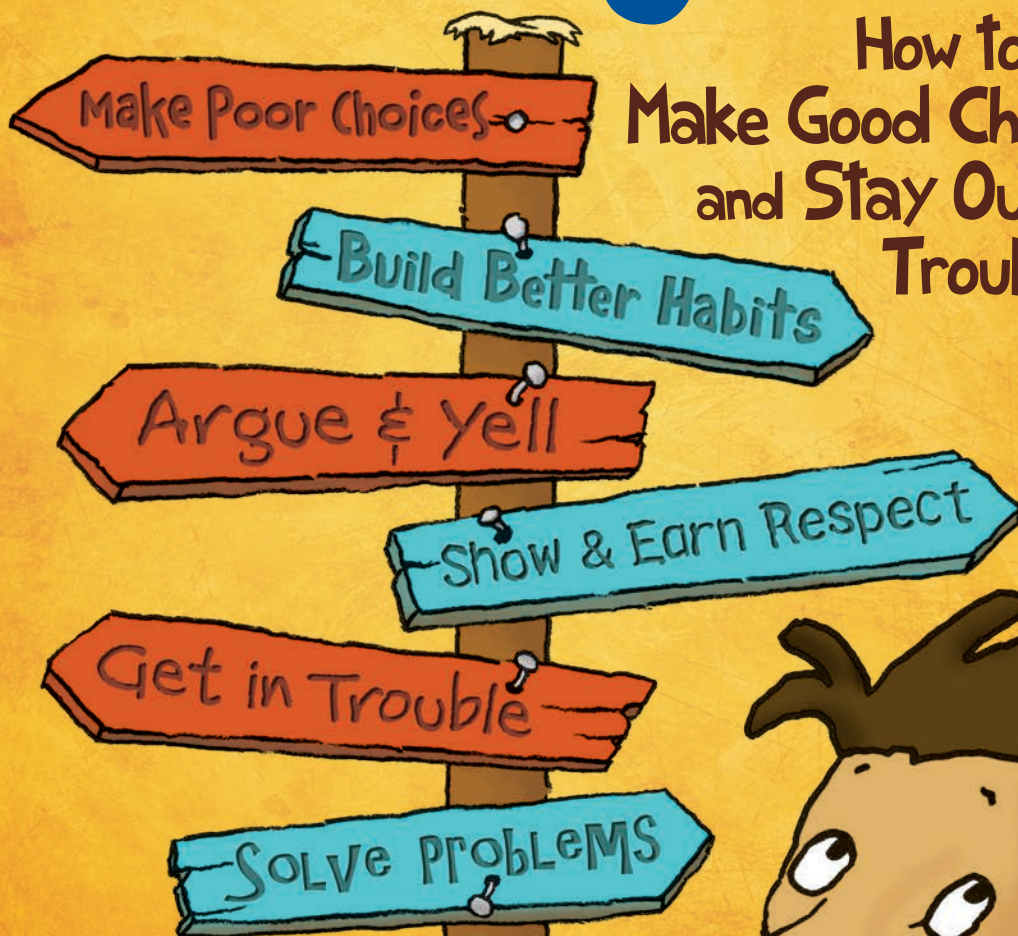


THE SURVIVAL GUIDE FOR

Kids with Behavior Challenges

How to
Make Good Choices
and Stay Out of
Trouble



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Forms for You to Use

You may download these forms at www.freepirit.com/SG4K-behavior-forms.

Use the password **4smartchoices**.

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Are You Ready?

If you're reading this book, adults have probably been telling you that your behavior needs to change. What do you think? Do you agree? A lot? A little? Not at all?

Psychologists have studied how people feel and act when they are told that changes need to be made. The experts say that most of us go through steps when we hear this news.

- When others tell us to change our ways, at first we usually don't see why we should have to do that.
- After a while, we notice that more people tell us we need to change our ways of behaving. Soon we begin to think maybe they are right. We begin to wonder if we should work on changing our actions. We also begin to wonder: If we *did* give it a try, would we be able to do it? Would we be successful?
- Next, we give the new ways a try. We practice them at home alone. Then with someone else. Then we try to show these behaviors in some real situations that aren't too risky, like practicing with a brother, sister, or trusted adult at home or school. That way, if we don't do it quite right, it doesn't matter too much. We know we're just trying it out, and we know that we might not get it quite right until we practice more.
- Now that we've practiced the new ways, we decide we want to make a total change for the better. We try to remember to make the better choices all the time. We know that we might make mistakes, but we will learn from them and get better at using the new ways.

