

## Character Development Training Plan

The following material is from the FOCUS Notebook, **Children** Tab. This resource is available at <http://www.forgingbonds.org/resources>.

### 1. Teach **attentiveness**

- Pre-requisite to obedience.
- When speaking to your child, always require him to look you in the eyes.
- Teach attentiveness to you.
- Teach attentiveness to his conscience.

### 2. Teach obedience by setting limits. Toddlers need to know that painful punishment will follow if they go beyond the limit.

- Limits begin in infancy with learning not to touch.
- “No” means **NO**. Disobedience is punished by a light slap on the hand.
- Limits begin to kick in formally during the toddler years, as children learn they are not the boss.  
Limits continue throughout childhood and even into the teen years (though the teen should need fewer limits because he is learning to regulate his own behavior.)
- Limits teach children they are not entitled to whatever they want.
- Limits give children the structure they need to feel secure.
- Whatever level of obedience you demand, they will eventually live up to. If you say, “**come**” and they know that they will be punished if they don’t instantly come, they will learn immediate obedience. If they know that your “**come**” does not mean that they must come immediately, they will dilly dally. Kids who don’t come immediately don’t come because they haven’t been required to.

### 3. Teach **contentment**.

- Contentment is “**realizing that God has already provided everything I need for my present happiness.**”
- Teach kids who are bored that they are responsible for their own happiness

### 4. Teach them the principle of sowing and reaping—**that behavior has consequences.**

- Praise their positive attitudes and behavior
- Help them see the benefits of their positive attitudes and behavior
- Help them see the relationship between bad attitudes or behavior and negative consequences
- Be firm in your discipline; otherwise you undermine the learning of this Biblical principle

### 5. Teach **responsibility**

- A good definition of responsibility is, “**recognizing and doing what both God and others are expecting of me.**”
- He should be given small tasks that he is responsible for, even as a pre-schooler.
- Your child must take responsibility for his attitudes, including anger. “He made me so mad” is excusing anger instead of taking responsibility for it.
- Your child must take responsibility for his own behavior. If he accidentally hurts someone, he is still responsible even if he did not intend to harm that the person.

6. Teach them **truthfulness**

- Teach them that God is the God of truth and that Jesus IS the TRUTH—that is how important it is for Christians to be truthful.
- Teach them the high cost of lying.
- Plan your punishments and consequences so that the most severe punishment is for lying, and they get a lighter punishment if they tell the truth.
- Never shame your child over his sins or mistakes.

7. Teach the principle of **ownership** and **boundaries**

- A child should have things that belong to him  
He should not be forced to share them with his friends. A better approach is to say, “John, Billy is coming over today. Are there some toys you would rather not play with while Billy is here? We will put them up in the closet. Now, what toys would you like to share with Billy?”
- Ownership implies taking care of possessions
- Ownership of his body means that no one else is to touch his private parts.
- Teach kids how to actually say no. “No! You may not touch me there!” “No. My Mommy and Daddy said it is wrong to pull your pants down in front of other people.”

8. Teach him to recognize the difference between the things he **can control** and **can’t control**.

- He can’t control the fact that the swimming trip got rained out, but he can control whether he stays in a bad mood all day because of it.
- Children must learn to adapt to reality, which is the definition of mental health. They should not expect reality to conform to them, which is the definition of mental illness.
- Teach older children that they must respect the boundaries of younger (weaker) children.
- Be sensitive to your child’s attempt to manipulate you. Maintain strong boundaries yourself. Don’t allow yourself to be manipulated into reducing the consequences for your child’s negative behavior.
- Reinforce the fact that he can control how hard he works on the science project, pleasing God and you by that hard work, even though he can’t control whether or not he will win first place.
- Teach him how to respectfully appeal to one in authority when he disagrees with a decision that has been made.
- Teach him to **go for it** where he has control and to **let it go** when he doesn’t have control over a situation.

9. Teach him **respect for others**—to change his mindset to, “**I’m not the only one who matters.**”

- As a family member, he needs to respect the rights of other family members, so he can’t leave his shoes in the family room
- He also needs to learn to respect the property of others
- Help him begin to put himself in the shoes of others. Ask, how he thinks others feel when he treats them badly
- Good table manners and manners in general are a reflection of our respect and consideration for others.

