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**How Two Quarelling Kids Helped Invent the Better Behavior Wheel**

**By Julie Butler**

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When David was nine and Laura was twelve, the battles started.

Prior to that, they got along great. Laura was always protective of her little brother, and he in turn, doted on her.

Perhaps it was about needing space, asserting independence...whatever the reason, it drove my husband and I crazy. It would start over the tiniest of excuses. One minute the house would be quiet, and the next they'd be shouting at one another.

"Mom, Laura won't give my CD back!"

"It's not yours. It's mine!"

"No it isn't. I got it for Christmas!"

"No you didn't. I did!"

And on and on it would go. Until, finally, one of us would have to intervene. And there would be a truce...sort of. At least until the next blowup.

We hated the atmosphere of tension that would invariably follow these exchanges. Our once happy home was being turned into a war zone, and it felt like there were land mines scattered beneath our feet.

One night, in desperation, we had a conference. We called the kids into the living room and told them how upsetting their behavior was. We asked them for suggestions on how we could restore peace and serenity back into the family.

## How Two Quarelling Kids Helped Invent the Better Behavior Wheel

Off to their rooms

Well, we didn't resolve anything on the spot. We sent them to their rooms with instructions to each come up with a half dozen appropriate consequences that we could impose the next time they had a fight.

The following day we were presented with a list of consequences from each. Some even looked pretty good. Examples: Clean the other person's room; Do dishes for the other person; Make the other person's bed for a week; Lend your favorite CD or game to the other person for a week; Make a list of 10 good things about the other person; Hug and make up....

We decided to arrange the consequences around the perimeter of a board, and then we attached a spinner in the middle. When you gave it a spin, the spinner would eventually stop and point to one of

the consequences. Then we hung the board up in the kitchen, in plain sight. We crossed our fingers, and waited.

And waited.

It was amazing. Just the presence of the board, hanging on our kitchen wall, had an instant calming effect on the atmosphere in our home. Occasionally we'd see one of the kids standing in front of the board, idly flicking the spinner, checking it out. But the fighting had stopped.

Well not forever. It took about ten days before they forgot about the board and peace was shattered by another battle.

We were ready.

We called them both into the kitchen, took the board down off the wall, and placed it on the table. They knew what they had to do. How could they refuse? They chose the consequences. They practically invented the board. It landed on the most dreaded consequence of all: Hug and make up!

The tension was broken as they awkwardly gave each other a hug, mumbling apologies. We all had a good laugh, and life resumed.

Maybe we're on to something

Wow, we thought days later when there'd been no further skirmishes...if this thing works so well for arguing, what about some of the other issues that we seemed to be always struggling with. Wasting electricity, for example. It seemed like the kids were always leaving the lights on when they left a room. Or they'd leave the TV on when they went to bed. Or they'd take half hour showers. Why not make another wheel with consequences related to wasting electricity?

Well, eventually and inevitably, we ended up making consequences to cover seven different issues, or themes. Excessive Arguing was joined by A Job Poorly Done, Leaving the Lights On, Stretching the

## How Two Quarelling Kids Helped Invent the Better Behavior Wheel

Truth, Taking Without Asking, Talking Back, and Not Putting Things Back.

And then, because we felt that extra good behavior should be recognized, we added another theme called Just Desserts, consisting of rewards.

We called it The Better Behavior Wheel.

It has worked beyond our wildest expectations.

In the past we'd often let behavior slide.

"David...it's 8:30. Get the dishes done."

"I know." From downstairs where he's watching TV.

"David. It's 9:00. Get these dishes done right now!"

"I know."

Until we'd get angry. And then the consequences would end up being out of proportion to the infraction. And blood pressure would rise, and anger would reign.

**"DAVID...GET YOUR BUTT UP HERE RIGHT THIS MINUTE AND GET THOSE DISHES DONE, AND YOU CAN FORGET ABOUT GOING CAMPING THIS WEEKEND!!!"**

But with the wheel...

"David...it's 8:15...you haven't started the dishes yet. I'm afraid we'll have to spin the wheel."

"But, Mom..."

"I'm sorry, Dear. It's really not up to me. Those are the rules we all agreed on. Gee, I hope you don't land on a really bad consequence."

The amazing thing is...we're no longer the bad guys. We can actually root for the kids as they drag themselves up to the wheel. It's no longer an us against them issue. It's the wheel that they have to answer to.

But the greatest thing of all...we hardly ever have to use the wheel. It hangs on the kitchen wall, acting as a watchdog and reminder. It's mere presence has worked miracles.

We want one too

After sharing our experience with our friends, and demonstrating the wheel to them, we have received widespread encouragement to make them on a commercial basis. Ultimately we thought, why not?

## How Two Quarelling Kids Helped Invent the Better Behavior Wheel

It's a great product. We know it works. If it can help others the way it has helped us, it almost seemed a shame not to make them.

We even made a Virtual Wheel – a download version that can be played on the computer. (This is my husband's favorite because he spent so many sleepless nights working on it.)

It's been four years since we had to send them to their rooms, but David and Laura get along great these days. They've both turned into wonderful teens, and we'd like to think that the Wheel shares a huge portion of the credit for that.

A mother of 4 kids from Eugene, Oregon, Julie Butler now lives in central British Columbia where she makes and markets the Better Behavior Wheel to grateful parents. Her website is

### **The Better Behavior Wheel – A New Kind of Calm in the Family**

**By Gina Ritter**

#### **The Better Behavior Wheel – A New Kind of Calm in the Family by Gina Ritter**

There's a new kind of fun and calm out there in the name of the Better Behavior Wheel, invented by Julie Butler and her family in central British Columbia. In an interesting twist on charts and discipline, this versatile wheel can be hung on a wall or toted with you in the car and on vacations.

