ACTIVE PARENTING
Parenting Strategies for Children in Grades K-4
The following is a brief summary of the three sessions of the Active Parenting Program presented at MCDS. The program focuses on what parents need to do to help their children thrive in society today. For more in-depth information, you can refer to the book Active Parenting Now by Michael Popkin available in the MCDS library.

Session 1
Styles of Parenting:

- **Autocratic/Dictator**: one who has absolute control and is all-powerful in dictating the lives of his or her children. Children are told what to do, how to do it, and when to do it. Children who grow up in autocratic families seldom thrive. They either give up, or, more often, they rebel. This type of parenting does not work well in today's time of equality.

- **Permissive/Doormat**: Permissive parents allow their children to “do their own thing” too much of the time. There is little routine and order, and few limits are placed on anyone’s freedom. Many parents behave like doormats, allowing their children to walk all over them. Children are raised with a feeling of insecurity, they have no sense of belonging, and because they have not learned to cooperate, they are often difficult to live with. Children with permissive parents are pampered and accustomed to getting their own way.

- **Authoritative/Active**: This parent is the middle ground between the autocratic and permissive styles, but it is also much more. Freedom is ideal, but so are the rights of others and the responsibilities of all. There is order and routine, and the parent is the leader who encourages cooperation. Children are treated with dignity and respect and they are entitled to respectfully express their thoughts and feelings to their parents. “Democracy does not mean you will always get your way. It means you will always get your say.”

Giving Children a Choice:
Just as people will rise up and overthrow a dictator, a child will resist a parent who does not give her a chance to share in some of the decisions that affect her life. When possible, parents need to give their children
choices. It can be as simple as “Would you like to take your bath before dinner or after dinner?” or for an older child “Would you prefer to set your homework time before dinner or after dinner?” By giving children a choice, they have some power over what is happening in their lives. It also gives children practice with decision-making.

The Goals of Behavior
There are four goals that enable humans to survive and thrive. These same four goals govern our children’s behavior:

- Contact/belonging
- Power
- Protection
- Withdrawal

**Contact:** The need and desire to belong. People make contact – physical or emotional – with other human beings. Families, schools, religious organizations and sports all provided opportunities for contact and belonging.

**Power:** We would like for things to go our way; we want the power to make that happen. It is through learning that we become able to do this. Knowledge is power.

**Protection:** To survive and thrive we must be able to protect our selves, our families and our nation. Children will also look for ways to protect themselves from physical harm or from threats to their self-esteem.

**Withdrawal:** Time-outs are essential and refreshing. Just as a child seeks contact, at other times he needs to withdraw, regroup and center. It is a counterbalance to the goal of contact/belonging.

The interesting part of the four goals is that they may be approached through either positive or negative behavior. Usually, children who are confident and have courage will choose the positive approaches. Those with low self-esteem who are discouraged will use the negative approaches. The parent’s job is to determine which goal your child is working towards. Once you figure that out, you need to help them to achieve the goal through positive behaviors.
### Child’s Goal

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<th>Positive Approach</th>
<th>Negative Approach</th>
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### Session 2

**Developing Responsibility**

All families have problems and conflicts, and all children present challenges. The difference is in the ability of the family to successfully handle the problems, which in turn helps to develop a responsible child. When there is a problem in a family, the first step is to figure out who owns the problem? Some problems belong to the parent, some to the child and some are shared. We can usually figure out who owns the problem by answering three questions:

- With whom is this behavior or situation interfering directly?
- Who is raising the issue or making the complaint?
- Whose goals are being blocked by the problem?

So, if your child constantly interrupts you while you are on the telephone, you own the problem. Your goal of talking on the phone is disrupted, you are making the complaint and it interferes directly with what you are doing. If your child complains that she does not like her sister going into her room without asking, your child owns the problem. Her goal of having privacy in her room is being blocked and she is raising it as an issue.

When a child owns the problem, the parent’s job is to provide support (this often involves listening and helping your child to come up with
solutions) and to let the natural consequences (the results that naturally occur from a child’s behavior without the parent doing anything) occur. When a parent owns the problem, a different path is taken. The parent can try and solve the problem with polite requests, I messages and logical consequences. Often, a polite request is enough to motivate a child to change his/her behavior. When a polite request has failed to change a child’s behavior, an “I” message is a more assertive next step. An “I” message needs to be delivered in a firm and calm tone of voice. There are four parts to an “I” message:

1. Name the behavior or situation you want changed.
2. Say how you feel about the situation.
3. State your reason.

*I have a problem with your leaving dirty dishes on the coffee table. I feel taken advantage of because I have to spend time and energy cleaning up behind you. I would like you to bring your dirty dishes to the kitchen and put them in the dishwasher when you leave the den.*

When polite requests and “I” messages do not work, children may need to experience a more concrete consequence of their actions in order to learn the lesson. Logical consequences can be used to handle parent-owned problems and to teach responsibility. They are logical because they are logically related to the child’s misbehavior. The following are the guidelines for using logical consequences:

1. Give the child a choice.
   - Either/or choice
   - When/then choice
2. Ask the child to help.
3. Make sure the consequence is logical.
4. Give choices you can live with.
5. Keep your tone firm and calm.
6. Give the choice one time, then act.
7. Expect testing.
8. Allow the child to try again later.
Session 3
Active Communication

When your child owns a problem or when you both share responsibility for a problem, active communication will help you to win cooperation and support from your child. There are five steps:

1. Listen actively.
2. Listen for feelings.
3. Connect feelings to content.
4. Look for alternatives and evaluate consequences.
5. Follow up later.

Listen Actively: If you listen fully, you don’t just receive information; you are an active participant in the communication process. Give full attention, keep your own talk to a minimum and acknowledge what you are hearing.

Listen for feelings: Many parents only listen to the content of a child’s story. While getting the facts straight is important, it is also important to listen to your child’s feelings and perception of the facts. This will help your child acknowledge and accept his feelings rather than deny them or keep them bottled up. If you listen with empathy, you can feel some of what your child is feeling which, in turn, will help you to connect with him/her. The result will be that your child will want to continue to share with you.

Connect feelings to content: Reflect the child’s feelings and connect them to what happened. You will show that you care.

Look for alternatives and evaluate consequences: Help your child look at various options and predict the likely consequences of each.

Follow up later: The follow up helps your child learn from the experience and validates that your interest was genuine.

Avoid communication blocks: commanding, giving advice, placating, interrogating, distracting, sarcasm, moralizing and being judgmental.
Allowance
The goal of allowance is to teach children how to manage money. It is easy to implement and children can start to get allowance in kindergarten. A common method of allowance is the Share Save Spend method developed by Nathan Dungan. Allowance can be divided into three parts:

1. Share
   - Emphasizing sharing first reminds children to look around and see the needs of others.
   - As a family you can plan whom/what you want to share with; what causes are important to you.
   - Tell children what you share and with whom.

2. Save
   - Teach deferred gratification.
   - Saving helps children in the future.
   - Saving involves time, patience and disciplined habits.
   - Short term and long term goals.

3. Spend
   - Spending is the easy part and is a necessary part of existence.
   - Let child know off limit purchases.
   - Explain needs versus wants.
   - Know that children will buy unnecessary items due to peer pressure.

How much allowance depends on which method you are establishing and what you expect your child to be able to buy for himself. For more information go to www.sharesavespend.com.

It is best if chores are separate from allowance. Chores teach real world skills and valuable lessons about life. Children learn what needs to be done to run a household and it helps them to build a feeling of competence.