



STAY CONNECTED TO HAVE INFLUENCE

by

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Child and Family Expert for One Step Ahead Parenting

INTRODUCTION

This eBook was prepared to help you become better acquainted with my ONE-STEP-AHEAD-PARENTING system, which I have developed and refined over the last 26 years of working with children and their families. Our mission is to provide you with the best tools for maintaining deep and sustained relationships with your children as you face their changing needs. It is easy to love the adoring infant but it can be a challenge when they become defiant, answer you back, or demand their independence.

THE PLAN

Often first time parents EXPECT that everything will happen naturally.

In reality you are likely to experience times when you feel lost, overwhelmed, or out of your element,
And in unfamiliar territory where everything seems challenging.

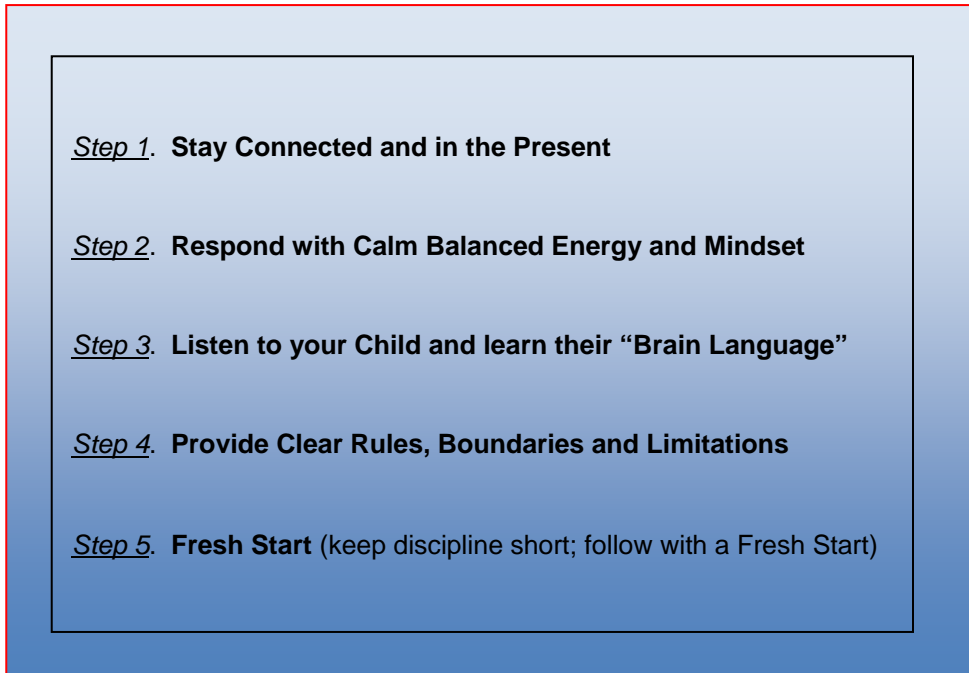
It is natural to underestimate the changes that accompany becoming parents. The **level of sacrifice** you make can be a shock. Meeting the demands and challenges of parenting is dramatically easier with a **clear consistent plan**. Without a plan, you may feel isolated and at a loss for solutions.

As a parent, you naturally strive to meet your children's needs; to maintain a healthy balanced connection with them; to teach them effective problem solving skills, and perhaps to do things differently or "better" than your parents. You have goals and ideas about the people you want your children to become.

Why do you need a plan? It is very much like building a home. Imagine what would happen without a plan. You could end up with a bathroom in the kitchen. In much the same way, *without a parenting plan*, you will find challenges that seem as distressing as having a toilet in the middle of your kitchen. This 5-Step Plan eliminates much of the fear around parenting by giving you consistent time tested-plan that works in parenting children of every age.



THE ONE STEP AHEAD PARENTING SYSTEM



This 5-step system will keep you **one step ahead of your children.**

Benefits of the One Step Ahead Parenting system

When following the one-step-ahead-parenting system, you reduce the stress of challenging situations because you know the exact steps to follow. You will find yourself **confidently going through the steps in your head**, which gets you in the right mindset to handle whatever situation develops.

This plan works for all ages. You learn and implement the same steps repeatedly. Once you understand and implement the plan, **you are not starting over from scratch when new situations and challenges appear**. With practice, you will **develop confidence** that helps you and your children **problem solve effectively**.

