

PARENTING WORKBOOK



Dealing With Frustrations



**A project of the Family Involvement Committee
of the Pennsylvania Council of Chief Juvenile Probation Officers
and the Juvenile Court Judges' Commission**

Juvenile Justice System Enhancement Strategy

INTRODUCTION

All parents and caregivers get frustrated. We want what is best for our child, and we want to live without stress or conflict. However, frustration is inevitable. Failed expectations, disappointments, anxieties, or fears may disrupt our family's desire for warm and supportive relationships. Fortunately, there is hope. We can reduce family frustration by changing the way we think about things. This workbook helps us peel back the layers of the onion and understand what is at the center of our frustration. It helps us examine how our child's behaviors "push our buttons" in a way that makes us feel, say, and do things we don't want to feel, say, or do.

GOAL: To identify sources of frustration and find ways of dealing with them.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Part A: Identifying Your Frustrations

- Top three reasons you get anxious or frustrated with your child's behavior
- My response when my frustration level is high
- How my child responds to my frustration

Part B: Coping With Frustrations

- Possible coping mechanisms
- Selecting your best coping mechanism

Part C: Reducing Frustrations

- Three techniques to help reduce frustration
 - Focusing on the child's strengths
 - Using techniques that worked in the past
 - Understanding my child's brain development

Part D: Solutions

- Identifying how your self-talk influences your frustration
- Changing your self-talk
- Summary of workbook

FRUSTRATION SURVEY (PRE-ASSESSMENT)

Please circle the number that best describes your experience with items A through E.

A. I/we get anxious or frustrated with my/our child's behavior

Never
1

Rarely
2

Sometimes
3

Often
4

Always
5

B. When I/we express dissatisfaction with my child's behavior I am pleased with the way he/she responds

Never
1

Rarely
2

Sometimes
3

Often
4

Always
5

C. I/we use effective coping mechanisms to calm down when my/our child's behavior upsets me

Never
1

Rarely
2

Sometimes
3

Often
4

Always
5

D. When my/our child's behavior upsets me/us, I/we see strengths in him/her through that behavior

Never
1

Rarely
2

Sometimes
3

Often
4

Always
5

E. When my child upsets me/us I/we change my/our thinking (self-thoughts) to calm down

Never
1

Rarely
2

Sometimes
3

Often
4

Always
5



Part A: Identifying Your Frustrations

Let's start by examining the reasons you get frustrated. In the left-hand column, read the reasons you sometimes get anxious or frustrated by your child's behavior. In the right-hand column, put a checkmark (✓) beside the TOP THREE reasons you get frustrated.

I get anxious or frustrated when I feel my child's behavior...	Top Three
...may hamper their present or future success	
...may cause their own unhappiness	
...may cause people to negatively judge me	
...makes me scared for their safety	
...makes me feel disrespected	
...affects the family financially	
...requires more time or energy than I have to deal with the situation	
...makes me feel weak or powerless	
...makes others feel disrespected	
...makes me feel guilty about things that happened in the past	
...makes me feel threatened	
Other: _____	



When my frustration level is high, I tend to: (circle all that apply)

Get very quiet

Raise my voice

Lose my temper

Leave the room

Count to 10

Become physical

Start to cry

Freeze

Make empty threats

Throw things

Say things I don't mean

Use "you" statements

Use guilt

Exaggerate

Involve my spouse, friend or significant other

Stop listening

Blame others

Avoid/withdraw

Self-medicate with drugs or alcohol

Calm myself down before reengaging

Other _____

Other _____

This is how my child responds to my frustrations: (circle all that apply)

Shuts down	Gets angry	Leaves the room	Goes to the gym or does something physical
Takes a time-out	Escalates	Gets physical	Complies with me
Gets quiet	Talks to a supportive friend	Breaks things	Gets defensive
Acts depressed	Says "whatever" or "I don't care"	Acts out in anger	Apologizes
Does a quiet activity (read, music, video)	Resists what I am saying	Gets loud	Stops listening
Becomes disrespectful	Accuses me of things	Threatens me or others	Gets sarcastic
Agrees in order to stop me from talking	Promises to act differently	Ignores me	Runs away
Cries	Says things they don't mean	Fights back	Writes in a journal
Other _____	Other _____		



Assignment: Over the course of the next week or two keep track of what you do when you get frustrated and how your child responds to your frustration. Use this to keep track of your observations.

