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The Fundamentals Of Terrific Parenting

In today's world, much of the parenting discussions tend to center around fear based conversations. There are relentless 'attention grabbers' in the media that lead us to endless worries over many relatively trivial issues.

One main problem with this focus on the 'small stuff' is that we end up devoting excess parenting energy to the minor factors, and ignore the major factors. These major factors are really the fundamentals of parenting, and account for most of our influence as a parent. Yet these fundamental activities often get lost, as we ignore the obvious fundamentals as we chase the minor stuff...and end up wondering why things have gone wrong.

If we think of any example of extraordinary success, we often find that genius or luck play a small role. Instead, we find someone whose life exemplifies an obsession with the fundamentals. There are always exceptions, but not often. The same is true for great parenting. A focus on the fundamentals will produce the greatest reward.

Focus on The Fundamentals: The Major Stuff

1. Make No Excuse For Losing Your Cool With Your Kids

It's easy to pretend that we can model throwing 'grown up tantrums' ourselves (when life isn't giving us what we want), and think our children should do better. Yet, it's really bizarre. Our children will not be able to behave better than we do, so the first fundamental is that we must model the kind of self-control and restraint that we will expect from them. If not, all bets are off! We just can't cheat on this fundamental without serious consequences.

2. Abandon The Losing Strategies

Over and over again, we can fall into the trap of using a strategy or parenting approach that is clearly not getting results. Yet, because of habit perhaps, or maybe just a lack of other parenting tools, we repeat the same thing...often with great frustration ...over and over again. Here are a few examples of losing strategies to abandon:

- Repeating ourselves a dozen times.
- Yelling louder and louder to get attention.
- Working harder at your child's homework than they are.
- Try to find out "who started it" between siblings.
- Negotiating with children over limits parents should set.
- Setting limits, and then ignoring them or changing them.
- Trying to 'win' or 'justify' yourself in an argument with your children.

Each of these lead to bigger and bigger problems as time goes by. Stop using them. They will fail you and your children.

We need better strategies. When we recognize that these losing strategies are 'losers,' this awareness opens the door to seeking more effective parenting strategies.

3. Honor the 80/20 Rule At All Times:

From my view as a parenting coach, I think the 80/20 rule is at the core of everything that sets your parenting on the right path. Think of it this way:

ALWAYS devote 80% of your thoughts and actions to the positive stuff! NEVER DEVOTE MORE than 20% of your thoughts and actions toward negative.

This simple rule suggests that we should make sure that each day finds us focused on noticing, enjoying, contemplating and engaging our children during positive moments. This is both 'catching the good stuff' when we are with our families, but also equally important is the idea of 'catching' the good stuff in ALL of our life...even when we are driving, or fixing dinner or at soccer practice. It's about the inside game of our minds, as well as the outside game of how we relate to our families.

Let your children experience a world where most of what mom and dad care about is the positive, happy and optimistic in nature moments. On the opposite side, where there is a lack of positive or optimistic behavior, turn away from this. Don't let it get you hooked. Over time, your children will learn to ignore and 'not get hooked' by the negative input of others, and stay grounded in a positive emotional state.

While there are other fundamentals, this is a good start to stimulate your thinking about the majors and the 'minors' in your home.

4. Remember: Words Do Not Teach Behavioral Lessons

Words are great for learning history, talking about what you enjoy or dislike, explaining directions...and a host of other things. Words are great.

However, the value of using words to teach responsible behavior is over-rated. In fact, we get misdirected, by thinking our words will change behavior. It takes our focus off of the real source of our power when it comes to changing or improving behavior.

Our power comes from our actions...not our words. We must learn to abandon repeated messages and arguments and reminders. They aren't working...or otherwise...we would not be repeating them. It's simple.

Instead, we must learn to focus on actions that change behavior. Learning the specific actions/consequences that work is not always easy, but we can know for certain that repeating the same words over and over... well, it's a losing strategy.

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PARENTAL SELF DISCIPLINE IS THE KEY TO TEACHING CHILD DISCIPLINE

Summary: We all understand the role of discipline in creating a successful journey through life. Yet, many parents struggle with how to teach discipline to their kids. As I've worked with parents over the years, it has become clear to me that self discipline is at the heart of the our ability to teach your children discipline.

