

INTRODUCTION: AN OVERVIEW OF TEACHING SELF-GOVERNMENT

This book will introduce you to the parenting system that has come to be known as Teaching Self-Government (TSG). As you dive in, it's helpful to understand the big picture of Teaching Self-Government: what it is and how it can improve your family relationships. This unique, effective parenting program started when my friends noticed the amazing changes my foster children made in their attitude, behavior and choices. They asked me to teach them what I was doing to transform these children's lives.

Since 1999, I've been asked to teach these transformational principles. The frequency of requests increased steadily over the next 10 years. Then, after the BBC asked me to be on their 2009 show, "The World's Strictest Parents," it was as if a flood gate was opened and requests came pouring in. You'll hear more about that story later in this book, but it was after being featured on this program that people demanded I write a book. Thus, the first edition of "Parenting: A House United" was published in 2009.

Over the years, this book has helped thousands of families experience amazing changes — similar to those I was seeing with my foster children. Since it's been more than 10 years since "Parenting: A House United" was published, I felt it was time to make some updates and release a second edition. You'll find some portions have been extensively rewritten. Overall, I hope you'll find this edition does an even better job of teaching what I feel are essential parenting techniques and strategies.

3 Parts to Teaching Self-Government

There are three parts to Teaching Self-Government. I like to use the imagery of a tree as it illustrates the relative importance of each part. It also illustrates the point that when growing a tree it should grow proportionately. A tree with a huge trunk but no branches will not serve its purpose very well, just as a tree with weak roots would blow over in a windstorm.

This book can be read cover to cover, or you can jump to the part of the tree where your family is struggling. Understanding the big picture will help

you master this book's parenting principles. The three parts to Teaching Self-Government are:

1. **Roots** — The roots represent the kind of family we want to be. It's the feelings or the tone we're trying to create in our family. It's the "why" for everything we do. Why do we care about correcting negative behaviors? Why do we want to be respected? Why does it matter how we raise our children? These questions and other similar questions should all be answered as you deliberately choose the characteristics for your future family: the family you want to become.
2. **Trunk** — The trunk represents the structure we build in our family that engenders trust. Trust is built when we live by a set of principles or a pre-planned structure and tone. Tone and structure create trust. Trust is established when we know what to expect from others and when we know they'll always respond in a certain way. Without a structure we'll always be making reactive decisions instead of proactive decisions, which ultimately leads to a lack of trust in our relationships. The right kind of unifying tone and structure make the trunk of our tree firm and strong. The result of developing this trunk section is: improved family communication; personal ownership of behaviors; a feeling of safety, love and trust; and an empowered family government.
3. **Branches** — Finally, the branches represent communication skills and problem-solving techniques. All these branches are needed to overcome obstacles, such as attitude problems, tantrums, disconnection, pouting, disobedience, etc. These obstacles must be overcome to finally produce the desired fruit of a happy, united family. By using family communication skills consistently within the family structure we promote a feeling of security and understanding. As a family we must plan ahead for how we'll overcome a problem or an obstacle by teaching the family problem-solving vocabulary. If parents and children don't understand the problem-solving vocabulary used, then assumptions and power struggles will result. In this book I share many proven skills, but ultimately the plan for how your family chooses to address each family problem or behavior will need to be made by your family.

While reading this book, keep this image of a tree in mind. It will help keep this self-government journey in perspective and will keep you from getting lost in the details. Many parenting programs focus on the "tips-and-tricks" of parenting. Teaching Self-Government focuses on changing the hearts of the family members so that those tricks are no longer needed. It's about creating a family that works together toward a common vision or goal. It's about being a house united.

A Brief History

When I wrote the first edition of “Parenting: A House United” in 2009, I had previously neither written a book nor had formal instruction in how to write a book. As I wrote, the book flowed out of me as if from a fire hose. Undoubtedly, some of you who read the first version are probably smiling and thinking, “Yeah, we know. It felt like a fire hose.”

When the flow of thoughts ended, the first draft of the book was 586 pages. I knew a book that length would never get read by parents, so I started revising it as best I could. It was edited 8 different times by skilled editors — despite the fact that errors still appeared in the printed version. Finally, the first printed version ended up being 377 pages. The more than 200 pages that were removed contained many details about setting up a self-governing environment and solving difficult behavioral problems.

