

## **The New Strong-Willed Child**

### **Discussion Questions**

#### **Chapter 1: The Wild & Woolly Will**

One of Dr. Dobson's key points is that adult leadership must be tested and found worthy before it is respected. Have you experienced this in your own life or observed it with your children?

After reading the descriptions of children's temperaments, where on the curve do you think your children fall? What characteristics of each of these temperaments do your children display?

What do you hope to learn through reading this book? What issues in your own family do you want to gain insight about?

#### **Chapter 2: Mothers Share Their Stories**

This chapter includes in-depth stories from three women about their strong-willed children. Each mentioned one or two decisive moments when she realized her child was strong-willed. Have you had a similar realization? What led up to it?

How do you respond to the idea that no matter how we parent, there is no guarantee about the outcome? How might this encourage or discourage you as you raise your children?

Dr. Dobson notes that to be an effective parent, you must see the situation the way your child sees it. Consider a recent confrontation with one of your kids. What do you imagine he or she was thinking? If you took more time to consider your child's perspective in the future, how might it help you?

How has your experience with a strong-willed child affected you emotionally? What hurts are you experiencing because of your situation?

Dr. Dobson comments that parents of strong-willed children should realize that God gave them those children for a reason and will help them through. Do you agree? How does this statement give you confidence?

#### **Chapter 3: What Makes Them the Way They Are?**

Where do you fall along the parenting continuum (from permissive to authoritarian)? How do you think your discipline style is preparing your children for the real world?

What kind of advice were you given when you became a parent (from books, friends, relatives, etc.)? How has it helped you or hindered you?

Consider the three personality patterns described by psychiatrists Stella Chess and Alexander Thomas. How do you see your children reflected in each?

A key finding from Dr. Dobson's study seems to be that strong-willed children have significantly lower self-esteem than compliant children. Do you see this reflected in your family? Why do you think this might be?

Dr. Dobson reports that many of our personality traits are inherited, and strong-willed parents are more likely to have a strong-willed child. Which of your characteristics do you see reflected in your children? Does that make you more or less sympathetic toward their struggles?

#### **Chapter 4: Shaping the Will**

What is your view of parental authority? How does your faith affect your view of authority? Why is it important for a child to learn to respect leaders?

How do you react to the idea that parents represent God to their children? How might this affect your approach to parenting?

Describe the difference between childish irresponsibility and willfulness. How do you see each of these exhibited in your own children?

The idea of comforting and reassuring your child after he has been punished may be a new one to you. Do you think it is profitable? Why? How might your children respond to this approach?

Dr. Dobson lists six steps for healthy parent-child relationships. Which of these is most thought-provoking for you? Which poses the greatest challenge?

#### **Chapter 5: Protecting the Spirit**

Describe the difference between the will and the spirit. Why is it important to preserve the spirit?

What are some practical ways you can preserve the spirit of your child? What habits or behaviors might you need to change as you interact with your child?

Dr. Dobson makes a strong case for the power of words in a child's life. Reflect on your relationships with your children. Do you find yourself frequently making cutting or sarcastic comments? Are there things you have said to them that you need to apologize for? If you're not sure, ask your spouse or a close friend who has observed you with your children if they can identify any patterns you need to change.

#### **Chapter 6: The Most Common Mistake**

Does the example of the policeman and judge help you to see how action is more powerful than words? What do you think about Dr. Dobson's statement that our anger can signal to our children that we're not in control?

Do you find yourself using words more than actions when disciplining your children? What have the results been? What would be more effective?

Do you recognize yourself in the story of Henry and his mother (allowing yourself to get angrier and angrier until your child finally obeys because he's convinced you're upset enough to do something)? How might you change this approach?

How have your disciplinary techniques affected your children's respect for you?

## **Chapter 7: Gearing Discipline to the Needs of Children**

Dr. Dobson relates a confrontation his wife had with their daughter, Danae, when she was just nine months old. Do you remember specific incidents with your young children when you realized they were challenging your authority? Share these.

“It is a total waste of time to ‘reason’ with a toddler in a moment of defiance.” Do you agree? Have you tried this, and what was the result?