When we as parents lack discipline, we can only talk about it. We can't teach through our actions. It's certainly possible for children to learn about self-discipline when we are undisciplined...but not likely.

In contrast, as a disciplined parent, you are able to teach lessons that the undisciplined parent simply is unable to grasp.

I'm going to explain why this is so, and emphasize the importance of a mastering self-discipline in order to effectively raise healthy, well disciplined children.

Why a Lack of Parental Discipline Promotes a Lack of Child Discipline!

1. Children Learn From What You Model

An undisciplined parent models undisciplined behavior. By undisciplined behavior, I am referring to a wide range of possibilities. This could include eating habits, exercise habits, working habits, and relationship habits.

This could also include a lack of discipline in how I conduct myself, with regard to my emotions and the language that I use. The lack of discipline could be reflected in my inability to maintain a consistent structure or routine in the home.

Or I might model the environment where I repeatedly say I'm going to do things and then I don't do it. I might model treating the people that I love worse than anyone else on the planet. I might model that being frustrated is an excuse to yell and scream.

There are unlimited possibilities here. Suffice it to say that the undisciplined parent has unlimited opportunities to model the very actions that he or she does not want their child to learn.

Just remember: You can't escape what you model.

2. Children Learn to Respond to What Tugs at You

I'm referring to a very simple principle. When we are undisciplined, and have developed unhealthy habits, we often respond, without much thought, to whatever tugs at our attention. What is it that keeps tugging at you – attention? I encourage parents to pay close attention to this important choice.

One of the key ingredients of the "Essential Parenting" approach, is grasping the critical nature of controlling your emotional reactions to your children.

An absolute fundamental of effective parenting is understanding that annoying, irritating, inappropriate, disrespectful, complaining, whining, argumentative, and problematic behavior (of all forms) pull for our attention. If, over time, we consistently respond to this, problems worsen.

Problems worsen because our children learn to respond to what we give attention to. What we consistently attend to <u>must</u> grow. It's a rule your children must follow (or rather, more accurately, their brains are wired to respond to what gets noticed for the most part.)

Remember: Where your attention goes, their energy flows!

In order to turn around difficult situations, I rely upon parents to learn to master this. The undisciplined parent struggles to do so.

For example, when I ask them to ignore most of the "problem" behaviors (as <u>part</u> of a comprehensive program) they simply seem unable to do so. They get pulled into arguments and discussions. They keep correcting their children. They attend to the whining and complaining, telling their children to "stop it." They negotiate with children making unreasonable demands.

Most problematic is the more emotional reaction. The undisciplined parent models the following:

When you don't get what you want from others, it's okay to yell and lose your temper.

What's the problem with this?

The problem is that the undisciplined parent is teaching their child how to deal with frustration. This is a critical lesson in how to deal with life, when life doesn't give them what they want. Will they learn the lesson that really serves them well?

Ultimately the undisciplined parent ensures the "kiss of death" when trying to turn around a chaotic or difficult situation at home. This happens for two reasons. First, they model angry and impulsive behavior as a response to frustration, and then tell their children not to do that. That doesn't work. (Remember our previous discussion.)

Secondly, the undisciplined parent continues to put their attention to the problem, and the problem just keeps growing.

3. Children Learn from Consequences, Not the Threat of Consequences

A disciplined parent knows the importance of accountability. They know that it is essential to "walk their talk."

Therefore, when they make comments around the dinner table, they know the importance of honoring their commitments to their children. They know the importance of honoring any commitments they make to themselves. Likewise, they understand the importance of accountability, when commitments are not honored.

With regard to parenting, the undisciplined parent often sets limits. These limits change however, depending upon the day of the week. The undisciplined parent forgets to be consistent with consequences. The undisciplined parent allows children to negotiate their way out of commitments that have been made. The Undisciplined parent fails to allow their children to experience the consequences of poor choices.

What's the solution?

In working with many parents over the years, I find myself continually amazed by the overwhelming power and influence that parents have to turn a difficult and dysfunctional situation into one that is healthy and thriving.

I am also, at times, greatly disappointed when dealing with parents who are not able to discipline themselves. I talk with their children, and I see their confusion. I talk with their teachers, and children struggle.