It's a way to get whole family involvement, and a little bit of humor to get us over the discipline bumps. Kayla Fay, publisher of *Who Put the Ketchup in the Medicine Cabinet?* says, "This is the proverbial spoonful of sugar to help the medicine go down! Only a loving parent could come up with such an effective way to discipline children."

#### **As the Wheel Turns**

Originally, the wheel sprang from constant battles between Julie's 9- and 12-year-old children, David and Laura. With battles raging in their home, Julie and her husband decided they must find some way to keep the peace. Julie says, "We hated the atmosphere of tension that would invariably follow these exchanges. Our once happy home was being turned into a war zone, and it felt like there were land mines scattered beneath our feet. One night, in desperation, we called the kids into the living room and told them how upsetting their behavior was. We asked them for suggestions on how we could restore peace and serenity back into the family."

The kids were sent to their room to come up with at least six appropriate consequences for their next fight. David and Laura presented the family with consequences like:

Clean the other person's room  
Do dishes for the other person

## How Two Quarelling Kids Helped Invent the Better Behavior Wheel

Make the other person's bed for a week  
Lend your favorite CD or game to the other person for a week  
Make a list of ten good things about the other person  
Hug and make up....

These suggestions were arranged around the perimeter of a board, and a spinner attached to the middle. The premise was that the spinner would choose the consequence for them, and they would hang the board in plain view in the kitchen. Julie remembers, "We crossed our fingers, and waited. And waited. It was amazing. Just the presence of the board, hanging on our kitchen wall, had an instant calming effect on the atmosphere in our home. Occasionally we'd see one of the kids standing in front of the board, idly flicking the spinner, checking it out. But the fighting had stopped."

Of course, the battle was won, but not the war. Ten days later, the fighting began again, but this time they were prepared. Says Julie, "We called them both into the kitchen, took the board down off the wall, and placed it on the table. They knew what they had to do. How could they refuse? They chose the consequences. They practically invented the board. It landed on the most dreaded consequence of

all: Hug and make up!"

Once the fighting subsided, Julie realized there were other behaviors she also wished to curb. "It seemed like the kids were always leaving the lights on when they left a room. Or they'd leave the TV on when they went to bed. Why not make another wheel with consequences related to wasting electricity?"

Eventually, eight themes were added:

Excessive Arguing  
Leaving the Lights On  
Not Putting Things Away  
A Job Poorly Done  
Stretching the Truth  
Taking Without Asking  
Talking Back  
Wheel of Just Desserts (rewards)

Forty-eight consequences and 16 rewards are printed on peel-and-stick paper with colorful eye-catching graphics, enabling parents to customize the wheel to meet their family's needs. Just cut them out and stick them on. It's very easy to make up your own consequences and themes.

Interestingly, Julie says the wheel lowers her stress, keeps the consequences appropriate, and removes parents from the "Bad Guy" label. In the past, she and her husband would have to repeatedly ask David to do something, only to hear him say, "I know." This would come to a boil, and in anger they would yell and exact a punishment too harsh for the infraction.

Now, the wheel does all the work.

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"David, it's 8:15; you haven't started the dishes yet. I'm afraid we'll have to spin the wheel."

"But, Mom!"

"I'm sorry, Dear. It's really not up to me. Those are the rules we all agreed on. Gee, I hope you don't land on a really bad consequence."

Julie says, "The amazing thing is, we're no longer the bad guys. We can actually root for the kids as they drag themselves up to the wheel. It's no longer 'us against them'. It's the wheel that they have to answer to. But the greatest thing of all is that we hardly ever have to use the wheel. It hangs on the kitchen wall, acting as a watchdog and reminder."

What Else?

The Butlers' website, <http://www.better-behavior.com>, shows some parents of ADHD children have found the wheel to be a wonderful program. That is great news for many! Every parent should work with their child's personality and decide if the wheel is right for them, keeping in mind that every program doesn't work with every child.

There are a couple of letters on Julie's site from parents asking for help with children who are

completely out of control. One mother says her five-year-old "beats (his big sister), kills animals, curses, and destroys everything in his path." Another mother said her six-year-old adopted daughter has angry outbursts and goes in cycles. She wondered what to do when her child refuses the consequences and it starts another battle.

These are warning signs of something more serious than just a discipline problem. Often, young children and teenagers exhibiting these symptoms have a physical problem that can cause behavioral changes, such as infections, Lyme Disease and thyroid problems. Mental disorders such as early-onset bipolar disorder can also cause very similar symptoms and must be diagnosed and treated immediately.

In these cases, the Wheel would not be appropriate and medical intervention is needed immediately. For help, contact your pediatrician and look for information on these diseases and disorders on the Internet.

However, there is still a possibility that the wheel will be valuable with a child who is stabilized. Again, parents will have to make the decision to try the wheel according to each child.

The Last Word

Parents of children with normal behavior and discipline problems are encouraged to try this wheel and have a little fun with discipline! Bringing the whole family into the discipline decision-making is an excellent way to work as a team and come to a peaceful solution. The wheel isn't meant to exact negative punishment on a child, but rather remind them to pick their battles and mind their parents.

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Teachers and parents alike will find the wheel very useful in classrooms and homes everywhere with children ages four and up!

Gina Ritter is a personal life coach for parents and publisher of [www.naturalfamilyonline.com](http://www.naturalfamilyonline.com). She lives in New York with her husband and three boys (who also spin in the kitchen).

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