As parents, we raised our son and daughter with this plan. Our family has lived this plan up close and personal. I learned much from the rocky times. I found when things did not go well that I **missed a step** or **tried to hurry things**. Once I got back on track, **the system never failed me**.

Our children speak the language of this system. When they make a poor choice, they acknowledge it, make a plan for next time and spontaneously ask

“Can I have a fresh start?”

STEP 1. STAY CONNECTED AND IN THE PRESENT



Connection requires more than just being family.

The language of connecting

We read the language of connection in many ways. We read the **body language**, the **tone of voice**, and **facial expressions** (i.e. open - smiling, welcoming, direct eye contact or closed – frowning, pouty, resistant or challenging, etc.)



You want to **connect** with an open side-by-side or face-to-face **relaxed, open posture** with your child. This starting point increases the likelihood of a positive outcome. Once you are connected, staying connected requires **quieting your own thoughts and emotions** to **screen out the background noise**.

Quieting your own thoughts frees you to observe. Being sensitive to your warning signals, like feeling rigid, clenching your jaws, shallow breathing, etc. *informs you* so you can address your own feelings, thus **reducing the risk of escalation**.



How many times has this happened to you?

You want your child to clean up their room and you are cooking dinner. You yell up “clean your room before dinner”, which is met with a resounding silence. So, of course you yell a little louder. Still there is silence.

It is easy to begin **assigning meaning** to why you are not getting a response. You become more irritated with each attempt and your emotional temperature is rising in frustration. The negative messages you may be thinking (based on previous experience) are disturbing. You might tell yourself, “...never listens to me”. It is easy to respond to your thoughts by building up into a highly emotional state. Now you are **determined, you will** get a response. You march up the stairs and by the time you reach the door, you are ready to “explode”.

The door swings open and you call out your child’s name only to receive a “huh” in response. This further pushes your hot buttons and you may respond in a harsh tone or by yelling “I have been calling you for 30 minutes, why haven’t you answered?”

Your child who just hears you for the first time (because the music is too loud, they are on the phone, on the computer, watching a video or totally absorbed in some activity), doesn’t know what just happened, except that the a tornado suddenly blew in the door. From your child’s eyes and ears you have just intruded on his or her space with anger and irritation.



Your child may become defensive, angry or anxious and then over react in response to your hyper-excited emotional state. **Your child may ask**, “What’s wrong with you?” Now you are “breathing fire”.

What just happened?

You missed the first step of creating a positive connection. You located your child but you created a whole scenario in your mind about your child “**choosing**” **not to respond**. The brain works this way. When something happens, we naturally try to understand and thus we **assign meaning**. It is essential to recognize that the **meaning we assign** has **only a 50/50 chance of being accurate**. **Problems occur** when we **act as if the meaning we assign is 100% accurate**.

As soon as you reacted to your scenario as if it were accurate, these thoughts led to emotional excitement and reactivity. Your **initial request was lost**. Your child did not know you were asking him or her to clean up their room. You are both **reacting to your emotion based on the meaning you assigned**. This type of interaction can become a pattern, with toxic fallout. Failing to plug in and make a positive connection can produce long lasting issues and conflicts.

STEP 1. IN ACTION

Let's replay this situation using connecting as the primary goal in getting your child to clean up their room before dinner. You go upstairs and connect with your child with a smile and open, receptive body language. You go to your child's side or sit next to them and observe what your child is doing. You comment on what you observe (hopefully), "I see you are getting some reading done". You take time to listen to what they want to tell you.

You ask how long your child needs to get their room picked up. This information gives both of you a reality check that there is sufficient time to meet your request. Calmly share that you are preparing dinner and it will be ready at ... time and you need him or her to fit cleaning up their room **before dinner** into their schedule. If there is a sigh or eye roll, **do not react to the reaction**. State you are looking forward to hearing about their day at dinner and exit.

"It takes too long!"

It may seem as if this strategy **takes forever to accomplish**. However, that is a misperception that parents often have. There are four big time-eaters in interactions:

- the parent's over reaction to a situation
- the child reacting to the parent addressing of a behavior or situation
- the child reacting to the parent's over reaction
- both the parent and the child reacting to each other's reaction.

By taking time up front, you are less likely to over react thereby eliminating or shortening the **reaction to the reaction sequence**. With the 5-step system, you get to problem solving much more rapidly.

