heart is to identify the talents God has built into him or her. It might seem counterintuitive, but it is even more important to identify those “talents” when kids use them to misbehave. Your defiant child just might be tomorrow’s leader. Or the one that’s always yelling, “It’s not fair!” might just grow to seek justice for all, not just themselves. This kind of encouragement opens even the most challenging of kids to hearing more about how God built them and what God’s purpose for their life might be. ([Ephesians 2:10](#))

This principle is richly Biblical. **When Jesus encountered “misbehavior” His goal was for natural personalities to be used for God’s purposes.** In the Bible, in the book of Acts, a man named Saul was leading others to persecute and murder Christians. Jesus met him with grace, knowing that God would use Saul’s leadership, determination, and zeal to build the kingdom. (See [Acts 9](#) for

the full story.) He became Apostle Paul, arguably the most important missionary in all of history.

When parents step back and look beneath their child's immediate misbehaviors, they can envision how God might use those talents for good. **The key to disciplining with God's perspective is to view our kids as both sinners AND as God's workmanship, created for His purposes.**

Seeing Kids from a Spiritual Perspective

When I (Jim) was working with at-risk teens I had an encounter that I'll never forget. Jared was covered with violent tattoos, had tattered dark clothes, a defiant countenance, and he wore multiple piercings in his ears, nose, eyebrows and lips which suggested a hard life.

Jared was in our program for skipping school along with other poor choices. His veneer seemed to say, "Back off!" but I dared to ask, "How do you get away with skipping school?" He grinned a little and was proud when he explained how he and his friends would distract the door monitor for each other and then take turns about who gets to skip school that day.

"So you're a good planner, you treat your friends fairly, and you're all willing to sacrifice for each other. Add to that list your

creativity and a good memory when lying and I'd say you're a pretty talented guy. **Imagine what might happen if you used some of those talents in ways that were more helpful to you and others, and less trouble!"** My words were heartfelt.

So were Jared's, as evidenced by the glint of a tear and soft tone. "No one has ever said anything like that to me before!"



When kids like Jared get in trouble, they usually tap into their strengths and talents to accomplish what's important to them. If parents' primary goal is to "straighten them out", or fix the problems through punishment, these kids often grow discouraged, believing they are trouble-makers, not talented people.

When kids believe the message "You are CALLED and CAPABLE" they hold onto the hope that they can use their gifts in positive ways, to impact the world around them.

3 "you are CALLED and CAPABLE"





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4 “you are RESPONSIBLE for your actions”

Of course, in spite of parents' most graceful efforts to stay calm, connect well, and guide kids toward wiser choices, kids still sometimes misbehave. They are “beloved sinners” (just like us) and need corrective guidance (just like we do). This communicates the message, **“You are responsible for your actions, and ultimately for your life.”**

A first step in communicating this message is to help kids understand the natural impact of their behavior. Galatians 6:7 says, “Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.” This simply means that if you do bad things, bad stuff naturally happens. But if you do good things, you will reap a harvest if you don't give up.

Natural impacts (the ones that happen *without* any intervention from an adult) are the built-in “harvests” that come based on the actions people choose. For example, when a child lies, her friends and parents may not trust her



anymore. When an older sibling hits a younger sibling, the younger child might get scared. In both of these situations, as well as others, there are various icky feelings such as shame, guilt, sadness and so on. Most

importantly, relationships are broken. These are NOT imposed consequences (ones that occur when an adult intervenes), they are natural impacts.

Our natural instinct is to punish our children when they act up. While that might work temporarily to modify behavior, it does little to build wisdom. **The natural impacts of our children’s behavior will be their best life-long teacher, if**

they are taught to understand and pay attention to how their heart feels when they hurt others.

When our son Noah went through a phase of struggling with lying we initially dealt with it by firm confrontation or imposed consequences. We got nowhere. It was almost like “Game On” to see if he could sneak one by us. Then we changed our approach and did three things that really encouraged him toward honesty.

- » We taught him to pay attention to that little feeling in his stomach that would come with a lie (one of the natural impacts of dishonesty). It was God’s gift to him to protect the trust and connection between us.
- » We helped him understand the other natural impacts of lying - the mistrust, the broken relationships, the hardened heart that could come if he ignored that icky feeling in his stomach.
- » We put our biggest energy into watching for times when he told the truth, even for little things, and we focused on the value of his honesty.

“you are **4 RESPONSIBLE** for your actions”



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Soon after we shifted our approach he began coming back to us to confess when he had lied and it was not that long until the lying was pretty much done. As a teen and now as a young adult, Noah has become strongly committed to honesty and making things right so relationships can be restored. Through this approach he had learned wisdom for a lifetime.

This kind of wisdom isn't taught through lectures. There is an art to helping kids understand natural impacts through thoughtful questions, analogies, observations, and even stories. As we gracefully guide our children to discover the natural impact of their behavior, they often want to make right what they've made wrong. "Making it right" can look different depending on the situation, but the end goal is restored relationships. It might mean doing an extra chore for someone who cleaned up your mess, or giving a back-rub to a brother after hitting him, or truly apologizing and reconciling after a verbal argument.

When kids are too upset to reconcile a misbehavior right away privileges that are a distraction can be put on hold until they are calm and ready to reconcile. Guiding kids toward heartfelt reconciliation is an important and often overlooked alternative to punitive discipline. (Punitive: "Your xbox is gone for a week!"

vs Restorative: "Until you and your brother work things out, your screens and friends will be put on hold".)

At this point you might be thinking, *Yes, but what about THIS situation? What about THIS consequence?* **But remember, the most important thing is not the methods -- it's the messages you send your child when you discipline.** (To read more specifically about consequences read our ebook [Consequences That Actually Work](#)).



“**4** you are **RESPONSIBLE** for your actions”



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a final word

Are you letting your kids know, “You are safe with me! You are loved! You are called and capable!” and “You are responsible!” - even when they misbehave? If so, your kids are likely well on their way to valuing God’s grace and truth in their lives!

Our prayer is that, after reading this, you will be more thoughtful about how your discipline can connect with your child’s heart. We hope you’ve recognized a few ways you are already leading your family with grace by communicating these four powerful messages to your children. We are excited to partner with you as you continue in your journey to a grow a connected family.

Dig in to keep learning and growing!

- » Watch for the next Discipline That Connects online course.
- » Purchase the full length Discipline That Connects book on [Amazon](#) or on our [website](#).
- » Check out our [parent coaching](#) and [workshop](#) options.

Kids who grow up believing they are safe in God’s care, loved no matter what, God’s workmanship - capable and called to do his works, and responsible to God for their lives, are kids who grow up to change the world for God’s glory.

Our kids need this. **Our world needs them.**

About Jim & Lynne Jackson and Connected Families

Since 1993 co-founders Jim & Lynne Jackson have worked in the trenches with parents of all kinds – single parents, adoptive parents, parents of teens, parents of kids with intense behavior challenges, parents in blended families, parents of wealth and parents in poverty, and any other kind of parent you can think of. [Jim & Lynne](#) and their [growing team](#) are committed to bringing you content that will challenge, encourage, and equip you to be the thoughtful and confident parent you long to be and to lead your family with grace.

