

“Brilliant!”
Award Winning

Got An Angry Kid?



We have a solution.

Parenting Spike:
A Difficult Child

^
Seriously

by Andrew D. Gibson, Ph.D.

Acclaim for *Got An Angry Kid?* and The P.A.C.T. Training Program

“Dr. Gibson, a renowned Parent Educator has spent years refining his techniques for treating “Bad Boys.” Those who have followed Dr. Gibson’s edicts have seen their bad children returned to them as functional pleasant human beings. I urge all parents, especially those with difficult children, to read Dr. Gibson’s book and follow the wise advice you find therein.”

Richard H. Bloomer Ed.E. ABPS, FACAPP, FACFE
Emeritus Professor, The University of Connecticut,
Certified Neuropsychologist,
M.S. Clinical Psychopharmacology

“Although I was only a few weeks into P.A.C.T., I felt myself becoming calmer, more hopeful and more in control. P.A.C.T. Is putting life into my parenting. P.A.C.T. does what three years of residential placement didn’t.”

Mrs. K.C., Middletown, CT, single Mom of a seriously emotionally disturbed boy

“I thank God every day for being enrolled in P.A.C.T.”

Ms. R.R., Middletown, CT, single Mom of an out-of-control daughter

“When Dr. Gibson first came to my home, I was angry. My son was angrier. My household was total chaos. My husband and son were always yelling at each other. My son was in total control. This is not so anymore. P.A.C.T. has stopped the anger.”

Mrs. D.R., Putnam, CT, Mom in a blended family

“If P.A.C.T. were used more often it could prevent many kids from having to be taken from their homes. It is a GREAT tool. My only regret is that we didn’t get involved with P.A.C.T. sooner. Our daughter has changed considerably.”

Mr. & Mrs. R.S., Andover, CT, Parents of an out-of-control daughter

“I was hesitant to start P.A.C.T. Now I can effectively communicate without displaying anger. I now listen. My relationship with my son has greatly improved.”

Mrs. E.D., Danbury, CT, single Mom of an out-of-control son

“We are grateful for P.A.C.T. It seemed too simple at first. How wrong we were! As weeks passed we changed as our children changed and life became livable again. Compared to what our life was before P.A.C.T., everyday is a bed of roses. P.A.C.T. Gave us a second chance.”

Mr. & Mrs. R.B., Woodstock, CT, Parents of a severely disturbed daughter

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In an effort to respect confidentiality and privacy, all discussions of former cases in *Got An Angry Kid?* are compilations. Spike is a fictionalized treatment of a real child.



“My Name is Spike and I pretty much hate you.”

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Spike is on poor terms with the school principal.

Preface

The Author's Biography

I was born one soft spring day in 1945 in Detroit toward the end of World War II. I was the third of four children. My Dad once told me that he sired his children in an effort to keep himself out of the draft. It didn't work. He was called up, made it as far as boot camp but was sent home: VJ Day arrived. So, three toddlers later, he and my mother had clearly developed a fondness for each other. It lasted for 65 years. Other than that, all he had to show for his time spent avoiding the military was an army blanket. He wasn't even in long enough to qualify for a veteran's-preferred job. But we survived. There are worse ways to start life. There are also better ones. I grew up in a small farming town in Michigan. We didn't farm. Dad was the biology teacher at the local high school. He wasn't much cut out for that and finally made the transition to community college teaching—a position he held until his retirement.

I remember most of my elementary school teachers and can name them in sequence to this day. Mrs. Osgood was my kindergarten teacher. She loved me. My fourth-grade teacher was Miss Duffer. She didn't love me. What a beast that woman was. But I learned my multiplication tables as well as learned to have disabling headaches which continued for many years. Once past the third grade, my teachers found me less and less charming. There was something about my need to be charming, coupled with a world that demands more than charm, which prompted a vast range of misfitting tendencies. Life was slowly turning brutal. The headaches were just the canary in the mineshaft. It was about this time that I swallowed a bunch of aspirin. I really don't think I wanted to kill myself. I knew I was very interested in getting close. I wanted someone to stop the misery, yet nothing happened. On the bright side, I didn't have a headache that day. On the less bright side, I was still me. I will leave the meaning of this up to those better prepared to understand it. Anyway, I didn't try it again.