Yet, time and time again, it comes down to discipline. We must be able to discipline ourselves, to respond in healthy, consistent, and loving ways. Parent coaching provides the road map for success. And I can tell you when you're off course. Make no mistake however: you still have to do the work. In situations where children are struggling and acting out, the demands are often extraordinary. These situations require us to take on an extraordinary level of commitment to nurturing healthy behavior.

It is essential to understand, as many of you already know, that counseling for children cannot compensate for unhealthy patterns in the home.

You are the primary influence shaping your children's destiny. If you take that seriously, and learn how to use your "power," you can make an incredible impact on your children.

To do so often requires learning to discipline one's self, and to be conscious and intentional in your responses to your children.

All change is difficult. However, it is most difficult to move from old habits, into developing new habits. I understand this. Yet, no one can do that work but you.

If any of you are interested in learning more about these parenting principles, I would encourage you to consider participating in parent coaching or enrolling in one our Parenting Courses. I work with parents all over the country, either in person or by telephone, and success is typically within reach with 4 – 8 sessions.

You can also get more information about these principles through my CD Home Study program, Essential Parenting. This is available through my website (www.TerrificParenting.com), or by calling my office at 518-383-0600. This is a carefully developed comprehensive parenting program, which takes you through an 8 week process to transform your parenting.

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"House Rules" That Really Work!

Life sets limits on all of us, and learning to live happily and effectively within them is a skill we acquire through our childhood experiences. In President Obama's last State of the Union Address, he reminded parents of the simple, but essential need to establish rules, and limit TV and video games, while ensuring that homework is done first! President Obama offered several comments, suggesting that parents must be strong in maintaining healthy rules.

All..or most of us agree: Our children need rules. Yet, we often get confused about the specifics of how and when to have rules, and what to do to enforce them!

In my work as a Licensed Psychologist and Parenting Coach, I find many parents are either setting too many rules, or unwilling or unable to set and maintain fair, predictable rules. Yet, these limits are essential.

I receive many questions from parents about how to establish rules that really work for both children and parents. These struggles occur because we tend to make several critical errors. In this article I will outline these critical errors, and the corrections that will keep you on track.

Critical Mistake One: Too many rules.

The more rules you have in your home, the more violations of the rules that will occur. The more violations, the more frequently you have to end up managing your children's behavior.

This leads to constant intervention, and decisions making about consequences. If you have a difficult or strong willed child, this will mean you are frequently adding consequence upon consequence, and the environment begins to feel very punitive and negative.

Solution: Have just a few essential rules.

Rather than dozens of rules, focus on the critical rules that will maintain structure and routine. If you understand how to manage behavior using the leverage you possess in your home, this is not too difficult to do.

In fact, it is easier to manage your home, and to maintain order and sanity with just a few decisive rules, than it is when you have lots of rules that you can't keep up with.

Critical Mistake Two: Setting rules that we don't follow.

This is one of the biggest mistakes that we make. We establish guidelines for our children, and then we violate them repeatedly.

For example, we might set the rule that there is no disrespectful talk in our home. Yet, when our children aren't listening, we're willing to compromise that rule for ourselves and we yell in an ugly voice to our children. We may not think of this as disrespect, but if we had a video camera sitting on our child's forehead and we played it back for the world to see....I suspect that it would appear quite disrespectful.

Another common example would be a rule that says that we don't eat in front of the TV. Yet, our children repeatedly finding us gleefully chomping down a late night snack in front of the Letterman show, and then we pretend that this won't matter.

We tell the children they are getting pudgy, and so we limit their snacks. Yet, they see us failing to exercise and putting on the pounds, while we eat chips and ice cream during the ball games.

We can all pretend these little things don't matter. It does matter.

Solution: We walk our talk.

If we set a rule, then we have got to be willing to follow it ourselves. Now there are certainly rules that apply to children that don't apply to adults. Many of these are built into every fabric and structure of our lives, and thus children see it repeated over and over. These are not problematic, because...like it or not... they reflect reality.

The problem occurs in more of the ongoing, day to day routines where we expect our children to do one thing, and then we do another. It's just hard to keep a household going in a peaceful, loving way when we set up our lives in this manner.

Critical Mistake Three: Setting rules that do not reflect reality.

I find that every parent has a positive intention behind their rules. However, many of these rules do not reflect the reality we live in, and thus often waste both parent and child energy.