- Teach him that he is not to talk to his mother or father in a disrespectful manner.
  - Orderliness is the result of respecting the rights of others who live in the same house
10. Teach him **gratefulness**—making known to God and others in what ways they have benefit my life.
- Help him see that as sinners we deserve punishment—not the enormous blessing we have received.
  - Model gratefulness—talk often about the many undeserved blessings for which you are grateful
  - Teach him to begin his prayer time with thankfulness. Prompt him to remember some things to be thankful for.
  - You want to undermine an “entitlement mentality”—an attitude of discontent that expects to be given to instead of expecting to give.
  - Remind your child that God says, “To whom much is given, much is required.”
11. Teach him **how to cope with pain**.
- Remember that pain is required for your child’s growth—Resist the temptation to rescue him from it.
  - Good pain is the pain of consequences that have resulted from bad choices. **Always be compassionate.** Say to your child—“It really hurts you doesn’t it?” Validate the pain. **But don’t continually rescue your child from the pain** or he won’t learn from it.
  - Part of the pain he endures will teach him that the world isn’t always fair and require him to learn to forgive.
  - Help your child see that life is not about avoiding pain. Any worthwhile endeavor will require him to experience some pain.
  - The key to handling good pain is to make it an ally.
  - Responding to pain in a godly way is a major part of maturing.
  - Be alert to pain that can harm. This is the pain of abandonment, lack of love, repeated blows to his or her self esteem. Here your child needs protection
  - If kids are to become healthy, parents have to learn the difference between healthy pain and destructive pain. If they remove healthy pain (rescuing) their child will remain emotionally immature. But if they don’t remove destructive pain, their child will be injured.
12. Help him move towards maturity **in his motivations**.
- Initially, obedience may result from a fear of the consequences. At this stage, the child needs to see clearly that the consequences are the result of his bad choices not the result of an enraged parent
  - As you set limits for your child, you are training their conscience. This immature conscience will mature as your child learns from your example, from reality, and from Scripture. Over time, your child internalizes these factors and a more mature conscience is formed.
  - As a child is internalizing the Biblical limits you have set, he must move from the “because Mommy said so” to a Biblical understanding of the principles upon which Christian ethics are based. During this stage, parents need to major on explaining the reasons why.
  - Some degree of freedom also needs to be given to teens in order for this maturing process to be complete.

- As your child continues to grow, he will move beyond the ethical question of right and wrong to the motivation of love—loving God and loving others.

13. Help him cultivate the quality of **initiative**.

- Taking the initiative means recognizing and doing what needs to be done before one is asked to do it.
- Generally speaking at the root of every lazy kid is an enabling parent—a parent who never lets his child suffer the consequences of his laziness
- Help him discover his spiritual gifts and other aptitudes along with the conviction from Eph 2:10 that he was perfectly designed for good works that God planned for him before he was born
- A major cause of passivity in kids is an entitlement attitude—they have succeeded at demanding and getting special treatment
- Help your child take initiative to shoulder his own load. This will strengthen his character and mature him.
- If laziness continues to be a serious problem, you will have to make passivity more painful than activity

14. Help him **cultivate healthy horizontal relationships**

- One of the most important principles in relationships is direct communication and full disclosure of what is going on in the relationship
- Indirect communication is destructive
- Life is better when relationships are lived out in the light. Most of the time, things are better when they are in the open, even if these things are negative and hurtful.
- Be sure you model forthrightness in your relationships, especially your relationship with your spouse and child.
- Help your child overcome the fears that make him avoid confrontation
- Help him learn to speak the truth in love.

**Additional helpful resources to help disciple your children are available in the Focus Notebook, Children Tab.**

**FOCUS Notebook Content: Section on Children**

Spiritual Leadership In the Home  
Leadership Diagram  
The Three Sides of the Leadership Triangle

Biblical Principles for Training Children  
General Principles  
8 Steps To Discipline Your Child

A Tool For Focusing On Each Child's Uniqueness  
Unique tastes, strengths, spiritual gifts, love language  
Goals—relationship with God, skills, character

Character Development Training Plan  
(this download)

