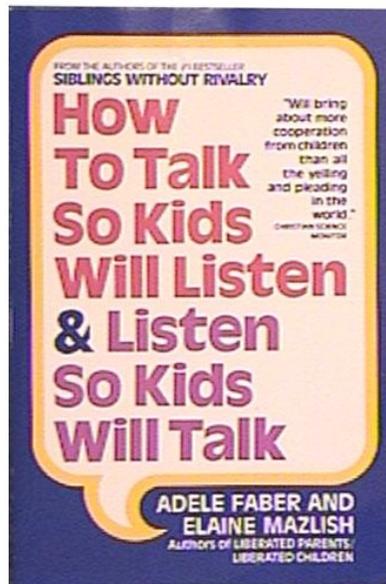


How To Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk
Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish



The book “How To Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk” was written by Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish, the authors of “Siblings Without Rivalry” and “Liberated Parents-Liberated Children.” My wife got a big kick out of me while I was reading this literature. She would advise me to put the book down before the vein in my forehead burst from the frustration that was building up inside of me. Reading the advice from these two women, I wondered if they really believed in their method of child rearing, or if this touchy feely gobble-de-goop was a theory of theirs that had never been put to the test.

The Faber/Mazlish team tries to convey the idea to the reader that children are equal with adults and should be treated as such. On the cover of the book, a critique from the Los Angeles Times states “Designed to bring adults to the level of children, and children to the level of adults, so this happy meeting ground can truly make for harmony in the home.” The critic from the Los Angeles Times is correct about one thing. This book attempts to convince us that children are capable of mature decisions, and the parent’s attempt to correct a child is damaging to their self esteem. Unfortunately, the critic for the Los Angeles Times is wrong about their last statement. This level playing field, or “happy meeting ground,” cannot make for harmony in the home. Although there were areas in the book that made no sense at all, there was enough common sense information mixed in to make a person consider the advice given. But the large picture, the overall flavor of this book, is a recipe for disaster.

As I shared some of the suggestions in this book with others, I found that most experienced parents did not consider much of the contents as credible and doubted that anyone reading this book would believe it’s advice. Have you ever read some fluff stuff that promotes getting along by feeling good and being tolerant of others? When I read advice from “experts” insisting that children are void of any personality or conscience, I am reminded of what the Psalmist says in Psalms 58:3, “they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies.”

The Faber/Mazlish team begins the book by relating some of the problems they were experiencing with their children prior to their “enlightenment” by parenting classes. The author (who prefers to be thought of as one person, not two) lists some arguments from her children that she states “finally wore her down.” She writes that every day was a variation of the one before, with children fighting and children arguing. She lists some of the arguments she receives from her children, including “I won’t go to my room. You’re not the boss over me!” My reaction when reading this was that this woman was already lost if her kids were advising her they had fired her as their mother. I was wondering if the kids knew who the “boss over them” was. Obviously not!

The mother joined a parent group. There are plenty of those around, mostly occupied by parents who have been fired by their children and are looking for other employment. This particular parent group was led by a “young psychologist” by the name of Haim Ginott. There were two adjectives describing the instructor of this parent group. “Young” and “psychologist.” That’s strike one and strike two in my book. But evidently he impressed this mother who was filled with new hope after her first session which was titled “children’s feelings.” Strike three.

The first step in this course of behavior modification was to convince the parent that their child was much more intelligent than they had ever dreamed. I soon realized that this course was on parent behavior modification, not child behavior modification. The parent was encouraged to trust their child’s way of thinking. It was then pointed out to mom that if she could refrain from giving advice to her child, there would be fewer arguments. On page 3 it reads,

Not only were all our conversations turning into arguments, I was telling my children over and over again not to trust their own perceptions, but to rely upon mine instead. Once I was aware of what I was doing, I was determined to change. After all, we were two separate people, capable of having two different sets of feelings. Neither of us was right or wrong.

Uh-oh. Here we go with the “it’s nobody’s fault” syndrome. In our society, we have tried to eliminate fault from our actions. From “no fault” divorce to placing the blame of misbehavior on everything but the person who is behaving badly. “Oppositional Defiance Disorder” is an excellent example of the rubbish this society has come to accept from the mental health field. A kid who will not do what he is told is diagnosed with a “disorder,” causing him to fall under the Americans With Disabilities Act, and giving him special protection under the law from discipline and punishment. Hogwash! Page three continues.