For example, we can waste extraordinary amounts of energy by focusing on rules that are arbitrary, and have no real life parallel. Examples could be, "At our home, you don't eat with your elbows on the table." Or, "You must put away your shoes first, and then you can hang up your coat."

Solution: Have reality based rules.

"You can't eat unless you wash your hands." Learning to wash our hands before eating tends to be supportive of health. Good rule.

"You lose it...if you throw it inside." Good rule. It preserves what we care about.

"You will repair it, or replace it, if you have a tantrum and break it." Good rule. Again...it parallels what happens in the real world.

The more we can stick with reality, the more we establish rules that really make sense, and more importantly, reality based rules prepare our children for the future.

Remember: Keep it simple. Minimize the number of rules. Walk your talk, and keep focused on rules that reflect reality.

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Psychologist Secrets To The Nurturing The Truly Spoiled and Indulged Child!

By Dr Randy Cale

Are you in the race for the most spoiled and indulged? The true brat of all spoiled brats? In this obvious satirical article, I thought it might be helpful to provide some coaching for those parents who are in the race for the most spoiled and entitled child on the block.

During the school year, there are practical limits to how much one can pamper a child. However, the summer opens the door to new levels of indulgence. By the end of the summer, we would set some high goals. For example, you must raise first graders who expect to play while others read, 2nd graders who show up 90" late each day while carrying a supersized iced coffee to class and by 5th grade, a true superstar brat will demand to carry their cell phones to class and text their mom about how mean the teachers are being.

Three Key Lessons to Raise the Most Entitled, Spoiled Child

Here are my top three mistakes, oh ... I mean lessons... that will help your child to master the art of entitlement.

Lesson #1: Allow your child to know more than you do about parenting.

The truly spoiled are raised in a home where the child is viewed as the ultimate authority. Lessons you may have learned from your parents, books you may have read, advice from psychologists, as well as your "common sense" must be thrown out the window when faced with a child who is objecting to your wisdom, your consequences, or your limit setting.

Remember: Assume they know more. When it comes to what's healthy, of course...they should choose fast food. When it comes to mature video games, like Call of Duty, of course they should own it. When it comes to bedtime, unquestionably your kids know better what is good for them.

This is a great start...but really, it's only the beginning...

Lesson #2: Work harder at your children's happiness; work harder at your children's success and work harder at your children's lives than they do.

This lesson is one of those "insider secrets" that must be considered carefully when in the race for the GOLD. If your child is given homework, made sure that you prod, push, negotiate... and ultimately work harder at solving their homework problems than they do. For any serious projects, you must stay up late while they go to

bed. If your child is unhappy, negative, and asking you to 'fix-it' so they can be happy, then you must go ahead and fix-it. Do this repeatedly!

Work harder at solving their problems. Work harder at everything in their life.

Brat building lesson #3: Never set limits, and teach them that reality will always conform to their whining, demanding and complaining.

This is really an ultimate brat building secret...a true foundation of the spoiled and entitled. In the real world, effort is related to results. This is reality.

However, the truly entitled child must be protected from these rules of reality. If exposed, they might begin to realize that effort is required, and that consequences come with choices. At all costs, if we want a child who is fully indoctrinated in the ways of entitlement, we must give them what they want when they whine or complain. Please, never insist on real effort or contribution!

The best of the entitled are raised to presume that the limits that apply to others do not apply to them. They shouldn't have to follow the rules, and if they break the rules, mom and dad MUST rescue them from the consequences.

They shouldn't have to work when something is difficult. They should have no chores. They should get paid for taking their plate to the dishwasher, or picking up their room. And when disrespectful, just surrender and given them what they want.

Those are my three key lessons to raising the spoiled and super indulged. However, if brat building does not appeal to you, then simply do the opposite! And smile...as you do so!

In case you have a spoiled, or apparently an 'entitled' child or teen on your hands, there are ways to turn this around quickly. The fundamentals of the TREC initiative will be your first steps. For more specific coaching for your family, consider connecting with Dr Cale directly. You can contact Cami, his assistant, at 383-0600.

Foundational Habits: How Seemingly Small, But Critical Choices Shift Destinies

When we look at the literature on life trajectories, we occasionally find the dramatic event that shifts a person's perspective and then their entire destiny seems to change. Yet, this is rare and leaves one's life up to fate or luck. Not the best plan perhaps, as we look as shaping your child's future.

