

Hello!

Whether you are a new parent or a child psychologist with ten children of your own, *15 Powerful Tools for Successful Parenting* was written for you.

I'm proud to say that, as a professional martial arts instructor, I have taught or supervised the instruction of nearly twenty thousand children over the course of more than thirty years. A lot of the tools in *15 Powerful Tools for Successful Parenting* come right off the mat.

Through my interaction with students and their parents over the years, I've had the privilege of seeing great parenting in action. Before having children of my own, I interviewed dozens of parents whom I felt were doing a great job in order to learn strategies that I could put to use.

In this quest to enhance my teaching skills, I have read literally hundreds of books on teaching, coaching and parenting. During my research, I came across a broad spectrum of parenting strategies, some of which were diametrically opposed to one another. However, certain concepts were consistent throughout my research. *15 Powerful Tools for Successful Parenting* weaves these common threads into a logical, concise and easy-to-read guide to being a great parent.

I've been applying these principles both to my parenting and martial arts instruction for decades and they're as useful now as they ever were.

I hope you have a great time teaming up with your child to use the tools in *15 Powerful Tools for Successful Parenting*.

And please note that I refer to your child as either "he" or "she" throughout the book to simplify the message, but all the tools apply to both sons and daughters.

Happy parenting!

Dave Kovar

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Your Most Important Role
- Guideline 1 : Praise in public, but reprimand in private
- Guideline 2 : Believe in your child’s potential
- Guideline 3 : Walk your talk 18
- Guideline 4 : Constantly catch your child “doing things right”
- Guideline 5 : Set boundaries and stick to them
- Guideline 6 : Listen
- Guideline 7 : Hold your children to a high standard
- Guideline 8 : Inspire your child to greatness
- Guideline 9 : Choose your battles wisely
- Guideline 10 : Be easily in awe
- Guideline 11 : Give your child choices, not ultimatums
- Guideline 12 : Never compare
- Guideline 13 : Maintain rigid flexibility
- Guideline 14 : Don’t speak out of anger
- Guideline 15 : Make sure your child knows that you love her unconditionally
- Why Your Child Needs Martial Arts
- Keeping It Simple
- About the Author

## Your Most Important Role

The most important role you will ever have is that of parent. Parenting can be extremely rewarding, but it's extremely challenging, too. Just when you think you have it figured out, something happens and it's back to the drawing board.

Ben Zoma, an early spiritual sage, often asked his students, "Who is a brave person?" Zoma described "a brave person" as "someone who is smart enough to be afraid, but does whatever needs to be done anyway."

To me, "being afraid" means that certain things are to be taken seriously. Parenthood is a real responsibility. Like it or not, we're responsible for helping to shape our child's life. We should not take this lightly.

Sow a thought, reap an action.

Sow an action, reap a habit.

Sow a habit, reap a character.

Sow a character, reap a destiny.

The above quote, attributed to Ralph Waldo Emerson, is one of my favorites. First and foremost, a parent's job is to do his best to raise his child to become a confident, healthy, happy and contributing member of society. And, in order to do this, parents need to help their children think in proactive, positive ways and develop strong self-images that will guide them through rough times.

The following Parenting Guidelines are designed to support your and your child's success.

You have probably heard most of these guidelines before. Most of them are common sense. However, knowing what to do and understanding how to do it are often two separate challenges. 15 Powerful

Tools for Successful Parenting unites the “what” with the “how” for a logical, easy-to-use guide to parenting.

As you read, you might think that I’m exaggerating the importance of being positive with your child. Guilty as charged! In my experience of working with thousands of parents over the course of more than thirty years, rarely have I come across parents who are too positive with their children. I have, however, frequently seen parents spend way too much time criticizing and being negative with their children. At the other end of this spectrum, though more rare, are parents who believe their children can do no wrong. Both approaches are off kilter.

15 Powerful Tools for Successful Parenting teaches positive, logical and effective parenting and communication skills in an intuitive format so that you will be able to begin to apply them immediately.

We’re all busy. Even with the best of intentions, days or weeks might slip by in which we haven’t used any of our parenting tools. If these tools make sense to you, you might try calendaring them into your phone or computer, even setting the alarm clock on your phone as a reminder or writing yourself notes placed in strategic locations.

## **Guideline 1 - Praise in public, but reprimand in private.**

There is no better feeling than public recognition from someone we respect. We should be constantly looking for opportunities to praise our children openly.

### **Description**

Don't miss any opportunity to let your child know he did a great job. Rewarding him in the moment is the way to encourage his great attitude and excellent effort.

Most of us have experienced public humiliation sometime in our life. For many people, these memories haunt them forever. Being a parent is not easy. Sometimes we get angry and want to "teach our child a lesson." But it's important to remember that, no matter how angry we are or what our child has done, we should not humiliate or reprimand him in front of others. The best way is to cool down first and then address the matter privately.