Frustration Response Tracking

Date	What happened?	How did I show my frustration?	How did my child respond?



Assignment Review: In looking back at your assignment in Part A list any patterns you may have noticed (example, "I tend to get more frustrated in the morning when I feel pressured to get to work on time" or "My child reacts in anger every time I raise my voice").

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Coping Skills

Part B: Coping With Frustrations



Now that we have examined why we get so frustrated and how our frustration triggers a response in our child, let's look at some ways to better deal with frustration. Review this list of strategies and put a checkmark (✓) beside each one you think would be helpful. List other techniques that have worked for you under "Other."

STEP 1: Select Possible Coping Mechanisms

Coping Mechanisms During a Conflict	Put a checkmark if this may work for you
Count to 20	☐
Repeat to yourself words that relax you (e.g., "This will pass," "This is normal," "This is not life-threatening")	☐
Seek to understand before voicing your views	☐
Practice deep breathing (mindfulness)	☐
Know your triggers	☐
Use humor (laugh at yourself)	☐
Ask yourself if this will matter a year from now	☐
Other:	☐

STEP 1: Select Possible Coping Mechanisms (continued)

Long-Term Coping Mechanisms	Put a checkmark if this may work for you
Write in a journal about your experiences and feelings	☐
Exercise or engage in physical activity	☐
Join a support group or surround yourself with supportive friends	☐
Reduce your expectations	☐
Keep a log of what has worked in the past	☐
Take better care of yourself (sleep, exercise, eat nutritious food)	☐
Other:	☐

STEP 2: Select Your Best Coping Mechanisms

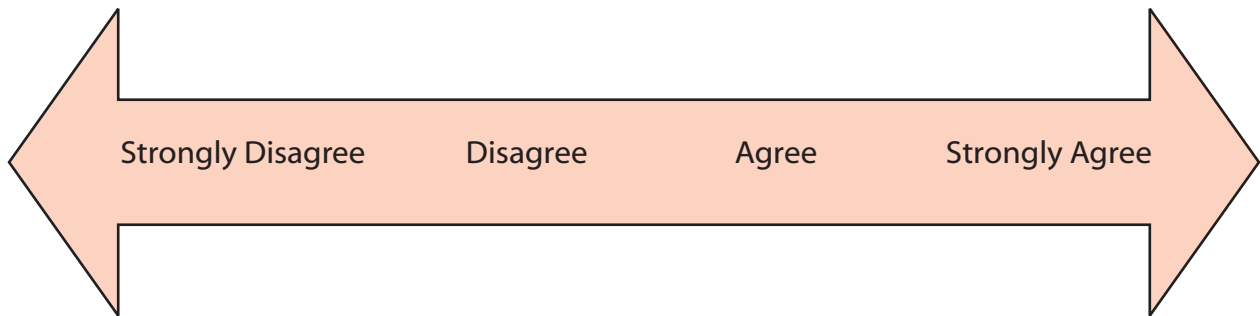
List your two best coping mechanisms from the list in Step 1 on pages 1 and 2:

1. _____

2. _____

Indicate whether you agree or disagree with these statements:

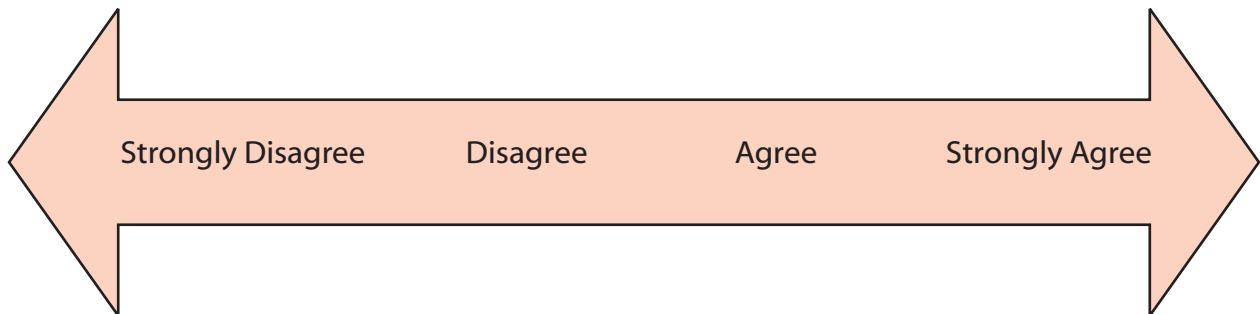
I am willing to use these two ways to cope in the next two weeks.