These steps might *sound* easy to do. They're not. They take courage. They take practice. They take patience. We especially need to be patient with ourselves when we make mistakes. Of course we're going to make mistakes. That's why they put erasers on pencils! Learning new behaviors is just like writing and erasing. We make mistakes, and then we make corrections and learn from our experience.

It helps to have one or two grown-ups work with you as you learn these new behavior choices. It also helps if these adults watch you and tell you which parts you did right, and how you can get better at these new ways. Adults can learn more about how to help you by going to this website: www.BehaviorAdvisor.com/ReadinessForChange.html. It talks about helping kids make smarter choices about their behavior.

What's Your Starting Point?

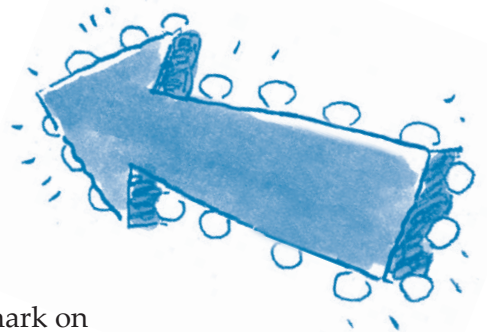
Let's figure out where you're at right now. Take a look at the "Ready Ruler" form on page 12. Copy it or print it out online. Then make a mark on the Ready Ruler to show how you're feeling right now about your behavior. Answer honestly. Mark what you really think and feel inside yourself about whether you see a need to change your ways or not.

The closer your mark is to 0, the more you think that your usual ways of acting are okay, and the less you feel like you really need to change.

If your mark is in the middle range, you're thinking about maybe trying to change your behavior to what adults would like to see.

The closer your mark is to the number 10, the more convinced you are that you would like to work with someone who will help you change your behavior.

What to do now: Show your Ready Ruler to an adult you trust. Together, look at the next section and find the questions that are about the number where you placed your mark on the ruler. Talk about those questions with the adult.



If your mark is on numbers 0, 1, 2, or 3:

- What about your usual behavior leads you to keep doing it? How does it work well for you? What are the payoffs and benefits? What is working well for you?
- When you think about the behavior that adults would like you to show, why do you think it's not right for you?
- If you were going to change, what things about you **MUST remain** the same? In other words, what pieces of your personality and self are so important that they must remain a part of you? What should not change about you, no matter what, because it is an important part of who you are?
- Is there something about your thoughts, feelings, or personality that stops you from even thinking about changing?
- What would need to happen to get you thinking about changing the way you behave on a usual day? How will you know when it is time to at least think about changing? What signs, situations, or happenings would convince you that you need to find new tools and new ways to live a better life?

If your mark is at 4, 5, or 6:

- Why did you put your mark here and not closer to zero? What makes you think about changing?
- What would you need in order to feel okay about moving your mark a little farther to the right?
- Have you tried some ways to change? What did you try? How well did it work for you? Did it work better than the old ways?
- If you tried some new ways to act in situations, but stopped, why did you stop? What do you think is better about your old ways than the new ways adults would like to see? (Or, if you don't use these new ways very often, why don't you use them more?)
- What gets in the way of changing? Why do you think change usually isn't quick or easy? What kind of support from others would help you with the changes you want to make?

If your mark is at 7, 8, 9, or 10:

- What would you like to talk about?
- Which behaviors would you like to change?
- What behaviors would you like to learn to show?
- What is the biggest hurdle to changing your behavior?
- What could help you overcome this hurdle?

After your discussion, make a second mark on the Ready Ruler that shows how you're feeling right now. Make this mark a different color or shape so that it doesn't get mixed up with the first one. Is it in the same place?

REMEMBER...

Change takes time—time and practice and patience and more practice. At times, you may want to give up. But you won't. Why not? Because you want better things to happen in your life. You want others to be proud of you. You want to be proud of yourself.

Your journey to new ways of behaving is like climbing up a rocky hillside. You might slip back, but you'll keep trying. You might feel hurt at times. You might wonder if you're ever going to make it to the top. You will. Why? Because people are stronger than they think they are. Inside you are strengths that you haven't even discovered—yet!

Yes, that behavior hill looks scary at first, but you'll find your way up it. The view from the top is worth the difficult climb.

You are stronger than you think you are. You have what it takes to keep trying, even when the going gets tough. To quote Christopher Robin, the kid in the Winnie the Pooh stories: "You are braver than you believe, stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think."