### **A Great Example**

Sensei Bruce was my first karate teacher. He is a good guy and I'm happy to say that, forty years later, we're still in touch. Back in those days, not a lot of children took martial arts and there was no thought put into teaching methodology. Public praise and positive reinforcement were not in Sensei Bruce's arsenal. As a matter fact, I don't think I ever heard him say anything positive about me during those first couple of years training. It wasn't that he was rude or mean, he just didn't think to give any of his students any positive feedback.

One day, my father came into the school to pick me up. He was a bit early, so he sat down for a few moments to watch the remaining part of class. Unbeknownst to me, Sensei Bruce had decided to promote me to

blue belt at the close of class. In front of the class and my father, he said aloud, “Dave, he’s a tiger. He is doing great and could be a champion someday. Tonight I’m awarding him his blue belt. He certainly deserves it.” I can’t tell you how amazing it made me feel to have my instructor tell my dad and the rest of class that I was doing so well. I was on cloud nine the whole way home. I’ve never forgotten that incident. It reminds me to pass on public praise to my children and my students whenever possible.

## **Room for Improvement**

When I was young, I was at a party at my friend’s house where there were dozens of guests of all ages. After dinner, all the kids were told to rinse their plates off and put them in the dishwasher. My friend forgot to do this and left his dish on the counter. Seeing this, his father jumped at the chance to “teach him a lesson.” In front of everyone, he berated his son. I’ll never forget my friend’s pain and embarrassment at being publicly humiliated.

## **Tool #1**

Like Indiana Jones, go on a treasure hunt. But you’re not looking for an ark. You’re searching for opportunities to praise your child during your normal, daily activities. These moments could occur at the grocery store, social gatherings, talking with friends on the phone, or just about anywhere where you and your child are with other people. It might take practice but praising your child in public will soon come naturally.

## **Guideline 2 - Believe in your child's potential.**

Probably the single most important factor that will increase your child's overall success in life is your own belief that she can succeed.

### **Description**

Your belief in your child's potential is very powerful. As parents, we need to know and believe that our children have the ability to succeed. Then we must act accordingly. Amazing things will happen.

### **A Great Example**

I remember TJ as we'd met yesterday. This young boy was from India. TJ was very bright, but terribly shy and quite possibly the most uncoordinated child that I had ever taught. After his first introductory lesson, his father asked me point blank, "What do you think? Can he ever be any good at this? Do you think he can ever be a Black Belt?" Not wanting to disappoint the father or lower TJ's self esteem more than it already was, I lied. I told them that, although it would be difficult, I had complete faith in TJ and I knew that, if he stuck it out, he would one day earn his Black Belt. The father responded by saying, "Well, you're the expert. If you believe that he can do it, that's good enough for me. Let's sign him up."

The guilt started the moment they left and continued to build to the point that I was sick to my stomach. I had completely sold out. There was NO way in this lifetime that TJ would ever even earn his yellow belt, let alone his Black Belt. How could I mislead this nice family? Tim, my brother and business partner, was able to calm me down a bit by reminding me that TJ had nowhere to go but up and that our program would help even him.

I decided to make helping TJ succeed my personal project. I made sure to give him a lot of attention and encouragement. Over time, a funny thing

began to happen...TJ started to get it and, before long, he successfully passed his yellow belt test.

Five years later, I found him in front of me, amongst a group of newly promoted Junior Black Belts. He had done it and quite well at that! After the test, he and his dad asked to speak privately with me. The father began express his appreciation for the program and how much it had done for TJ. Then TJ said, “Thanks for believing in me. I never thought I could do it, but you were so sure that I could and I didn’t want to let you down.”

TJ continued to train for a few more years. He grew into a fine young man. The last time we talked, he was in medical school. I’ve lost touch with him now, but I hope our paths will cross again because I never really got the chance to thank him. Looking back, I realize that I learned way more from TJ than he ever learned from me. He taught me how to be a better teacher. He showed me what perseverance really is. Most importantly, he demonstrated the power of believing in someone.

## **Room for Improvement**

Early on in my career, I attended a Zig Zigler seminar. At this seminar, I heard him share a statistic about inmates in the Texas State Penitentiary. He said that over fifty-percent of the inmates were told by their parents when they were young that they would end up in prison.

While an interesting statistic, I didn’t fully believe it until I saw firsthand this exact thing happen. Daniel was ten years old when he and his sister enrolled in our martial arts school. Both were good children, but it was clear that they had a hard life. Their grandmother was raising them. Over time, I found out that their dad was an alcoholic and a drug addict with whom they barely had contact. Their mother was incarcerated and wouldn’t be eligible for parole for several years.

I saw their dad only one time. He came into the school to watch them compete in a small tournament. It was obvious that Daniel wanted to do

well for his father. When he won his match, I heard his dad say, “It is going to take a lot more than that to impress me, Danny. You’ll probably wind up just like your mother.” I’ve never been so close to kicking someone in my life! Okay, I’ve kicked lots of people. I’m a martial artist. But only in training, never in anger.

