

“If the parents of my students had access to this book I would have been out of a job!”

- Joanna G., Award-winning Teacher,  
California Youth Authority,  
Youth Penitentiary



# Acceptable Behavior Checkbook SYSTEM

Turning Your  
Strong-willed Child's  
Misbehavior Around  
is as Simple as ABC

**Free Sample Chapter**

**Self-centered  
Demanding  
Uncooperative**



**From this...**



**to this...**



**...to THIS!**

**Self-motivated  
Empathetic  
Cooperative**

## Monique M. Gallagher

with contributions by  
W.G., Monique's 10-year-old son

**The Acceptable Behavior Checkbook  
is dedicated to the following people:**

"Mom, you know what Pinocchio needed?" Mom replies,  
"No, what?" WG continues, "The ABC, because he lied a  
lot and misbehaved." WG, author's son age 9

My son, who is my favorite work in progress human and the most inspirational little man in the world. Without his selfless refinements the ABC would not be what it is today. He handed me the 'keys to the kingdom' by tightening up the loopholes in the system, which admittedly cost him!

WG has your touch with people. Previously it was like he was rejecting your values, now he embraces them."  
Rob Cohan, best friend

Rob Cohan, a true example of "being there" for someone for without his continual encouragement this book would ever have been written.

Joanna Gallagher, were it not for her vision and guidance this book would likely never have been completed. Additionally, I am very grateful that because of this book, Joanna has been brought back into my life after 30 years.



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## Introduction

I have often thought to myself that parenting demands every personal development tool I have ever possessed and more!! I believe this more emphatically with each passing year.

"I can't do this!" I remember thinking." It is just too demanding, too hard. I cannot be a mother. Maybe I was wrong to have a child." And then, I remember the guilt that always followed when I looked at my beautiful son. "What am I thinking? That's like saying, 'I wish I never had him,' and he isn't even four years old!"

Sound familiar?

Writing the Acceptable Behavior Checkbook has been pleasurable work for me, because I knew my goals. My intention in writing this book is twofold. I was motivated by my desire to share with other parents the success it gave me, as a single mom, in raising my strong willed son. I wanted to give other parents, single or not, the opportunity and knowledge to dissolve the inevitable guilt of parenting. This knowledge will certainly contribute to their peace of mind, because it will end those sleepless nights and restless days of beating themselves up emotionally. I can visualize as though it was yesterday, trying as hard as I could to sleep, just tossing and turning, staring at the ceiling and wondering what have I done so terribly wrong to cause my son to misbehave so blatantly? I must be the worst mother in the world.

These worries and negative thoughts will disappear and be replaced with a confidence in your parental abilities that will eliminate any self-doubting or questioning. Most importantly, if you follow the ABC precisely, the impact that it will have on your child is nothing short of miraculous. Your child will learn to become an accountable, responsible

young person by choosing opportunities to control his own behavior.

Secondly, this book will assist you in getting off the emotional roller coaster that is your relationship with your child. You will start by viewing your child's behavior as a performance skill so you will stop taking your child's behavior personally. You will learn that if your child does not do his homework or chores, it is neither your fault nor responsibility. Accountability will be placed where it rightly should go--right onto your child's shoulders.

\*\*\*\*\*

When WG was first born, we shared that bond that only mother and child have; I could read his adoration in his eyes.

Gradually, by the time he was four years old, his personality was shaping in such a way that I was not sure he was the child I gave birth to. He seemed to be bent on challenging everything I said to him, everything I asked him to do and every rule I established. He appeared determined to gain control of our home. When WG continued to challenge me, far beyond the so-called "terrible twos", I knew something had to change. Something drastic had to happen to restore order.

I knew I could easily have continued down the path of least resistance, which meant me giving into him just to maintain peace, but I also knew I would pay the price later. Whenever I caved in, it only made matters worse. He would temporarily be in a good mood and easy going, but then suddenly something in him seemed to snap and he would demand more and push and push. During those days, I began to reason that it was easier to let him speak disrespectfully to me, rather than change my way entirely which meant respecting myself and demonstrating that to my son. I believe it is every parent's duty and obligation to ensure there is mutual respect in the relationship, because if you don't, there will be great pain and anguish later.

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I did not realize that the first step in developing a healthy, meaningful relationship with my child is mutual respect. As a new parent I guess I believed that this naturally developed between mother and child. When he turned four years old I realized this was not happening. I knew then that we needed to heal this tumultuous relationship from the ground up. No longer could I accept him throwing things at me, smacking me or screaming at me at the top of his lungs. We needed to build a new relationship based on love, respect and boundaries and it had to be me at the helm.