Ready Ruler



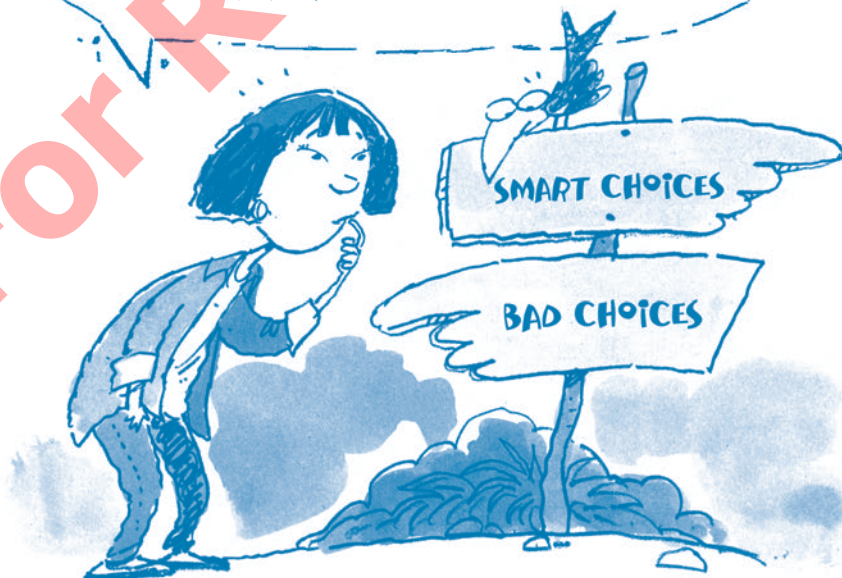
0 to 3: There is no need for me to change. My behavior works fine for me. I don't see any problem.

4 to 6: I'm thinking about changing, but I'm not really sure about it.

7 to 10: I want to change my behavior. I would like to talk with an adult about doing it.

Four Smart Choices for Dealing with Feelings

"My behavior is always getting me into trouble. It keeps me out of classes I want to be in, and other kids don't want to be around me. That hurts a lot. Sometimes, I get really angry and want to hurt those kids back. I get mad at myself, too. My choices are messing up my life." —C.J., 12



Being a kid with a behavior challenge is tough. I'm sure I'm not telling you anything you don't already know. You're under a lot of pressure to behave well. The work of trying to be good all the time can cause a lot of tension. It can be exhausting. Other people always seem to be telling you what you did wrong, or what you should be doing. Teachers, parents, and other kids may not see things the same way you do. When you make poor choices, people can get mad or decide they don't want to be around you. You might feel angry at people, at the choices you've made, and at yourself. You might feel **frustrated** or hurt, too.

With so much pressure, you can get pretty unhappy. This happens to many kids who have behavior challenges. It can seem like no one understands or cares about you. You might find that you're confused about your own feelings and behavior.

So what can you do when the pressure on you piles up too high? First, know that the feelings you have are okay. It's okay to feel sad or hurt or angry sometimes. It's also okay to have other strong, upset feelings—even if you don't know what exact feeling you have at the moment. Second, know that you always have choices about how to *deal* with strong emotions. You can learn to make smart choices instead of ones that only make the problem worse.

How Can I Tell the Difference Between a Bad Choice and a Smart One?

There's usually an easy way to tell the difference:

- Bad choices bring on more **stress** and more bad feelings. They make things worse than they were.
- Smart choices get rid of the stress and bring better feelings. They make things better.



Bad Choices

People who make bad choices when they have strong feelings often do it in one or more of these ways:

Acting without thinking. Someone who does this feels the emotion and just says or does something right away. This isn't really a choice because the person does not think about what to do. But with practice, this person can learn to control that behavior and think before acting.

Thinking in a negative way. Sometimes people think before they act, but they don't think in helpful ways. Instead, they think about the stressful thing over and over. Their emotions keep getting stronger and stronger. Finally, a person in this situation will feel ready to burst. Then the person acts up.

Losing control. Kids who make no decisions or bad ones about handling emotions may lose control. They might do things like:

- hit themselves or others
- throw things (or destroy them)
- curse or say bad things to themselves or others
- refuse to do work or follow directions
- walk out of class or put their heads down on the tabletop or desk

Some kids cry when their emotions get too strong. This is a lot better than doing something wrong. But these kids can learn to think about things differently and act in control so that crying doesn't happen so often or so strongly.

You Always Have a Choice

You can choose whether or not to let something bother you. And you can choose how *much* you'll let it bother you. The amount of stress you feel, and how you react to it, depends on how much attention you decide to give a bad feeling or a difficult situation. And *you* are the one who decides whether to make wrong choices or smart ones.