On the 10th year anniversary of this book, the following changes have been made: Previously edited material has been restored; material addressed in other resources via the TSG Support Group, classes and other resources available in the implementation course have been removed; and new material related to issues unknown 10 years ago has been added. These changes are designed to increase the readability of this book.

Ten years ago, children didn’t carry devices in their pockets. The technological world was very different. Technology is now an integral part of family life for most homes. In this edition, I added relevant information about this topic and others to help with the problems facing today’s parents.

Nearly 50,000 copies of the first version of this book were sold. It has been widely bought and read. That said, I know that many parents with the best intentions didn’t read the book all the way through, for whatever reason.

Please make a plan now of how you will, in self-government fashion, read this book. Plan time to read daily — even if it’s just going to sections in the book that interest you the most. Do whatever it takes to keep you going. Just make a plan and stick to it.

A united family grows strong roots, a sturdy trunk, and many fruitful branches to be self-governing, so you’ll need all three sections of the book to be successful.

Spouse or No Spouse

This book has a section dedicated to the couple relationship. However, that doesn’t mean a person has to be married to read this section. All the tone and structural elements can be modified for each family’s needs.

One of the biggest questions I get is, “What if my spouse isn’t on the same page about parenting? Is implementing self-government principles even possible then?”

Yes, it is. It may look a bit different, but self-government is always possible. I know many people who read this book aren’t married. Others have a spouse who isn’t interested in learning about self-government or implementing it. I also know that many parents reading this book are discouraged by these scenarios. They aren’t ideal. Nevertheless, I promise you that parents can still learn about self-government and live with more calmness and love themselves.

In fact, as our hearts change, causing our relationships with others to improve, we will influence all those around us — even our partners or ex-partners — for the better. The ripple effect of one changed heart is hard to calculate because it reaches further than anyone can see.

Decide that you need to learn self-government *for you*. Do it for your own freedom and your own relationships. Don’t do this to change him or her. That change can take years. Believe me; I know from personal experience. But your spouse’s change will come gradually — bit by bit. Focus on changing your own heart first. The roots section of this book will help you make that change.

If you need additional support or help, please see the courses, resources and support groups available on TeachingSelfGovernment.com.

Youth vs. Children

Over the years as I’ve studied and reviewed many international documents related to children and the family, I’ve noticed that the words “youth” and “child” are used to describe many differing age ranges. It seems that there isn’t an international consistency for age-descriptive terms. It appears that most often these words are used interchangeably.

In this book I will likewise use the words youth, child, and children interchangeably to denote the age range between baby and 18 years old. Youth and child are my two favorite words to use to describe this age range. I do not like the words kid, kids, teen or teenager because each of these words were originally used as derogatory terms for young people or delinquents. I believe parents should look at their children with the same care and nurturing that a shepherd has as he cares for his little lambs. What a contrast to thinking of your children as though they were bothersome goats; always getting into mischief. The way parents reverence the role of child changes how youth honor the role of parent. If one of these negative terms is used in this book, it’s either part of a quotation or used to clarify age, as in “teen years.”

Crisis Course

If your family is in crisis right now, I recommend you start by reading and applying the first few chapters in the roots section. This will give you a brief understanding of self-government and a family vision. Second, read the branches section. At this point, you should be able to get things started. Your family won't run perfectly until you've built your whole tree and nourished it for a while, but you will be off to a good start. Don't feel you have to be perfect before you can start using the self-government methods. You'll get stronger at self-government over time.

Finally, after you get started on the vision and skills, return to the roots section and read the remaining chapters. Then read the trunk section of the book.

Remember, change takes time. Be patient with yourself and your children. Actually, they will likely be better at it at first than you are. They usually are. Don't expect perfection at first. That only comes after lots and lots of practice.

This book isn't a gimmick. You won't be totally self-governing because of one simple trick. This book is about having a change of heart and a change of behavior. That takes consistent effort and time. I've never met a person who wasn't improved in some way by this book (unless they read it just to examine grammar and punctuation and/or simply wasn't committed to improving. If you want to improve your own self-government and the self-government of your family, then you'll find this book will provide the insight and guidance to help you with those goals.