

# Keeping the Elephant Out of Your Home

By Steven Vannoy and Allison St. Claire

If you want to create a beautiful family, keep these simple tips close at hand and use them every day.

## 1. Tune Up Your Belief System

We all know we live out of our beliefs – our pre-determined, default opinions about things. What we believe is what we expect to see. Since we go towards our focus, belief systems have a way of controlling our lives. They can hurt us or serve us.

What are your beliefs about your family?

- Do you believe your family is a hassle or a blessing?
- Do you believe you could have done better in picking your partner, or do you believe you are the luckiest guy/girl in the world with or without a partner?
- Do you believe mornings are stressful, rushed and something that you have to get through, or do you believe your mornings are a time to celebrate and enjoy life and family?



What belief systems are handicapping you? Which ones are serving you?

## 2. Compliments that Work

Have you ever seen parents who constantly give a lot of compliments to their kids? (*Good job! Way to go! Keep it up!*) Have you ever given this type of compliment? If so, please take that approach out of your parenting choices. Children quickly learn to tune this meaningless chatter out and then we lose the ability to influence the ones we love the most. Here are three proven ways to truly build your children's confidence, character and values:

### Be Sincere, Specific and Selective

When you see an occasion to acknowledge your child, it will be 100% **sincere** as it will be focused on a **specific** action or event, rather than a vague generality. Saying "*Jimmy, you are so responsible,*" many times a day or week in a sneaky attempt to convince him or manipulate him, is neither sincere nor specific. A better way might be, "*Jimmy, I admire the way you handled your school project all by yourself and turned it in ahead of schedule.*"

When this approach is done well and used **selectively**, your children will see themselves in a different light. Over time, they build a different belief system about themselves, and as we mentioned above, we live out of our belief systems and we go towards our focus.

### 3. Ask Questions That Help Them Think

Replace a lot of your telling, informing and lecturing with **Forward Focused Questions**. For example, instead of telling your child how he should act at the birthday party, ask him for his thoughts and ideas first. You might say, "*Mary, how would you like to behave at the party that would make the other kids feel good and also take care of Beth's home and toys?*" The old way of telling and lecturing can easily perpetuate undesirable behavior. Asking a Forward Focused Question allows children to develop their own critical thinking skills.



### 4. Stop, Look, and Listen Deeply

How do you feel when you're trying to talk to someone and they are intent on a TV program? Most people see their kids less than three hours a day, and out of that, only a few minutes are with complete concentration on the child(ren). Any parent will tell you that kids grow up too fast. Do you want to risk losing what precious little time you might have with them before they are out in the world?

Truly listening to what your child is saying and feeling makes every moment meaningful. Replace the empty compliments and too much telling and lecturing by stopping what you're doing (as quickly as possible or explaining you'll be with them in a specific small amount of time needed to finish the task), looking into their eyes, and just listening.

### 5. Create a Home/Family of Celebration

When you and your family are celebrating the good things and events in your life, you will naturally be on a roll. When your family members are on a roll, they usually feel good about themselves. They become more confident, and naturally want to support each other, have fun and cooperate. One of the hundreds of ways to bring this discipline into your family is to ask a variety of celebration questions at mealtime. For example, ask everyone, "*Please share something that you are celebrating today.*"

## 6. Count Your Blessings – Out Loud!

When you and your family are thankful for each other and all of the blessings in your lives, you are automatically living on the front side of the **Energy Map** – feeling confident, empowered and positive. It's one of the oldest laws of the universe: what you focus on is what you'll get. In addition to asking questions to easily create this focus, your family will naturally follow your example. Over time, as you model a sincere attitude of gratitude, your family will too.

## 7. You Get What You Focus On

A child naturally wants to be great – until we teach them that they are bad. Every time we focus on their bad behavior, or tell them “no” or “don't,” it reinforces their own belief system that they are a bad person – which can easily become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Replace this old approach with clear, firm messages on what's important to you and why. If their age is appropriate, you might follow your message “*It's important to me that we are always honest with each other*” with a simple question such as, “*How do you think you should do this?*” Or, “*How do you think this will make things better?*”

## 8. Create Emotionally Healthy Kids

When your children's emotional needs are met, 90% of your parenting issues and hassles will disappear. Here are some ways to gauge your kids' well-being.

- Do they feel truly listened to?
- Do they feel like their feelings are acknowledged and understood?
- Do they feel that they are unconditionally accepted and loved vs. just accepted and loved when they are behaving the way you want them to behave? (Note: this does not mean that all behaviors are OK. It is very important to be firm in stopping an unacceptable behavior and then to redirect your children to acceptable conduct.)