Summary STEP 1. STAY CONNECTED AND IN THE PRESENT



What Should Stick

Connection communicates that your child is important and you are interested in what they have to say

- Maintain relaxed, open body language and calm receptive attitude, no rushing
- Stay connected by quieting your own thoughts and emotions
- Avoid bringing up your own agenda until you connect

STEP 2. RESPOND WITH CALM, BALANCED ENERGY



Making the connection in Step 1 includes **observing**. As you work to make the connection, you may observe things that are distressing. Body language like the eye roll, the head toss, the sigh, or the glare often signal parents to react. **Do not react to your observation**. You need to **remain focused on connecting**. In order to maintain your focus on connecting requires that you utilize Step 2 of responding with calm balanced energy. You might want to use each breathe in and out as a **signal to remind yourself, calm balanced energy**.

Calm yourself so you can think

When you get excitable and experience intense emotions, like your twelve year old telling you to shut up, you must wait to respond until the emotion settles back down. You connect with calm body language and wait for your calmness to become contagious. **Just as hyper-excitement is contagious, calmness is contagious**. You will find that **your power to influence is in your calmness**. **Wait for your child to “catch” your calmness**.

How many times has this happened to you?

Your two-year-old bolts out the front door toward the road, your heart is pounding and you scream your child’s name at the top of your lungs. Your child stops and you rush out grab him or her and pull your child to safety. Next, you start screaming questions, how many times have I told you not to go into the street without holding my hand...?

Your child’s first reaction is a glazed over look with bulging eyes and then the trembling lip followed by tears. You almost do not notice because your **fear is still in high gear**. You may feel angry and want to shake some sense into your child. You are in turmoil; you want the strongest of punishments to get your child to realize they could have died. You are **determined** to make sure **your child never forgets** this moment. You are so angry that you think no consequence you can give will be big enough.

As you settle down a bit, you notice your child has gone from tears to sobbing. Now your heart goes out to your child who is shaking and inconsolable. Only later when your panic calms down, does the relief that a car did not hit your child start to filter into your awareness.

What just happened?

You missed the first step of creating a positive connection and the second step of responding with calm balanced energy. You saw the danger. **You reacted out of panic.** By yelling out to your child, you got him or her to stop. You ran to your child, grabbed him or her and went to safety. Your approach saved your child from the immediate danger. Then you released your fear and anger.

When you yelled, your child responded with a glazed over look. This glazed over state is a **self-protective numbing, an emotional retreat or coping strategy.** A response like **arguing back** is another **coping strategy to get through an emotional storm.** The glazed over look is a passive retreat while the arguing back is an active, action based coping response. Both are **reactions to your over reaction.**

When you are **in a panic or state of high alert and distress, you do not think clearly.** Your adrenal glands are pumping cortisol to move you into a state of fight or flight. So you moved into action but there was **fall out** and your **child became scared.** You might say this is just what you want. However, your child's fear is in **response to your anger, not to cars in the road or the dangerous situation.** The message your child gets is **mom or dad are scary.**

STEPS 1 and 2 IN ACTION

Let's replay this situation using Step 1 Connecting and Step 2 Calm Balanced Energy as the goal in getting your child to safety. Your child is running toward the street. You quickly get to your child and hold them close. You wait until your panic has calmed. Your child senses your distress and once you are calm, it is important to say you were scared. Only after you are fully calm do you have a safety talk.

Your safety talk focuses the two of you on the importance of only going in the street when mommy or daddy are there to hold his or her hand. Using the steps of connecting and calm, balanced energy, your child is not afraid of you. You are **much more effective when calm because then you can think, not just react. Remember that emotions are contagious. If you are calm your child will calm with time. If you are hyper-excited your child becomes hyper-excited.**

Summary STEP 2. RESPOND WITH CALM BALANCED ENERGY



What Should Stick

Calmness is your greatest tool because it allows your child to think and listen

- Your calmness is contagious
- You avoid creating new problems when you are calm

STEP 3. LISTENING



One of your best tools is the ability to **listen without responding**. I urge you to **lean back and listen** because the action of leaning back signals your brain for **receptivity, not reactivity**. Reacting or talking interrupts the listening. **Separating your response from listening** is one key to effective communication. Parents are often preparing a response before or immediately after hearing the first sentence from their child or another adult's report of your child's misbehavior. Once you are **focusing on your own thoughts or arguments** you do not hear your child because you are **not present**. **Listening does not mean you are agreeing**. Often parents feel a need to interrupt and correct the perception of their child. Even if you believe that your child is reporting something inaccurately, **wait** it out and **listen**. You want to **hear how they see situations**. By listening, you have the privilege of hearing how their thought processes and problem solving skills are developing. Listening gives you the opportunity to learn what assumptions your child has made.