My parents were, in the face of this, like deer caught in the headlights—surprised, disbelieving, and unprepared. Of course they cared, but they didn't know what to do because they lacked the courage to understand. Love was never an issue, but just because they loved each other doesn't mean that they could effectively parent their kids, all of whom still hobble about to one degree or another. So they took me to a shrink. ME!! What about them? It was, in short, a childhood that didn't leave me ready to be an adult, much less a parent. I couldn't avoid the former, but I probably shouldn't have been the latter. However, that doesn't stop most of us, and it didn't stop

me. It didn't stop my Dad either, may he rest in peace. He, after all, got in to the parent business to avoid the Army.

Everything about my childhood and my experience as a parent went into what became P.A.C.T. Training and the book, *Got An Angry Kid?* One of the really great things about life is that you get second chances. Not that you get to replay the same tapes over again. You can't. Once something has happened, it has happened. But you can figure out what went wrong and work like hell to make it better. Your childhood is foisted upon you. Your adulthood is yours to make. YOU are the key here. Not THEM, be they your parents or your kids. We get one set of each and have to learn what makes them special. Along the way, we have to stop complaining and stop waiting for everyone to change so we'll be happy. The best defense is a good offense. Learn to create it yourself. P.A.C.T. is all about taking ourselves by the ear, trotting us in front of the bathroom mirror and saying, "Look at yourself!" The program and the book are my opportunities to exculpate myself and pass onto other parents a lot of what I have learned.

On the way to adulthood, I got my BA and MA from San Diego State University. I elected to stay in San Diego after discharge from the Navy during the Vietnam War. I then taught briefly at Portland State University in Oregon and the University of Maine, Presque Isle, before completing the Ph.D. at the University of Connecticut in 1987. I had the marvelously brilliant Richard Bloomer for an advisor. We remain friends to this day. I couldn't have developed P.A.C.T. without him even though he had nothing to do with the actual program design. It is his approach to learning that spurred P.A.C.T.'s development.