## 9. Keep Yourself Emotionally Healthy

When your emotional needs are met, you can more easily meet your children's emotional needs. Ask yourself:

- Are you taking good care of yourself?
- Are you focused on your blessings?
- Are you celebrating the good things and moments in your day?
- Are you living on the front side of the Energy Map and on a roll most of the time?
- Do you have positive thoughts and dialogue about yourself?
- Are you blocking off time to do things that you really enjoy?
- Do you have a circle of healthy, caring friends?
- Do you have healthy belief systems about yourself, your family, life, etc?

## 10. Four Simple Keys to Parenting

Do you follow the four simple keys to parenting?

- Do your children know that you love them and accept them unconditionally?
- Are you direct and firm in sharing what's important to you and why?
- Are you consistent?
- Do you set a good example in how you live your life, including how you treat you spouse, friends, co-workers, to how you take care of your possessions, your home, your responsibilities, and so forth?

## 11. Magic Moments Matter

Why is the moment between an event or circumstance in your family - and how you respond to what has happened - so magical? Because your choices in how to handle those moments continually shape your family dynamics. Use these moments wisely.

They are truly **magic moments**: We have a choice to either just get the job done – stop the bad behavior, for example, and perhaps leave our children with inappropriate qualities and values; or we can get the job done and leave them with priceless qualities and values. These are gifts - such as responsibility, honesty, confidence, joyfulness - will make or break your child's future.

We all know that material gifts such as bikes, video games, cell phones, dolls and trucks pale in comparison to these gifts of qualities and values that are the foundation of healthy, happy, successful lives. But how many of us realize that we get to choose which ones we want to give our families?

It's easy to parent when things are going well. But how do we parent and lead when problems arise? These are the times when taking a magic moment will dissolve

undesirable behavior, build self-esteem and reinforce positive relationships.

## 12. Let the 3 Mind Factors Help You Focus

Ever notice how your children will strive to become how you define them - for example shy, studious, stubborn or indecisive?

As far as we know, no child has ever come out of a mother's womb screaming, "I'm going to be a messy, irresponsible child." Or, "I'm going to be very shy." We help create every one of their good or bad behaviors by how we use the **3 Mind Factors**.

These 3 Mind Factors – (1) the mind can only focus on one thing at a time, (2) the mind can't avoid a "don't," and (3) we go towards our focus – will strongly influence your children's lives. No matter what traits, qualities or behaviors they exhibit, how we and they use the 3 Mind Factors will determine whether these characteristics grow or decline.

For example, if we mention that "this is my quiet child," or if we tell them, "don't be so shy," they will tend to become more reserved or shy. However, when we are sincere, specific and selective in noticing when they are outgoing (since they will go towards their focus) their confidence and ability to communicate with others will grow, and their behavior will develop accordingly.

## 13. The Key to a Great Life

An important key to a great life is to always have an updated dream and vision for what's important to you. For example, how you want your family to be, how you want to parent, and how you want to treat your spouse. Then, since we go towards our focus, look for evidence that your dream is coming true, and you'll move even faster in that direction.



## 14. Mapping the Way to Joy

Ever feel like life is hard and having a family is one huge struggle after another? If you are using an old family approach or map, like the backside of the Energy Map, you can count on it getting even worse. If we want to look for what's not working, what we're not happy with, what we don't have enough of, our problems, or what we don't like about others and ourselves, we will surely find it and move rapidly in that direction. If we're using this old, destructive family approach/map, it's almost impossible to be on a roll, have fun and build a happy, healthy family.

When we use a new family map based on the front side of the Energy Map - focusing on what is working, what we do like about each other, what we can learn from our

mistakes, struggles go away - behaviors improve, and life and family become fun and rewarding again. Of course, there will still be problems and upsets, but now you have the family culture to move things forward in a productive, win/win way.

### 15. Looking for Love in All the Right Places

The best time to create an elephant-free home is before the kids are born. And the best time – before you even meet the person you intend to spend your life with! As you create a personal culture of health, happiness and effective approaches, that's what you'll attract and create.

If you are *looking* for happiness, love, and a great environment and culture in your life, they might elude you. When you *become* these things, they will be everywhere.

### 16. Your Truly Important Work

When you first saw your baby or first held your child, was there any doubt in your mind that raising that child was the most important work you would ever do? How crazy would it be to go to work early in the morning and stay late giving your company everything you've got, and then come home and give your family your leftovers? Would that approach serve your family? You? Your career? Your company? What would be the cost to all, short-term and long, if you did this five+ days per week?

What's the value to all when you give everyone and everything your best?



To give your family your very best, no matter how tired you are when you leave work, or at the end of a long day at home, ask yourself these four questions before you gather together.