How many times has this happened to you?

Your child is complaining about their teacher being unfair. You know how often your child complains, putting responsibility on others, so you are inclined to think that there is much more to the story. You begin to ask questions: are you listening; are you doing all the assignments; are you reading the book, and are you asking for help.

Your child is likely to go on the defensive, complaining that you always take the teacher's side. Your child marches off feeling unsupported, angry and upset. Perhaps there is a comment like, "I don't know why I even bother to talk to you".

What just happened?

You missed the first step of creating a positive **connection** and the second step of responding with calm balanced energy. From your perspective, there was omitted information. **You reacted before listening** because you felt irritated that your child was giving an unbalanced story.

Do not judge the story; be glad your child is talking with you. **Lecturing** your child gives the message that you think they are **incapable of problem solving**. Asking questions such as, have you been listening in class or texting, **assumes you child is at fault for the problem** and your child is likely to **respond defensively**.

What just happened (cont.)

That **pushes you apart**, often leading to **disconnect**. When you become disconnected, you have **lost your ability to have positive influence**. While the teacher may be perfectly reasonable and clear, it does not matter. Your child is reacting based on his or her perception. You can help by listening.

STEPS 1, 2 and 3 IN ACTION

You connect powerfully by sitting quietly and giving your child your undivided attention. You **remain calm, not judging, not thinking about previous situations, just focused on the current concern**. You **listen silently to each complaint**. Then **summarize what you heard**. "It sounds like you believe that your teacher is asking questions on the test that are not covered in class and that seems unfair."

Listen with the assumption that your child has tools to solve the problem

Make sure you have heard all of the complaints by asking, "**Is there anything else the teacher has done that seems unfair?**" You follow up with asking what your child **has done** or **might do** to deal with the situation.

You want your children to take responsibility for their actions. Listening is one of our greatest tools in helping your child demonstrate how they take ownership. If **you are talking**, your child is a **passive recipient**. You are telling him or her about your thinking.

Listening with the assumption that your child has some tools to solve the problem is another powerful tool. Children want to be valued. Their self-esteem increases when they know we believe in their ability to solve problems. By listening, then **asking open-ended questions** that get them **thinking about solutions**, you **empower your children to effectively problem solve**.

Even if you get off track and need to go back and listen, the great thing about kids is that they generously give parents many "**fresh starts**", **new chances to do better**.

Summary STEP 3. LISTENING



What Should Stick

Listening is a powerful tool because it allows your child to think, feel **connected** and **supported** so that he or she can effectively **problem solve**

Your listening skills reinforce the connection and the calm balanced energy

- Avoid creating new problems when you are attentively listening
- Your **calmness** while listening is **contagious, allowing your child to do their best problem solving**

STEP 4. PROVIDE CLEAR RULES, BOUNDARIES AND LIMITATIONS



Boundaries always need to be clear and definite. The intensity of your delivery determines how your child experiences the boundary. Calm, clear boundaries are statements of **expectations provided in advance**.

Children are more stable emotionally when they are receiving support and reinforcement through appropriate behavior. **Calmly and concisely**, state what you expect from your children. Be sure to check out what your child heard you say. The benefit of **clarification** is that you know **you were clear**, your child imprints the message he or she heard and you will not waiver in wondering, after-the-fact, if your child understood the expectation.

Boundaries provide safety

With new limits, make sure you provide enough time for your child to be successful. As children get older, they will have learned your methods for handling stressful situations. While they will test limits, **calmness and consistency will keep them on track**.

Take whatever time is necessary, stay calm so that they can calm themselves and successfully comply with your limitations. Protest is natural; your job is to **wait out the distraction of the protest**. Stay focused on what you are **teaching; self-management of emotions and effective problem solving skills**.

How many times has this happened to you?

It is time for the kids to be out of bed getting ready for school. You wake your son and go off to prepare breakfast. When you come back to check on his progress he is still in bed. Your tone is frustrated and angry and you pull off the sheets and blankets to move him forward. You have sounded the alert and now both of you are in sour moods. As you direct your child to the breakfast table for oatmeal, he falls to the ground in a full blown tantrum demanding waffles. You are **under pressure** and in **reaction mode** because the **stress** is on **to get everything done in less time**.