Before I developed the Acceptable Behavior Checkbook, when WG and I spent time together, I would disguise my feelings by giving into his demands. I was so full of guilt over not being a perfect mother, that the only times I felt peaceful was when he was asleep or in school. I was barely surviving my days--congratulating myself on the days I actually got something done in our home, other than engaging in endless negotiations and battles with my son.

Let me give you a brief glimpse into how the Acceptable Behavior Checkbook system transformed our lives. We went from battling nearly everyday, over chores, schoolwork, and disrespect and on and on. Everything seemed a fight back then. Neighbors could hear the noise of slamming doors and raised voices. At times I put my son in the backyard and actually locked the house, until he calmed down. It was a very difficult time. There were even times he would run away, rather than do his chores. He refused to listen to basic requests, which in turn resulted in me adopting behaviors I detested in myself. I felt I had turned into a shrew and a pure disciplinarian.

But, fast forward six months or so and peek into the window of our life together now. Just today he said that he was excited and looking forward to spending time with me. He said to me, "Mom, I don't know why I like being around you more than other grown ups, maybe it is because you don't yell at me so much." We like and enjoy each other's company again, but with a huge difference. I remain at the helm of our relationship. We are not equals. He is the child; I

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am the parent, the coach. The rightful balance of power has been restored. We are at ease in our relationship as parent and child. He acknowledges that my primary responsibility as his parent, is to set standards of behavior for him, to teach and guide him as he grows into adulthood. In a word, harmony has been restored in our home.

WG recently told me: that he trusts me and believes me and he knows I respect him. When I heard those words I knew that I was succeeding in my role as a parent. We may not always agree, but at the core, he knows everything I do and say is out of love for him and with his best interests at heart.

In today's world, firm boundaries are more necessary than ever. Providing my son with firm boundaries and a safe harbor where he can be himself gives me confidence and strength as we enter his teenage years. A foundation of trust and respect has been established in his early years. Through the Acceptable Behavior Checkbook, parents will easily be able to gradually expand their growing child's boundaries while ensuring that standards of behavior are maintained in the home. There is not a question in my mind that incorporating the Acceptable Behavior Checkbook system into your family life when your children are still young, will enable you to not only survive, but also thrive during the upcoming challenging teen years.

This book will provide leadership for you on your journey to lead your child as he grows into an adult, maintaining all the characteristics you spent years nurturing. Your child will know and love who you are with all your beauty and your failings. No act of trying to be the perfect parent will be needed. Throughout this process, you will be teaching your child that you too can learn and grow just like him. As our children transition from little angels who adore us to teenagers who question everything we say and do. One vital lesson we can share is our own willingness to grow and change. By sharing this system with the most precious gift in the world, your child, you are honoring that part of him that sees the best and worst in you and still trusts you implicitly.

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My son has once again become my greatest joy and inspiration. It is my dream that this book will assist you in facilitating your child's ability to reach his highest potential, and help you develop your own. We are never too old to learn!

## Real Life Comments of a 9 year old

- Reporter: Would you tell me what your home was like before your mother developed the Acceptable Behavior Checkbook? (ABC)
- Young boy: "Basically yelling, getting in trouble a lot."
- Reporter: Do you think that the ABC could help other parents too?
- Young boy: "Yes, because it is a good book and it will get your children to listen."
- Reporter: How does it get you to listen?
- Young boy: "I can't really answer that question, I don't know."
- Reporter: Do you get along better with your mother now after using the ABC?
- Young boy: "Yes, because I listen better and I get to go out to movie night and other activities that I wouldn't have been able to do before because she would be mad at me."
- Reporter: How have other adults tried to get you to listen that did not work?
- Young boy: "My Dad used to spank me, ground me, take away TV, take away playing with my friends."
- Reporter: Why didn't the punishments your dad used not work?
- Young boy: "It doesn't work, I did it again anyway."
- Reporter: Do you remember how you felt about your father when he punished you in the manner you just described?
- Young boy: "It made me hate him for doing it."
- Reporter: You said earlier that someday you might want to get married and have children. How are you going to get your children to listen to you when you are a parent?
- Young boy: "I will use the ABC." (The reporter stopped and asked, "seriously?") He said "yes, really."

## FORWARD

In her book, Ms. Gallagher speaks to the parents of strong-willed children. Her motivation to address the issue of willful children stems from the fact that she is the mother of one. Her only child, a boy named WG, would argue incessantly about any task she asked of him. He refused his bedtime, spoke to her in a demeaning fashion when he did not ignore her altogether and took perverse pleasure in finding new ways to exasperate her. All before his fifth birthday!