- What did I learn today that's going to be valuable?
- What did I do well today?
- What are the greatest blessings in my life?
- How can I be the best parent and spouse I've ever

been today?

### 17. Dreaded or Delightful Family Dinnertime?

What best describes your family dinnertime? You stuff down food so you can get back to all of the unfinished tasks of the day? You complain and lament about all of the things that didn't go well that day? You yell at the kids for what they did – or didn't – do at school? Is mealtime a time to zone out and watch TV?

Or is your dinnertime a sacred opportunity to create an elephant-free family? Is mealtime a time to find out what your family members are doing, thinking, and feeling? Is it another chance to give your children lifelong qualities and values - priceless moments to enjoy your precious family?

### 18. Dreaming and Planning Time

There are a few times we think are even more important than your family dinnertime – the time that you pay special attention to your partner or a caring friend or someone in a support group you count on. How will you let your spouse know he or she is number one in your life? We strongly recommend one night a week that is just for the two of you to treat each in some special way to reinforce and continue to build your relationship. Or, how about a regularly planned phone call or visit with that friend or friends if you are not currently in a relationship?



### 19. Just the Two – or More – of You, Family Dreaming

If you want to make your family dreams come true even faster, and continue to raise the bar on everyone’s health and happiness, we recommend setting aside time every few months for just you and your spouse or partner to sneak away by yourselves. The goal? To revisit your family vision and dream, and brainstorm ways you want to make your family even stronger.

Are you currently the only parent in your household? Arrange some special times to spend with your children to envision ways to make your family life even better. The more they are involved in the planning, the more likely you will get full cooperation and participation in achieving all your dreams.

Then there are two simple keys to manifesting your goals:

1. Keep your vision constantly alive and in front of you.
2. Notice when your dreams are coming true.



## **20. Brain Builders**

Would you like to create children who simply “take orders,” or would you prefer to create children who are confident, independent thinkers? Remember, every time we solve their problems by telling them what to do, we are only activating a small corner of their brain. However, when we ask them a question to help them find their own solutions, we are activating a much larger part of their brain, plus building their confidence and ability to think and function for themselves. Independent thinkers naturally reject peer pressure, which is especially important when they become teens.

As a general rule, we tend to create resistance and rebellion when we tell. Conversely, we create partnership and ownership when we ask questions, listen and discuss.

## **21. Want to Waste Some Time Reinforcing Unacceptable Behavior?**

Keep telling your children what you don't like and pointing out their bad behaviors – and you're practically guaranteed a never-ending struggle.

When we share what's important and why it's important to us, we honor them and help create good behavior and a healthy future together. Since we go towards our focus, the time we spend trying to fix our children's problems not only perpetuates the problem or behavior, but that time is gone, wasted. It's not available to build good behaviors, qualities and values, or to enjoy our family.

## **22. It's Always Your Choice**

Since we all live out of our goals and belief systems, we might as well pick good ones!

- Do you want your children (and spouse) to respect you and be kind to you? Here's the great key to make sure that happens – be kind and respectful to them at all times.
- Do you want to consistently treat your spouse and children with respect and kindness? Here's the great key to make sure that happens – consistently be kind and respectful to yourself.

## **23. The Low Road Is Always a Toll Road**

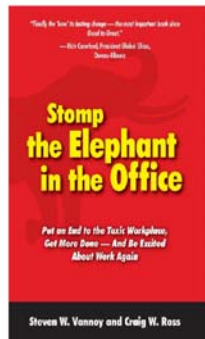
On the low road, we tend to come charging in and take care of the “problem” right now – without much forethought.. Can we really afford to take the low road with our spouse or partner - with our children? The cost is enormous, in fact, incalculable. Low road reactions and actions might put out fires, but they don't build sound structures. They may stop inappropriate behaviors for the moment, but they do nothing to encourage good conduct in the future. They keep the control external and do nothing to foster internal control and self-responsibility.

Isn't it worth an extra (magic) moment to keep yourself on the high road?

## 24. The Questions You Ask, The Results You Get

The questions we ask ourselves will largely determine the quality of our family. For example, I can ask questions that create distance and unhappiness: “What if I picked the wrong person? What if there’s someone better out there? How can I get her/him to change? How can I get her/him to do it my way?”

Or I can ask questions that create closeness, love, gratitude and forward movement: “How did I get so lucky to have you in my life? I am so fortunate to have the friends/ family/ support structure I have. What do I love best about my spouse? My kids? How can I serve my family even more? How can I be an even better parent? What’s good about this situation? What can I learn from this situation? How can I use this to serve all?”



**TWO  
BOOKS  
THAT CAN  
CHANGE  
YOUR  
LIVE**