What just happened?

You missed the first step of creating a positive connection and the second step of responding with calm balance energy. From your perspective, you called your son and he did not respond by getting up. You then **reacted before listening**. You felt irritated that your child was not doing what you expect every school day. Some of the **toughest times are transition times**. Therefore, **advanced planning is essential**. Time pressure created tension build up.

STEPS 1, 2, 3 and 4 IN ACTION

Scheduling extra time for the wake up process provides time for Step 1 connecting with your son. You **connect** by sitting quietly and giving your child a head rub. Step 2, you remain **calm** and open the windows to let sunlight in and perhaps start some music playing to help in the transition from sleep to wake up.

By counting down the time and saying we have 3 minutes or for younger children, the third time I say a nonsense word like “goggleeegoggleewiggileewagalee” it is time for your toes to touch the floor, you give clear messages about time. Children **need signals** so they can adequately meet the request and **feel successful**.

You give a signal then continue to awaken your child with your voice becoming a bit stronger with each minute. You are **“listening”** to your child’s body language. You begin to talk about the day, the sun is out, the clouds are waving as they move by, and the birds are singing a special song. Your child is coming further awake and you **are connecting**.

You give a time reference at 2 minutes or second “goggleeegoggleewiggileewagalee” and again at one minute. You speak to his toes and tell them they need to move closer to the floor. When his toes touch the floor you say wow **you made it right on time, good job toes**.

If you wait to tell your son to do all the steps at once, you might find yourself in the middle of a meltdown. Most children are soundly asleep and for them to awaken take some time. You are teaching him how to **smoothly transition from sleep to awake**.

Appropriate, natural consequences

If your child does have a meltdown, you need to apply **consequences that relate to the issue**. An appropriate consequence if your child does not get up on time would be, “I see you were not able to get to get up on time. I know it is harder to get up when you are tired. Tonight I will move your bed time 5 minutes earlier. This way we can be sure you get **enough sleep to make it easier to get up on time**. There is no judgment or criticism, just calm natural consequences.

Your child is likely to protest, “That’s not fair”. Your job is to continue calm and balanced. Do not speak when your child is escalating. Once your child is calm, use very few words. **Speak only when you are calm yourself**. You can reassure your child that once he is able to get up easily on time, you can move this bedtime later again. If you **react to their reaction**, you further **escalate** the distress and your child will start **reacting to your reaction, not the issue of following the rules**.

Getting your child to follow rules

Getting your child to follow rules and **regulate their own impulses and behaviors** requires that you are **connected, calm, listening** and have provided **clear expectations in advance**. You want your children to take responsibility for their actions. If you are always telling your child what to do when and managing every moment, they do not practice the skills of self-regulation.

As your children are old enough they can begin to think decisions through by telling you three reasons why you should say and three well thought through reasons why you might say no. The more practice your child has in thinking through what they want from a broader perspective the more skilled they become in making good choices. Your ultimate goal is for your child to make good choices when you are not there to monitor or instruct. To reach that point they need practice.

Summary STEP 4. **PROVIDE CLEAR RULES BOUNDARIES & LIMITATIONS**



What Should Stick

Limits made clear and repeated back by your child provides the safety of boundaries.

Limits and boundaries need to be consistent.

- You avoid creating new problems when you are consistent
- Your calmness, which is contagious, makes limits less threatening

STEP 5. FRESH START



Fresh starts begin after your child has achieved emotional balance and after completing their consequence. Ideally, your child has discussed what will be different next time a similar situation arises.

How many times has this happened to you?

Your child seems to keep doing the same things repeatedly even though you have made the expectations clear. You do not ask for the impossible, you expect your teenage son to pick up his dirty clothes and put them in the clothes hamper after getting out of the shower. Yet day after day, you walk into the bathroom after he is off to school to find the pile of dirty clothes.