On the other hand, when we see a child or an adult make a critical habit change (that can appear small), then something much more extraordinary happens. That apparently small change, implemented consistently, can evolve into a 'foundational' habit.

What Is The Impact Of A Foundational Habit?

The foundational habit can often only be seen retrospectively. It's not that evident at the onset. For a child or adult, a small change or commitment to do things differently is seen as important perhaps, but not life changing. Over time, that change becomes a habit. The evolution into a foundational habit reveals itself by the manner in which other behaviors are affected. The 'domino effect' is evident by how that single foundational habit seems to 'nudge forth' changes in other areas of life.

Again, if viewed in isolation, the initial adjustment in behavior is often small, and not of extreme importance. Yet, when looking back over time, and putting events together retrospectively, this single shift reveals the clear and profound effect of the 'foundational habit.' Some life behaviors are 'nudged' out, while others seemed to be invited in. The impact accumulates, shaping one's destiny in many ways.

How Foundational Habits Can Be Positive or Negative

The foundational habit has tremendous power, somewhat camouflaged by its inauspicious beginning. However, this power has no bias toward positive or negative outcomes.

In other words, these foundational habits can be quite positive, and set forth a series of changes that profoundly unlock the doors to happiness and success. On the other hand, a negative foundational habit can set forth changes that profoundly limit life satisfaction, health and rewards.

Negative Foundational Habits: Life is filled with examples of foundational habits that have a toxicity that spreads and limits life. Let's look a few simple illustrations.

Being sleep deprived is a foundational habit, albeit a very negative one. The literature is clear on the detrimental effects that not only impact mood and motivation, but ultimately health and longevity are compromised. Work routine, academic performance and athletic functioning are all negatively affected with compromises in sleep. This is the epitome of a detrimental foundational habit.

For children and adults, another negative foundational habit would be choosing the easy, path over the more challenging, goal-attaining path. We could say that this is about seeking what feels good immediately versus seeking the value in the long-term reward. For kids, this is about wanting to play first, and then get to work later. The domino impact of this habit is devastating, as over and over children learn less, do less and accomplish less...all in service of seeking the immediate satisfaction and the easy way out.

We could cover many of these negative foundational patterns, but this is not my goal. My purpose here is to introduce this idea, so that you can begin to see beyond a simple choice today, that appears to be 'no big deal.' Small habits, when positioned and seen as potentially a foundational habit, suddenly are exposed as worthy of change and attention.

In next week's article, we will discuss positive foundational habits, and how to best instill these in your home. It's an exciting and important discussion!

Positive Foundational Habits: Part II

In last week's article, I introduced the notion of a foundational habit, and emphasized that these habits can be of a positive or negative nature. I also covered examples of negative foundational habits, and the havor they can reap.

We view a foundational habit as a relatively small change that appears unremarkable at its origin. With time however, the small seed affects other behaviors and becomes the foundation of a life trajectory. Today we will review a few positive foundational habits that are essential to establish for your children.

Positive Foundational Habits: The Essential Three

Habit 1: Focus On What We Love, Appreciate & Is Working Well (No Whining)

In today's world, much of the media programming and software available tends to promote a whining, complaining or negative attitude. Many children arrive at my office, with loving parents committed to their families, seemingly unable to find anything positive about their lives.

How do we turn this around? As parents, we must recognize that we shape how our children's view their life through this foundational habit. Do we engage their repeated complaints or whining? Do we model predominately complaining about our jobs, the traffic or even our friends? Do we allow children access to social media where often teens turn to repeated gossip and complaints about friends, teachers and parents? Do kids watch TV shows that seems to thrive on a whiny, negative or incompetent theme?

Stop it all today. Just stop.

And instead, resolve to have a home that is guided by the foundational habit of optimism. Focus on what you appreciate and enjoy. Notice what is working well, and ask questions in that direction. Obsess on finding programming that is uplifting, inspiring and supportive of your key values. Become disciplined in ignoring repeated complaints, whining and negativity from your children. This is key to starting life on a healthy, happy foundation.

Habit 2: Do Good, Then Feel Good.

In order to feel good about life (i.e., deeper satisfaction), we cannot spend our days watching TV, playing violent videos games and gossiping about others. Notice these are easy habits to pick up; no skill required.