For a while my new skill was a big help. There was a noticeable reduction in the number of arguments between the children and me.

The author isn’t real specific about what the children were doing during this period. I’m not sure if they were following any of the rules, since their “feelings” were being considered by mom, and mom, now aware that “neither of them were right or wrong,” was not selfishly imposing her will on the children. But we do learn, further on in the book, how this tranquil scene came to be in this “feel good” household.

The method used to accomplish this utopia where the entire household agrees on everything is outlined in chapter three. This chapter is titled “Alternatives to Punishment.” The

author states,

Parent educators, labor negotiators, marriage counselors have worked out some excellent detailed methods for resolving difficult conflicts. Here's the version that I presented to the group. 1) Talk about the child's feelings and needs, 2) Talk about your feelings and needs, 3) Brainstorm together to find a mutually agreeable solution, 4) Write down all ideas - without evaluating, and 5) Decide which suggestions you like, which you don't like, and which you plan to follow through on.

The author describes a problem being experienced by one of the other unemployed parents in the group. The mother indicated that she was having difficulty getting her son, Bobby, to come home on time. She told them about his constant excuses, his broken promises, and his broken watches. The group prepared an exercise and decided to tackle this problem of the not so rapid Robert. They start by roll playing, and giving what they consider to be an old fashioned response to Bobby when he trudges in hours after he was supposed to be home. The out-of-touch parent pretends.

I've had enough of your excuses! Well this time you're going to be punished. Every day next week you'll come home after school and stay home. And don't think you'll sit around watching TV either! You can go straight to your room now because dinner is over.

This sounds very much like my mother would have sounded if I wasn't home at the assigned time when the assigned dinner was on the assigned table. But things have changed! We must revert back to our five problem solving steps we have learned from our young psychiatrist instructor guru. This is the way the modern parent, one who does not want to be unemployed in the near future, should handle this constant tardy problem with Bobby. (This is it folks. Really! Just like it is in the book!)

Mother: Bobby, there's something I'd like to talk about. Is this a good time for you?

Bobby: (suspiciously) It's okay. What is it?

Mother: It's about the business of getting home on time for dinner.

Bobby: Nobody else has to go as early as me. Nobody!

This is the typical kid response. None of my friends have to follow the rules like I do. Notice how mom made sure that Bobby boy wasn't being inconvenienced too much by her inconsiderate intrusion into his personal time. This is something the unemployed mothers in the parent group were learning, how to be submissive to your children. The scenario continues.

Mother: Hmm.

Bobby Yeah! Then Kenny calls me a baby.

Mother: Bobby, do you know how it is from my point of view?

Bobby: Yea, you want me home on time.

Mother: That's part of it, but mainly I worry when you're late.

Bobby: Then don't worry!

Okay, we have determined that big brat Bobby is not only inconsiderate of mom's feelings, he is also just a bit arrogant. I believe my mother would have drawn the line right here if I had replied like Bobby, but let's give mom the benefit of the doubt and see what her response is.

Mother: I wish I didn't.... Look, let's put our heads together and take a fresh look at this problem and see whether we could come up with some ideas that would be good for both of us. (Mother takes out pencil.) You start.

Bobby: I'll come home late, but you don't worry.

Mother: All right, I'll write that down. What else?

Bobby: I dunno.

Let's be honest folks. Would your mom have listened patiently to you spout off like Bobby Bratmeister, and write your stupid little suggestions down on a piece of paper acting like she was concerned about why you didn't think you had to be home in time for supper each night? Perhaps she should have done what this unemployed mom does next. Suggest something and have Bobby reject it completely!

Mother: Hey, I have a thought. I could come to the playground and pick you up.

Bobby: No.... that's no good.

Mother: We're writing down all our ideas. Later we'll decide which we like and which we don't. What else?

Bobby: Why do we always have to eat together? Can't you just leave my dinner for me?

When I was growing up, my mom always showed more patience than my dad did, but I doubt if she would have stretched it out this far. My mom would have picked me up by my ears, booted me into the kitchen, and reminded me how ungrateful I was and how I was lucky for getting any dinner at all. Unemployed mom, on the other hand, writes the brats suggestion on her list.