A horizontal double-headed arrow scale with four labels: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, and Strongly Agree.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

I am confident that these two ways to cope will be helpful.



A horizontal double-headed arrow scale with four labels: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, and Strongly Agree.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree



Assignment: Over the course of the next week or two keep track of the two coping mechanisms that you decided to use more often or for the first time. Use this to keep track of the results

Coping Mechanism Tracking

Date	What happened?	Which coping mechanism did you try?	What was the result?



Assignment Review: In Part A of this workbook you reviewed why some of your child's behavior frustrates you, how you respond when you are highly frustrated, and how your child reacts to your frustration. Then, in Part B you examined some common coping techniques to deal with frustration. You may have picked one or more coping techniques that you were willing to use. Let's see how that went. List the two preferred coping techniques you selected in Part B and describe your experience using them by listing what worked and didn't work.

What two coping techniques did you use and what did you discover?

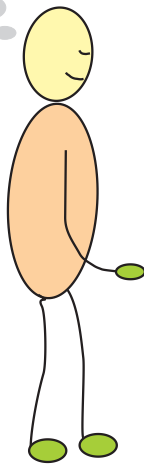
Coping technique #1 I used: _____

I learned: _____

Coping technique #2 I used: _____

I learned: _____

1, 2, 3,
4...10



Part C: Reducing Frustration

Reducing Frustration. There are three techniques that can help us feel less frustrated:

1. Recognize that youth behaviors that frustrate us can also be viewed as **strengths** which, properly channeled, can become assets in adult life.
2. Identify **past successes** dealing with frustration and act this way more often. Often, we only remember the times we did not handle frustration well and forget those times we successfully dealt with frustration.
3. Understand that a youth's brain is undergoing significant development and changes, which means that many adolescent behaviors are actually normal and to be expected. **Understanding brain development** can help us reduce our frustration.

Let's look at each of these techniques.



1. Strengths. Negative behaviors can actually be signs of strength. For example, stubbornness can be a strength when your child wants to get a job or get into college. Pushing back at rules can be a strength if your child is in a work or personal situation that requires "out of the box" thinking. Being argumentative can indicate that your child has good verbal skills and might become a communications expert later in life.

Look at the sheet at the end of this section entitled Parent and Youth Strengths. Circle all the strengths you have and fill in the table below entitled "My Strengths." An example is provided.

My Strengths (Example)	
My top five strengths	How might this strength help me deal with my frustrations as a parent?
1. Respectful	If I treat him with respect he is more likely going to treat me with respect. This will keep the conflict from getting out of control.
2. Good teacher	I can use my teaching skills to help teach him learning skills to stay out of trouble.
3. Fun loving	This helps me keep things light and not so serious all the time.
4. Honest	I think he appreciates an honest answer even if he doesn't like hearing it. He is more likely to listen to me if I am honest.
5. Persistent	I know that if I keep trying and not give up my efforts will be successful.

My Strengths	
My top five strengths	How might this strength help me deal with my frustrations as a parent?
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	



Going back to the strengths sheet at the end of this section, circle the strengths your child has. List five of your child's greatest strengths here:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

List three of your child's behaviors that make you feel frustrated and indicate what strength might be associated with each behavior.

1a. I feel frustrated when my child _____

1b. A possible strength behind this behavior is _____

2a. I feel frustrated when my child _____

2b. A possible strength behind this behavior is _____

3a. I feel frustrated when my child _____

3b. A possible strength behind this behavior is _____



2. Past Successes. As caregivers, we experience times when we feel confident and competent and other times when we feel the opposite. We have done many things right as a caregiver. Focusing on past successes can help us identify those things we said or did that could be repeated.

Here are a few examples of successful ways you may have handled frustrations with your child in the past. Add other examples to the list.

Put myself in my child's shoes	Gave myself a few minutes to collect my thoughts
Remembered that I did some of the same things as a child and I turned out fine	Asked another adult to support me
Did not take the behavior personally	Waited for the right moment to discuss the issue
Calmly discussed the behavior	Distracted myself until my emotions settled down
Held my ground and did not cave in	Other: _____
Asserted my authority as a parent	Other: _____
Agreed to change the rule when it made sense to do so	Other: _____

List two times when you handled your frustration well. What was it about how you handled each situation that led to this success?