To introduce the positive foundational change, we must remove the tendency toward instant gratification. In addition, we must engage in activities that bring good to ourselves or others, and this often requires a bit of effort.

Here are a few examples: Take the family on a walk every day. Volunteer consistently, as a method to make a difference in the community and empower children. Require children to contribute to the home, by completing chores and responsibilities every day. Allow only healthy food in your home. All of these are small examples of allowing children to 'do good' in the world and thus learn to feel good. You can think of many others. But remember, this must be habit...before it is foundational to life change!

Habit 3: Work First, Then Play.

When it comes to making life easy over the long term for ourselves and our children, there is no more important habit. While I repeatedly emphasize this to parents, some seem to get it, and others do not.

Work first means that homework and chores are required, before playtime. It's a simple formula. In your child's brain, the effort is reinforced by the play. This is critical. Over time, homework and chores actually begin to 'feel good' to accomplish. Once this happens consistently, we have shaped a life-long habit that will create success and easefulness in their academic and professional lives.

PAIN SEEKS PAIN: WHY GRUMPY KIDS WANT A GRUMPY FAMILY!

Have you ever noticed when your kids are grumpy that they want everybody else to be grump? It's like they wake up in the morning and start poking at the world . . . trying to get the world to react back in negative ways. (By the way, grownups do the same thing. We might not be quite as obvious about it...but we do the same!)

Negative Emotional States Feed On Others Negative Emotions

When your son wakes up with the "grumps," there is little doubt that a negative emotional state has consumed them. But we often see that this is not enough. They are not content to just be 'silently grumpy.'

Your son seems to start 'poking' at the world. He seems intent on seeking a negative response! He is not able to see anything as okay, and instead finds problems or issues to complain about. They bark back. They yell when it's not necessary. They overact to the smallest thing.

All this becomes more understandable if we just imagine that this grumpiness can only survive if the negative state "feeds" on similar emotion. The only way that "grumps" can survive (long term) is if they can find or stimulate or other "grumps" in the world. Most grumps are experts at doing this. They get good at provoking others to react negatively, and thus the grumps get 'fed' the emotions they need to survive.

Without finding similar grumpiness however, these negative emotional states cannot survive. They tend to just fade away.

How To Outsmart The Grumps!

Key Lesson: We must recognize that the grumps (i.e., negative emotional state) must FEED on other's negative emotional energy. This is not just the preference of the grumpy emotion; it is the sole source of 'grump nutrition.'

So remember, grumpy emotions are trying to find something to feed on. It wants another negative emotional state for energy! It's as if . . . it has its own life . . . and seeks something negative to feed on in order to continue its existence. (While this may not be true, it's a great way to understand how humans walk through the world.)

To outsmart the grumps, we simply must never feed into it. Regardless of how provocative, or negative, or ugly . . . we must not feed the grumps with our negativity. This is what sustains the grumpiness.

The Best Option: Starve The Grumps Of A Negative Response!

Instead of reacting to the grumpy comments or negative emotions, starve the grump of your energy and attention! Do not react negatively, or respond with an edge.

Don't try to fix it. Don't try to redirect. And don't try to make things better. If you do, the grumps will simply pull you into a negative state . . . and then you're feeding into the very emotion you wanted to change.

Again, the solution? Walk away. Walk away. We simply starve that grumpy moment of any energy or attention!

Expect The Hungry Grumps To Escalate (Initially)

When you start to walk away from the grumps, the grumps WILL work harder to poke at the world, and get some negative energy. The grump will need something to feed on. If you have a very serious grump on your hands, expect them to get really upset and angry perhaps. Why? Because that grumpy energy needs something to feed on...and it wants your energy!

Don't do it. Walk away. The grumps will get worse. The grumps will throw a fit.

But eventually, the grumps will fade away and soon, your child emerges again. At that point, there is no need to comment upon what just happened. Instead, enjoy the child who has reemerged into your world. But remain prepared for the next time when you'll have to "teach the grumps a lesson."

If you want to help your kids get out of the grumps, and everything that comes with it (i.e., complaints, whining, negativity and unhappiness), consider connecting with Dr. Cale for his special 4 Session program for parents, which combines the use of personal coaching and audio training sessions. Ask for the TREC special when you call Cami, Dr Cale's assistant (383-0600). You can also email Cami at DrCale.Assistant@gmail.com

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