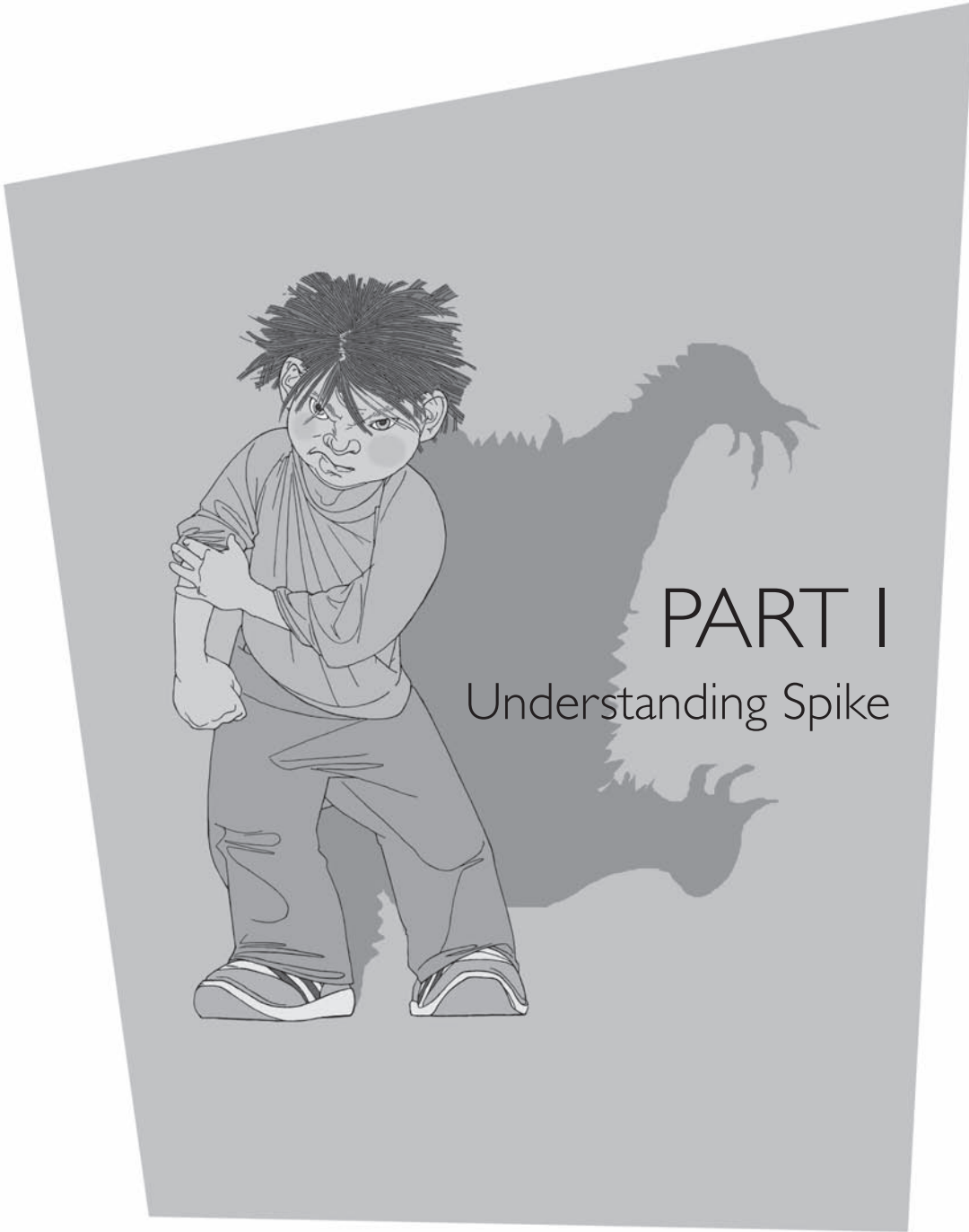
I put the bones of the program together just as one of my sons was turning into Spike before my eyes. Spike, as you will see, is the antihero of *Got An Angry Kid?* I didn't know what to do with my own Spike. I just acted on a hunch. But it was a hunch that proved correct—quit trying to be the parent you obviously can't be. Everything else was flesh hung on the bones of this idea. It took me three years to achieve, in my own family, something that now takes me less than a year to teach to others. I had only the occasional client to work with until the Connecticut State Department of Children and Families stepped forward and asked me to create an official program in 1993. Since then, some 500 families have gone through the program. The success rate has always been high, and it has been a gratifying experience to tell families, "I know what you are going through, but there are lights at the end of the tunnel if you are willing to make some substantial changes in how you approach your kid."

I was asked recently if I was a Spike. I said, "No, that's somebody else." I was the kid who would have happily taken a shotgun to school but that was way before blowing away classmates became a common way of demonstrating unhappiness. My Dad also didn't own one, which probably helped. Thankfully for me, and hopefully for you, I lived to share the tale.

I now live in northeastern Connecticut with my wife of 40 years and enjoy good relationships with my sons, both of whom seem to have turned out fine. I enjoy a wide circle of friends. Yet, I'm still occasionally beset with the feelings of being the lonely kid that dominated my childhood, that sent me in a direction I didn't want to go, and made re-routing myself so challenging. My story doesn't have to be your story to make the program work for you. We acquire the Spikes in our lives many different ways. This story is only one of them.

Anais Nin said, “The
only abnormality is
the incapacity to love.”

P.A.C.T. says, this
is fortunate because
as out of whack as
Spike seems, he still
has the potential to
accept and give love.
You’ll see.



PART I
Understanding Spike



Spike doesn't like shrinks and resents it when he is dragged into one of their offices.

CHAPTER 1 : Introduction to P.A.C.T. (Parenting Angry Children and Teens)

Got An Angry Kid features a self-help program called, Parenting Angry Children and Teens (P.A.C.T.). It is directed to parents of out-of-control children. Those children are seemingly unparentable.