Soon you find that you are holding onto resentment. You start to lecture him and make a comment about “how many times do I have to tell you”. You attempt to drive home your points hoping that maybe this time it will work. You have entered the realm of the **power struggle**. **Power struggles lead to children trying to gain power through resistance and defiance.**

If you get into power struggles, your child has the easy win by saying NO or I DON'T CARE, YOU CAN'T MAKE ME or THROWING OUT SOME EXCUSE. This response is likely to enflame you and the focus of the interaction shifts to WHO IS IN CHARGE. You might then be **inclined to exert more power to get your child to comply**. **Engaging in a power struggle gives away your real influence.**

Once into a power struggle, you are likely to lose your temper and the original problem remains unsolved in the heat of the argument. The result is that the opportunity for teaching problem solving skills is lost. **Learning to cope with limits, manage emotions and effectively problem solve is essential to healthy development.**

STEPS 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 IN ACTION

Connect first by **calmly** sitting down and listening to your son. Do not jump into your concern until you are connected and listening. Then let your teen know that **you realize that it seems natural to him to throw his clothes on the floor and leave them there**. Saying this takes some steam out of your son's feeling you are **making a big deal out of nothing** and that you should rearrange your life to deal with his actions. You **realize that it does not bother him**, but reiterate the limit that dirty clothes belong in the hamper.

Stay Connected to have Influence

STEPS 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 IN ACTION (cont.)

Do not respond to derailing comments like, “Why do you have to have everything perfect?” You might say, I don’t think either of us want this to become a big deal, nothing has changed dirty clothes have always belonged in the hamper. Stay calm and move forward by asking for his solution for getting his clothes to the hamper immediately after his shower. If his solution works, that’s fine, but what if it doesn’t? Ask your teen to provide some consequences should he leave his clothes on the floor again. If he doesn’t want input that is fine you can make the decision if it happens again.

Perhaps the solution may be that you pick up his clothes and put them on his bed for him to have to deal with later. This way you do not have to look at the clothes and feel upset throughout the day. The consequence you chose may be that he does the dishes for one day to compensate for you picking his clothes up. When the consequence is completed then there is a fresh start.

There are many benefits to the fresh start approach. You teach that you understand you child will make **bad choices** and this is a **part of life**. You teach that they have the opportunity to take appropriate steps to **think ahead, weigh and balance the choice to act on impulse in the moment or think things through and weigh out the result**.

If your child has good tools for self-regulation, they are likely to make sound decisions when you are not with them. If you stand over your children and bring up **every mistake** they make they can easily **fall into feeling powerless**. Other than avoiding punishment, there is no incentive to thinking through their actions through in advance in order to make better choices. They begin to feel they can never please you or do enough right to receive positive recognition. **Defeated kids do not put the effort out to improve**

When your children experience the power of making good choices and the benefit of self-regulation they have incentive to do better because it makes them **feel good about themselves**. Children like adults **thrive with positive empowerment**, taking **responsible control over their own behaviors**, and the **joy of mastery**.

Summary STEP 5. FRESH START



What Should Stick

Fresh Starts are new chances to do better. When your children understand that mistakes are a part of life, there is no need to hide them or make excuses.

- When children are constantly reminded of past mistakes they get stuck and lose incentive to strive
- When you focus on problem solving skills rather than harping on mistakes, your child becomes empowered and responsible.



Sandra L. Dye

Parenting and Child Expert

Sandra has worked with children of all ages. From those whose teachers labeled them as constant problems and were on the verge of being kicked out of kindergarten to the rebellious teen. These children and their parents found in Sandra, someone who understood them and helped them experience the thrill of success.

Over her 26 years in private practice, Sandra has helped parents stop feeling guilty, and find delight in parenting. Sandra has taught parents how their children have the ability to regulate their behaviors once they have the right tools. Parents discover that home life can change from chaotic with constant battles to calm, fun and rewarding.

Parents told Sandra they were looking for more than quick how to advice and random answers to issues. Sandra responded to requests to take her knowledge and experience and offer a time-tested system that parents could implement. Now her 5-step system is available to any parent who finds they are struggling.

One family said, "Sandra translates the acting out behaviors of children that feel incomprehensible into something simple that makes total sense." A six year old with behavioral problems, whose parents learned the 5-step system said, "My crazy friend at school needs to come see you."

From private practice to the homes of parents around the world, Sandra helps parents get the positive results they desire. When you get stuck, it will be easy to sort out and accurately identify the problem by reviewing each step of the 5 step system: connect, calm, listen, limits and fresh start.

Sandra found with her own children that there are times when she tried to rush things. Sandra reports, "When you go back and redo things at the proper pace you find everything gets back on track. While it may take time, the system has never failed our family."

As a young child Sandra was call an "old soul". This shaped Sandra's belief in herself and her awareness that with the right tools, **anything is possible for children and parents.**

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