Mother: (writes "Leave dinner") The days are getting longer now. I suppose we could have dinner fifteen minutes later.

Bobby: Only fifteen minutes!

Mother: You'd like it to be more. Hmm. (writes "Eat 15 minutes later") Any other ideas, or should we look at our list now and see what we want to cross out and what we want to keep?

Bobby: Let's look!

So far, mom has given in and scheduled dinner at 6:15 instead of 6:00, something dad should be extremely happy about. Is mom going to stick to her guns in any other area? Let's see.

Bobby: Cross out where you pick me up every day. Kenny would really tease me if you did that.

Mother: Let's look at this next one. I suppose I could move dinner to six fifteen. Would fifteen extra minutes help?

Bobby: No..... Well, maybe a little.

Mother: And I suppose I could leave dinner in the oven for you occasionally, if I knew ahead of time. How does that hit you?

Bobby: Good!

My wife laughed at me when I read this passage to her. She told me my blood pressure goes too high when I read material that I think is outrageous. Can you imagine new parents who are concerned about raising their children in a healthy, productive environment reading this stuff? The author goes on to say,

Doesn't sound too hard, does it? But it is. And the hardest part is not the learning of the separate steps. With a little study that can be accomplished. The hardest part is the shift we have to make in attitude. We have to stop thinking of the child as a "problem" that needs correction. We have to give up the idea that because we're adults we always have the right answer.

Wow! Tell me this isn't part of the movement to remove parental authority from the soon to be unemployed mom. If a parent follows this line of reasoning while bringing up Bobby, there will be real trouble in the utopia projected by the young psychiatrist instructor. Trouble is, the young psychiatrist instructor does not live with Bobby. Mom does.

Most non-spanking publications advocate the elimination of punishment completely in the discipline plan. It is amazing to me to think that my parents could have effectively raised me without punishing me when my behavior was unacceptable. The non-spanking movement believes that all children are born "good" and that the child's evil environment is the cause of any subsequent negative behavior. The Faber/Mazlish duo is no different. Chapter three of their book is titled *Alternatives To Punishment*. The authors discuss their parenting class led by the young psychiatrist instructor, Dr. Haim Ginott. According to Doc, a child should experience the consequences of his misbehavior, but NOT punishment. Dr. Ginott says that the problem with punishment is that it doesn't work, that it is a distraction, that instead of the child feeling sorry for what he has done and thinking about how he can make amends, he becomes preoccupied with revenge fantasies. In other words, by punishing a child, we actually deprive him of the very important inner process of facing his own behavior.

The doctor is saying that the "good" child is deprived of the "important inner process" of correcting his negative behavior if he is "punished" by his parents. Therefore, we should not punish a child who has assaulted someone, stolen someone else's property, lied, set the house on fire, and run away. He will eventually, on his own, return home, apologize to the person he assaulted and pay for the medical bills, return the stolen property to its rightful owner, tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, and repay his parents for the damage caused by the fire. All on his own! Notice how the parent has been eliminated completely from this formula. The child is left to himself to make the wise decisions needed to survive in our society.

A few pages later, it becomes very evident that the Faber/Mazlish team is living in a fantasy world. After months of involvement in the parent group, it has become evident to all that allowing your children to make their own decisions and settle their own disputes has solved every parenting problem that could come down the pike. The author states, "Parents told us that once their children became accustomed to problem-solving, they were able to work out their differences with their sisters and brothers." The authors give the following story from a member of the unemployed parent group. The story starts by saying, "The first example is from a father."

Brad (four) and Tara (two and a half) were outside. Brad was riding Tara's tricycle and Tara wanted to ride it. Tara started to get hysterical and Brad refused to get off.

Normally I wouldn't have hesitated to say, "Brad, get off. That belongs to your sister. You have your own bicycle!" But instead of taking Tara's side, I said, "I see you both have a problem. Tara, you want to ride your tricycle. Brad you want to ride Tara's tricycle and she doesn't want you to." I then said to both of them, "I think you should try to find a solution to the problem that would be acceptable to both of you."

Tara continued to cry and Brad thought for a moment. Brad then said to me, "I think Tara should stand on the back of the tricycle and hold on to my stomach while I ride."

I said, "This solution should be discussed with Tara, not me."