- **Out-of-control means what it says—parents no longer control their child.** Unparentable means what it says, too. There is little the parent can do in the name of reward or punishment that works.
- ***Got An Angry Kid?* introduces Spike and his family.** Spike and his family tell the P.A.C.T. story. His family is defined by his out-of-control behavior. Spike may resemble your child. Spike didn't become Spike as a result of some cataclysmic event. He could have. He just didn't. As it happens, his story is benign compared to many. It doesn't really matter. There are lots of ways of making children miserable. Most of them are benign and unintentional.
- **Spike is both worldly and naive.** He is, after all, a child. Don't expect him to understand a lot of what goes on around him. He does and he doesn't. He needs his parents to fill in the gaps, but he won't accept them.
- **Spike is miserable.** He needs treatment for emotional disturbance, but he won't accept it, either. He is miserable both to himself and to those around him.
- **The goal of the book is to get Spike's family to function as a family Spike's parents must change how they interact with their son.** *Got An Angry Kid?* will show parents how to restore control. Spike's misery will seem much less significant.

Spike's parents need to recoup lost respect. But Spike will never give it if he can't learn to value his parents first. Parental attempts to get his respect by asserting themselves on him will keep him fighting. Forget telling him what to do. It's a losing strategy. Instead, back off.

If the answer to *Got An Angry Kid?* is, "Yes," then a piece of cold comfort is that you have lots of company. The woods are full of Spikes. Many of them are friends of your child. But, you probably knew that already.

- **None of their parents like your child any more than you like theirs.** The fact that your child acts awful and hangs around others just like him is a problem. It will take something special to get his attention. That something special is you.
- **The parent who can answer the question, *Got An Angry Kid?* with a “Yes” is miles ahead of the parent who is still asking, “If only I knew what was troubling my child.”** Getting to “Yes” is a milestone many parents can’t achieve. If the answer is “Yes,” then the next question is, “Angry at whom?” Like it or not, deserve it or not, your child is focusing his anger onto YOU.
- **Spike’s behavior is a risky inconvenience.** Problems magnify if they linger into adulthood. He will take his emotional baggage and produce failed marriages, failed jobs and failed children. He will blame you. He will also swear he will do a better job of parenting. It isn’t true. He hasn’t the foundation. There is nothing on the horizon to suggest that he will get it.
- **Parents teach P.A.C.T.’s 28 goals to themselves.** The process takes about a year. You will have a calmer, more respectful and optimistic family. The difference is often dramatic.
- **How rotten does Spike have to be?** There is no law that says you have to have a child as awful as Spike before you learn P.A.C.T. However, most parents wait until their child is Spike-like, which is too bad. It is not too late, but it sure isn’t any easier.
- **P.A.C.T. is not clinical.** P.A.C.T. doesn’t figure out why the child is angry. That is a question for therapy. We accept that he is angry. The child controls the atmosphere of the household. No one is spared. He gets anger in return for his behavior. He seems to thrive on it. That must stop. For his sake and for your sake.
- **P.A.C.T. can change the parent vs. child struggle in your home.** Changes occur because parents care enough to adjust how they parent their Spike.
- **P.A.C.T. concentrates on getting rid of parenting that’s going nowhere fast.** Behavior that works will gradually emerge both in the parent and then in the child. The parent takes the lead.
- **There is a lagtime of approximately eight weeks between parent change and child change.** P.A.C.T. challenges every assumption you have about parenting. Most assumptions will be replaced. The child will wait to see how serious you are before adjusting himself.
- **P.A.C.T. works best in conflict.** Conflict drives parents to participate. Conflict ebbs as the parent learns. It will become clear that the child’s behavior and the parent’s learning are linked.

Practice P.A.C.T. on your whole family, on the whole town. Don’t just concentrate on Spike. Spike will calm down and his sister, the easy one, will pick up where he left off. It’s temporary, but it will happen. You need to be prepared.

What do parents learn?

- That they are in a codependent relationship with a child.
- That they have become victims.
- That victims act in stereotyped and counterproductive ways.
- That everything traditionally passing for parenting can enable the behavior parents say they don't want.
- That boundaries between parent and child have broken down.
- That the parental ineffectiveness and childhood opposition feed on one another, creating codependence.
- That the need to fix the child needs to be augmented by fixing the parenting style.

Cake mixes have directions. So does P.A.C.T. They are:

- Learn one goal at a time.
- Do not go to the next goal if you have more than four errors.
- Whenever your error rate goes above four errors, stop.
- Repeat the weakest goal until the error rate declines to four or fewer. Simple.

If you think this is tough, consider the prospect of living with your child for the rest of your life.

The more insecure children are, the closer they stay to home. They rightly suspect that you will always bail them out, emotionally and otherwise. They will cycle between needing you and rejecting you. You don't want that. You want them to stabilize.