While opinions may vary as to the definition of 'strong-willed child,' it is fair to say that strong-willed children are stubborn, persistent, defiant, self-absorbed, obstinate, inconsiderate of others and narcissistic. Above all else, willful children will refuse to abide by any limits or boundaries imposed upon them. As a teacher in a youthful offender correctional facility, my classes were filled with young men who had been labeled as such, early in their lives. In an attempt to better teach these young men, I did my homework and researched the topic, spoke with child psychologists and read more than a few books that addressed strong-willed kids.

What sets Ms. Gallagher's book apart from others that I have read is that she goes far beyond the typical rhetoric offered regarding these children. Typical advice regarding willful children's behaviors includes: "You must make them follow the rules." "Discipline them often and severely." "Do not let them get away with anything." "Expect to be tested constantly." "Do not give them an inch or they will demand a mile." "That is just the way he is, just learn to live with it."

Live with it, she did. But Ms. Gallagher's commitment and dedication to her son coupled with her need for peace in her home precluded her from resigning to the fact that her life would be an endless battle of wills with her only child. When she could no longer accept any of the clichés she had heard about strong-willed children, she was compelled to find her own answers. Not content with any of the temporary fixes she

read about, Ms. Gallagher did what only she could do; she decided to design and develop a system that enabled her son to be willing to change his behavior because he wanted to!

In the book you are reading, Ms. Gallagher is going to take parents of strong-willed children beyond anything you may have already considered or implemented. She will be your guide as you learn, step by step, how to bring harmony into your home and restore your peace of mind. The simplicity of her system is uncanny, yet she has incorporated all of the components needed to assure success when dealing with the behavior of a willful child.

“Does it work?” you must be eager to know. If I were the parent of such a child, I would demand concrete proof and would trust nothing less. As proof, Ms. Gallagher will present her own son!

From what WG's grandfather reports, WG is a completely changed child. Always candid, his grandfather admitted that for several years he would avoid WG whenever possible. He simply could not stand to be around his own grandchild. Admittedly, this sounds harsh but his reasoning was sound: WG, like all willful children, possessed a complete disregard of authority and was extremely obstinate. He would not listen to anything his grandfather asked him to do or, worse, told him to do. Today the time they spend together is as much fun for his grandfather as it is for WG.

\*\*\*\*\*

When I was 18 years old, I got a hint of how parenting might be. I married a gentleman with two small daughters. We were fortunate to be able to see them often as we chose to live close to them.

Closing my eyes, I can still envision them as they were then: little girls sitting in back of their father's new yellow Mustang. Especially, I remember Monique, yes I knew Monique for a brief time when she was a child, a slender 7 year old with an impish grin and freckles sprinkled across her nose. Her curiosity caused her to ask questions that I had not

yet considered. She wanted to know how glass was made one minute and why letters had to have stamps on them the next. As soon as she posed a question, she would attempt to formulate the answer. I marveled at the way her brain seemed to work and I never took her queries lightly.

Their father and I divorced after five years; the girls vanished from my life. Through the passing decades, I had wondered about them, especially Monique.

How did Monique and my life cross again? Well, fast forward to 2006, over 30 years later. I receive a phone call from my ex husband, the girls' father. For a few moments, we exchanged updates in our respective lives. He was still happily married, as was I and we had both retired.

Naturally, I inquired about his children and learned that Monique had married, become the mother of a son and had just written a book on children and discipline. Of all things! I did not know she was interested in writing. I thought she might become a scientist or researcher due to her extreme curiosity.

A few days later, my phone rang and when I said, "Hello," the voice on the other end was Monique's. Apparently her father had spoken of my teaching career in a maximum-security juvenile correctional facility. I believe she wanted to seek my opinion of what she had written because, in my field, discipline is, was and always will be, at the forefront. (Imagine a prison without discipline!)

As I read through Monique's book describing her system I could see that her own son is, in fact, her strongest selling point. WG, now 10 years old, has written a message to other strong-willed kids about the Acceptable Behavior Checkbook system. A significant contribution that, in fact, sets this book apart from others was his willingness to frankly admit to his mother, the author, what had worked with him, what had not and why. He 'exposed his own game!' By offering her insights about the times when he had manipulated her, simply because he knew he could. By the

way, this is another trait of willful children: they possess built-in, incredibly sensitive radar that detects when parents are unsure of themselves or their authority. The powerful intuition these children possess allows them to wreak havoc in their families. Unfortunately, it also causes their friends to walk away from them, and when the child enters school, his disruptive behavior distracts from any significant learning.