“Healthy parenting can be boiled down to those two essential ingredients: love and control. They must operate in a system of checks and balances.” How do you respond to this statement? As you look at your own parenting style, do you think you have a balance? Which ingredient takes precedence?

Why is it so important to teach children that their actions have consequences? What are some ways you are teaching this?

What specific ideas for discipline have you gained from this chapter?

## **Chapter 8: Corporal Punishment & the Strong-Willed Child**

Dr. Dobson shares his reasons for encouraging careful use of corporal punishment. How do you feel about this issue? If you have used corporal punishment, have you found it an effective discipline technique? How has it impacted your relationship with your children?

Dr. Dobson makes a strong case that careful corporal punishment can actually reduce the likelihood of physical abuse because the parent will be able to handle the situation before he or she loses control. Do you agree with this? Do your experiences back this up?

The article by doctors Trumbell and Ravenel defines discipline as “training that corrects, molds or perfects moral character” and lists five components, including confession, forgiveness, and assurance of love. Does this stretch your view of discipline? How would you define discipline?

The article also refutes eight arguments against spanking. Which of these arguments do you find most compelling? What have been your largest concerns as you have considered the issue of spanking? Did this chapter address them?

Dr. Turnball offers nine guidelines for spanking. Which of these is the most challenging to you? Which is the most surprising? What kind of guidelines (written or unwritten) do you follow before you spank a child?

## **Chapter 9: Bitter Brothers & Surly Sisters**

If you have both compliant and strong-willed children, can you recognize yourself in Dr. Dobson’s description? Think over the past few weeks and consider if you might be favoring the strong-willed child to avoid confrontations. If so, what steps can you take to address this and balance things out again?

If you have more than one child, have you observed jealousy between them? What seem to be the touchiest points? How can you downplay comparisons between your kids?

Were any of Dr. Dobson’s “rules” surprising to you? How might you implement them in your family? What other rules could you add?

## **Chapter 10: The Strong-Willed Adolescent**

What are your memories of adolescence? What issues are you most concerned about as your children approach adolescence?

How are your children most affected by the media and their peer group? What are the greatest pressures they face? Discuss some ways you can build your children's confidence at home.

Dr. Dobson admits that disciplinary options for a teenager are limited. Do you agree? What creative approaches have you developed? What have you found most effective?

“Even though it often doesn't seem like it, your teen desperately wants to be loved and to feel connected to you.” Have you seen evidence of this with your children? What are some good ways to express love and connection with teens who may not openly reciprocate?

In what areas do you most struggle with granting increased responsibility and freedom to your teen? Why is it so difficult to let go?

Dr. Dobson points out the parallel between parents allowing teens freedom and God allowing us freedom, even if it means we will fail or turn away from him. Is this a helpful analogy? Why do you think genuine love requires freedom?

## **Chapter 11: Dealing with the ADHD Child**

What did you learn about ADHD from the *Time* article? If you have an ADHD child, what similarities do you see between your child's behavior and the symptoms described in the article?

The book *Why ADHD Doesn't Mean Disaster* encourages parents to see ADHD from a positive perspective. What do you think might be some benefits of ADHD? What can ADHD kids excel at? How do you react to the statement that a person with ADHD isn't wired incorrectly; instead, it's our society that doesn't value the talents and abilities an ADHD person might have?

If you have an ADHD child, what effects has that had on your family relationships?

Dr. Domeena Renshaw offers eighteen practical suggestions for dealing with an ADHD child, from setting a flexible schedule to creating a quiet place of his own. Which of these suggestions is most helpful to you? Are there one or two things you can implement right away?

What does it mean to love your children unconditionally?

## **Chapter 12: A Final Word of Encouragement**

All parents face discouragement at times. When you feel frustrated or demoralized, what steps can you take to regain your joy in parenting? One thing that is helpful is to concentrate on your children's strengths. What character traits in your strong-willed children are you most proud of?

What are two or three key points you have taken away from this book? What encouragement have you received that will help you persevere? What insights have you gained into your strong-willed child?