Daniel and Sarah trained with me for years after that incident. Eventually, they drifted away from the school. Later, I learned from Sarah that Daniel was doing time for car theft.

I know that Daniel and Sarah’s parents were extreme, but still, there’s a lesson to be learned from them. Every now and then, I drive by the house Daniel and Sarah lived in when I knew them. After my thoughts wander to Daniel and where he might be now, they return to my children in the present. You can be sure that the next conversation I have with my children will be one in which I affirm their potential.

## **Tool 2**

Every morning as you are brushing your teeth, ask yourself if your words and actions have been congruent with your belief in your child’s potential. If not, decide how you will affirm your child’s potential that day.

## Why Your Child Needs Martial Arts

the benefits of enrolling your child in a martial arts program extend far beyond self-defense. Martial arts will help your child in nearly every aspect of her life. It will improve your child's health, fitness, athletic abilities, confidence, concentration and behavior.

Does this sound too good to be true? It's not. Many experts agree that martial arts are good medicine for the escalating childhood obesity, increased violence at school, and deterioration of the family structure.

There is a reason why Dr. Phil, Jillian Michaels (expert from the television show, The Biggest Loser), Tony Robbins, pediatricians, child physiologists and educators the world over all recommend martial arts as one of the most valuable activities in which your child can participate.

### The Benefits of Martial Arts

Self-Defense. The self-defense benefits of martial arts could be described as practice the fight so that you don't have to. As your child trains he will become more confident in his ability to defend himself. As this confidence increases the need to defend himself will decrease naturally because he will begin to carry himself in a more confident manner. He'll project confidence to everyone around him and will be less vulnerable to predatory behavior. Martial arts training includes strategic or preventative self-defense as well as physical self-defense. Your child will learn how to recognize potentially dangerous situations and how to avoid confrontations.

Athletic Enhancement. There is a reason why every professional sports team in every major sport supplements their training with martial arts. Martial arts training offers several advantages. It is amazingly effective in enhancing general coordination because it uses every part of the body in a balanced way. Upper body, lower body, right side, left side, forward

movement, lateral movement and rotational movement are all included in martial arts training.

Fitness. Fitness has three components: strength, flexibility and endurance. Martial arts training demands a balance between the three. Therefore, a child who trains in martial arts will find her weakest areas greatly improved. Because of her greater balance of strength, flexibility and endurance your child will be less likely to injure herself while participating in other athletic activities.

Health. While martial arts training improves health for people of all ages, it is especially effective for children. It's great exercise and it's fun so kids don't mind doing it. And part of martial arts training includes discussing diet and lifestyle habits so children who grow up training develop healthy habits that stick with them for life.

Concentration. Very few activities engage the mind, body and spirit more than martial arts. Because of this a child's ability to concentrate is greatly enhanced by his martial arts training. He'll bring this ability to concentrate to other activities, too.

Respect and Courtesy. Martial arts techniques are, by nature, designed to injure others when applied. Because of this, martial arts instructors greatly stress the importance of respect, courtesy and restraint. It has been proven time and again that children who are skilled in martial arts tend to be extremely respectful, considerate and composed.

Confidence. Martial arts training always increases a child's confidence for two specific reasons. First, there are no bench sitters. Every child participates and competes against her own potential rather than against the other students. Second, martial arts training is built on the concept of setting your child up for success by giving her a series of realistic, short-term goals that she can attain quickly while keeping her focused on an exciting long-term goal. Each time she experiences success her confidence improves until she begins to believe that she can accomplish just about anything with hard work and dedication.

## Keeping It Simple

more an art than a science, raising children is both challenging and incredibly rewarding. Each child comes into this world with his own agenda. Oftentimes our children throw curves at us that we never saw coming and, when that happens, it is hard to know exactly what to do.

I'm reminded of a story I once heard about a famous landscape architect, a master. He traveled the world creating amazing gardens and landscapes at prestigious locations. On days when he felt particularly challenged, he would pull out a mysterious piece of paper from his pocket, glance at it, nod, fold it back up and get to work with renewed inspiration and energy, resulting in another masterpiece. People were astounded by his brilliant designs that would seem to appear from thin air after he studied that piece of paper.

Eventually, the master died. His curious colleagues approached his widow and asked to see that mysterious piece of paper as they were convinced it contained the secret to his success.

After much to-do, she allowed them one glance at the old slip of paper. As they gathered around, she carefully unfolded the paper. They looked at the writing. It simply said, "When laying sod, always put the green side up."

I love this story! It reminds me how easy it is to overcomplicate things, especially parenting. In my experience, the answers to most parenting challenges are in these 15 tools. We only have to remember to call upon them in times of need.

I hope you'll find *15 Powerful Tools for Successful Parenting* to be a valuable resource for years to come.