Brad then asked Tara and Tara agreed! They then both rode off into the sunset.

Give me a break. They then rode off into the sunset? This is a four-year-old and a two-year-old, not Roy Rogers and the Happy Trail! Have any of you parents out there experienced anything like this? I pity the poor two-year-old girl who is forced to fend for herself when it comes to defending herself against her brother two years older. To assume that these very young children have the culpability to solve the complex problems of life is insulting to my intelligence.

The author continues on this line of thinking later on, when she states,

It also takes great restraint and self-discipline on our part not to move in with advice, particularly when we're sure we have the answer. I know that to this day whenever one of my children asks, "Mom, what do you think I should do?" I have to sit on myself not to tell them immediately what I think they should do.

Oh come on! Give me an example of a mother who doesn't know more than her child. This mother has been convinced that when she is "sure" that she has the answer to her child's question, it is not a good idea to voice her opinion. Picture this. Thirteen-year-old daughter Debbie is considering attending a beer party given by a friend. Her friend's mother is one of those unemployed parents who don't believe they have the right to restrict their child's behavior. Debbie asks mom, "Mom, what do you think I should do?" Mom doesn't think it is proper for her to give her daughter any advice. Stupid mom. Mom may as well be unemployed.

I believe that the best example in this book that demonstrates the ludicrous mindset of the authors is an example of a "good" kid who is allowed to become a "brat" in the interest of child choice. In one of the later sections of the book, there is a story given by a mother who has found

the answer to her child rearing problems by attending the unemployed parent classes given by the young psychiatrist instructor. Basically, this mother had a child who was a great delight and gave the mother little trouble. According to the young psychiatrist instructor, this was unacceptable. The mother solved her problem of the cooperative child by following the advice of the support group. The story reads:

Heather is adopted. From the first day she came to us, she was a joy. And she continued to grow into a sweet, adorable child. I not only thought of her as my pride and joy, but I'd tell her a dozen times a day what happiness she brought to me. It wasn't until I read your chapter on roles that I wondered whether I might be placing too heavy a burden on her to be "good," to be "my pleasure." My concern led me to try a number of things that were new. I suppose the most important thing I did was to think of ways to let Heather know that all her feelings were okay, that it was all right to be angry, upset, or frustrated."

The mother then goes into a dissertation about how she was able to change her child from a kind, sweet, adorable child into one that unfortunately, many parents are familiar with. The mother was able to convince the daughter that it was unfair for her to impose her will on the young girl, and that the girl was capable of deciding if her behavior was proper or not. At the bottom of the page, the mother explains how successful she was in bringing about this transformation.

The other morning was a "first." Heather was in the shower and I was rinsing a few dishes. She banged on the wall and I turned the hot water down half-way. Later she came storming into the kitchen and yelled at the top of her lungs, "I asked you not to run the hot water. I had a freezing cold shower!" I have the feeling Heather is going to be "expressing herself" a lot more in the future, and I'm sure I won't like everything I hear; but in the long run, I still think it's more important for her to be real than to have to continue being "mother's joy." P.S. Now, whenever I hear people telling me how "good" their children are, I'm a little suspicious.

There you have it! The book *How To Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk* in a nutshell. It not only contains information on how to allow your children to run their own lives, it also suggests that if you have an exceptionally good child, you have the ability to turn them into a selfish brat who screams at their mother with the best of them. To think that anyone would believe that it is an improvement in a child's behavior to go from being a "sweet adorable child" into one who screams at her mother (who by the way, was washing the dishes, something the brat should have been doing), is unbelievable.

The authors, Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish, are trying to convince parents to follow their advice. It's hard to believe that anyone would actually follow this instruction. Common sense would dictate that this type of ridiculous advice should be rejected by anyone with any brains at all. Yet every day, new parents are falling into the trap of believing something simply because it has been published in writing by a person who professes to be an "expert." This publication is another effort to remove parental authority and enable the child. To believe that a child left to

make it's own decisions will make the wise choice is simply farcical. Let me remind the reader of the wisdom of Solomon written in Proverbs 29:15, "The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame." The rod (physical discipline) and reproof (advice from the parent) give wisdom (knowledge by learning), but a child left to himself (left to make his own decisions) bringeth his mother to shame." Amen.