Because The Acceptable Behavior Checklist's approach is neither threatening nor punitive, the system gave WG permission and opportunities to make different choices about how he behaved. Over time, with Mom's consistent tracking of his words and deeds in the checklist, his behavior showed significant, steady improvement. She took the extraordinary measure of asking him to refine her checklist system to prevent other willful children from manipulating their parents so they would not have to own up to their behavior! Being accountable for one's actions is the first step in developing moral character

"How *did* Ms. Gallagher change her son's behavior?" you may rightly inquire. The truth is, she didn't. Frankly, she couldn't. No one can change another's behavior.

She gave WG *the opportunity to examine his own behavior*, which is the first step in changing it. Since strong-willed children are usually quite a bit above average in intelligence, it did not take him long to connect his actions to the consequences associated with them. One reason her system is so successful is that it is not a punishing tool. Behaviors—good and bad—are assigned point values and the point value is something that parent and child negotiate to reach.

As a teacher, I know that students learn best when they are given the opportunity to be part of as many decision-making processes that involve their learning as possible. Ms. Gallagher seems to know this instinctively; the ABC system is dependant on the child's participation in all 3 components of it. You and your child develop the system together, which ensures that the child has ownership of the process. Remember "Taxation without Representation?" Nobody likes

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to be managed against his or her will, especially not willful children!

Another important point that is that Ms. Gallagher makes is to never scoff at any suggestion your child contributes. Everything he or she says becomes an opportunity for you to reinforce that their opinions are valuable and worth listening to. Ms. Gallagher demonstrates many of her strategies charmingly, through real stories of her relationship with her son before the Acceptable Behavior Checkbook system, and then counterbalances them with stories that resulted after they incorporated the checkbook in their lives.

In my classes, I teach my students that there are 7 needs basic to a child's sense of well-being. After the lesson, I ask them to be candid about which were the ones they missed the most in their own childhood. *Invariably, their answers were the same: Strokes and Structure!*

This is exactly Ms. Gallagher focuses on; the need to be firm, fair and consistent with your child while providing him positive reinforcement (strokes) within a structured environment.

Sometimes, when I think about it, I believe that if the parents of my students had access to The Acceptable Behavior Checkbook, I would have been out of a job. And that would be ok with me.

**Joanna Gallagher**

Teacher, retired, California Youth Authority

**Excellence in Teaching Award**

State Department of Culture and Education  
Washington, DC

**Disney American Teacher Honoree**

Special Education Teacher of the Year 2000

**Fulbright Memorial Fund Recipient**

Mothers Day,

14th May 2006

Dear Frustrated, Loving Parent,

You and I belong to a secret society. A society in which our strong-willed intelligent child governs our world.

By 4 years old, I knew my son; WG was different from other children. He was always testing and bashing through any boundary I set. Regularly yelling, 'You don't Rule my World.'

Vividly, I can recall my anguish and agony as well as my son's. I wondered what I had done wrong to cause my son to treat me, family members, and teachers with such disregard and disrespect. It plagued me. Deceiving myself that everything truly was ok was easier than seeing the painful reality. I tried to pretend everything was all right! I remember thinking,

**“If WG weren't my son I would have divorced him.”**

Finding a method to motivate him became the driving force in my life.

No matter what book I read or system I tried, my son obstinately refused to cooperate. Everything had to be his way and too often I did as he wished, just to have some peace in the home. I was exhausted and depressed; just putting one foot in front of another was a chore.

I had a dream: I wanted to develop a method, which inspired cooperation, empathy and self-motivation.

I didn't know how to do it but fueled by determination and devotion to my son I believed it was possible.

After intensively researching the subject, buying mountains of books and trying countless methods to motivate him, nothing seemed to make more than a temporary dent in his behavior.

**Then it came to me and amazingly enough my son was completely on board.**

[Acceptable Behavior Checkbook.com](http://www.acceptablebehaviorcheckbook.com)  
Turning your Strong-willed Child's Misbehavior  
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The change in his behavior amazed friends, family and his teachers.

Strong-willed children test us for a reason. I'll reveal what I've found about why they test us and how the influence of internal and external factors effect their behavior... and of course, **the solution which works so well for me and my son!**

I'm telling you this is **NOT** because I want to *impress you*, but to *impress upon you* that intelligent strong-willed children can become cooperative, self- motivated, contributing member of your family without it costing you lots of money or time in a straight jacket.

If I haven't already persuaded you that you **should** try this book, my son WG will. Make sure you listen to his message on the website.

Take the first step in winning your child back. [ORDER NOW.](#)

Warm regards,



Monique

**PS. Remember cooperation is just a click away.**

**Buy Now**

<http://www.acceptablebehaviorcheckbook.com/>