In P.A.C.T., you will redefine how you parent Spike. You will lose spontaneity, but you also lose every unworkable parenting impulse you ever had. Given the peace you get, it isn't a bad trade. If you anticipate, then you are prepared. If you are in control only of yourself, that's plenty. If you can't direct, then you support. If you wait to be asked, you'll be asked. The willingness to act in a supporting role becomes the gift of patience.

Don't Look Now...

Here is what you learn if you want to de-Spike your home. Between the two of them, Spike's parents commit most of the following errors every day. Most days their tactics backfire, allowing Spike to think he is still in control. P.A.C.T. took these errors in parenting the out-of-control child and turned them into goals. Do some of them feel familiar? They should. You probably violate them, too. They are the keys to taming Spike. If you want Spike's cooperation, you must practice eliminating these on everyone. If you focus on Spike, the practicing won't work. Your task is not merely changing your interaction with Spike. You must change your interactions everywhere so that you don't run the danger of bringing them back to Spike.

1. No yelling
2. No showing anger
3. No failure to distract yourself so your annoyance doesn't turn into yelling or anger
4. No getting caught by surprise and over-reacting
5. No threatening
6. No swearing
7. No lousy tone of voice
8. No sarcasm
9. No criticism or fault-finding
10. No nagging, reminding, or repeating
11. No forgetting to follow through
12. No preaching, lecturing or giving unwanted and unsolicited advice
13. No deals
14. No allowing your buttons to be pushed
15. No demanding
16. No accusing
17. No arguing
18. No complaining
19. No namecalling
20. No talking so damn much
21. No questioning
22. No frustration
23. No initiating conversation
24. No dredging up the past
25. No explaining or justifying yourself
26. No negativity
27. No passive-aggressive nonsense
28. No waffling or inconsistency

P.A.C.T.'s experience suggests you have one of two reactions to the list:

1. "This looks so simple any idiot could do it!"
- or
2. "Oh, my God, you expect me to learn all that?"

If you have reaction number one, you don't have a problem. You clearly don't have a Spike. You may not even have any kids at all. What's worse, you probably don't understand parents who are in this pickle or face the challenge of reversing every parental impulse they have. This means you will have a hard time supporting a parent who identifies with the goals. Unfortunately, those parents who have reaction number two know that you don't understand them, don't sympathize with them and don't have patience for them. They feel isolated as a result.

If you have reaction number two, you are bowled over, don't know where to begin, and you think this is impossible. That means you are connecting with the list. And that makes you a prime candidate for reading further.

So, peel yourself off the floor and let's think about this. Yes, the list looks overwhelming but many parents have gotten through it so don't worry: You will, too. Is it hard? Sure, it's hard, quite possibly the hardest thing you will ever do. It is like losing 100 pounds. What makes it hard? You will be required to change how you parent. Period. These are not 28 suggestions; they are 28 requirements. Unlike diets, however, once you learn P.A.C.T., you probably won't slip back into failure. You will be changed forever.

You can learn P.A.C.T. if you like your Spike a little. If you despise him, you won't get far. This program requires self-discipline in the name of love. It may seem like a gift your Spike doesn't deserve. If that is what you think, you have a shoe on the wrong foot: Stop concentrating on Spike. Concentrate on yourself. If you take care of you, then Spike will take care of himself. For better or worse—and admit it, it's been mostly for worse—you have been concentrating on Spike for a long time. Spike has become the family centerpiece. It's time to get some flowers instead.

At this point, you can turn to Part II, which is the program, and get to work. Or, you can keep on reading the Introduction. Or, you can flip back and forth. Do whatever works for you.

And, by the way, the list isn't a random collection. The list represents a universal set of enabling behaviors parents use hoping their child will change. He won't. These enable the behavior you say you don't want. You can keep these and self-righteously defend your right to be angry. If so, you will feed your kid's insatiable need to oppose you. Or, you can give them all up, thereby removing the single most important source of disapproval, rejection, and criticism your child has in his life: YOU. If you do the latter, you will be rewarded. If you continue the former, you will set your kid up for failure.

We assume since you've read this far that you are willing to consider giving up the former. Wonderful. Now, back to work....