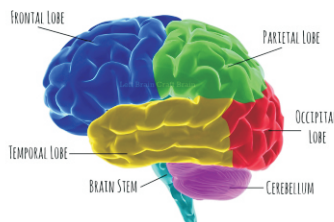
I was very frustrated when _____, but handled it well by doing/saying _____. The strategy I used was successful because _____.

I was very frustrated when _____, but handled it well by doing/saying _____. The strategy I used was successful because _____.

I want to continue (or increase) my use of these two methods for dealing with:

1. _____

2. _____



3. Brain Science. Some of your child's behavior can be explained by understanding what is happening in their bodies, in particular, their brains. Read the information on brain science and answer the question below:

Adolescent behavior is influenced by physical changes in the body, including in the brain. Science indicates that the adolescent brain is busy building links between different regions of the brain, such as the frontal lobes, where reasoning occurs. The "pleasure center," where rewards are felt, are "ramped up," resulting in a tendency to seek pleasure, act impulsively, and pursue new experiences, including risky behaviors. Adolescents become more socially fixated; their social life becomes extremely important. And, they experience more emotional intensity: it is more likely that they will erupt emotionally, and it can take 20 minutes for their brain to "settle down." During that time, it is difficult for them to have a calm conversation. We can help by giving them time to cool down, not provoking or overreacting, and by being empathetic.

Understanding brain development makes me think this way about my child's frustrating behavior:

Now that you have a better understanding about how your child's brain is developing – which explains what comes naturally to them and what is difficult for them – indicate whether you agree or disagree with these statements:

I have control over my child's behavior.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

I have influence over my child's behavior.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree



Assignment: Over the course of the next week or two keep track of how well any of the three techniques to reduce frustration worked for you. Use this to keep track of the results.

Frustration Reduction Technique Tracking

Date	What happened?	Which technique did you use (focus on strengths, past successes, or brain science?)	What was the result?

Parent and Youth Strengths

Parent Strengths

- Manage stress in healthy ways
- Laid back/calm
- Respectful
- Assertive
- Good communicator
- Patient
- Organized
- Protective of my kids
- Allow disagreement
- Flexible
- Hard-working
- Creative
- Take responsibility for actions
- Good problem solver
- Not afraid to be unpopular by doing the right thing
- Fun-loving
- Willing to admit when wrong
- Clear thinker/analytical
- Calm in an emergency
- Passionate
- Good teacher
- Manage family's money well
- Give affection
- Empathetic
- Set limits with my child
- Active and involved
- Ask for help when needed
- Optimistic/positive
- Honest
- In touch with feelings
- Open to do new things
- Take care of self
- Willing to sacrifice for others
- Attend all my kid's events
- Motivated/driven
- Responsible
- Has healthy boundaries
- Trust others
- Passionate and curious–zest for life
- Persistent (grit)
- Confident
- Other _____
- Other _____

Youth Strengths

- Manage stress in healthy ways
- Laid back/calm
- Respectful
- Assertive
- Good communicator
- Patient
- Organized
- Protective of family and friends (loyal)
- Comfortable with disagreement
- Flexible
- Hard-working
- Creative
- Take responsibility for actions
- Good problem solver
- Not afraid to be unpopular by doing the right thing
- Fun-loving
- Willing to admit when wrong
- Clear thinker/analytical
- Calm in an emergency
- Passionate
- Good student
- Manage possessions well
- Give affection
- Empathetic
- Picks good friends
- Active and involved
- Ask for help when needed
- Optimistic/positive
- Honest
- In touch with feelings
- Open to do new things
- Take care of self
- Willing to sacrifice for others
- Express gratitude
- Motivated/driven
- Responsible
- Has healthy boundaries
- Trust others
- Passionate and curious–zest for life
- Persistent (grit)
- Confident
- Other _____
- Other _____



Assignment Review: In looking back at the past week or two think about any patterns you may have noticed. Which frustration reduction technique worked best? Why?

Check the frustration reduction technique you used that worked best for you:

Focusing on strengths	☐
Using what worked in the past	☐
Using brain science to better understand my child's behavior	☐

Why did this frustration reduction technique work best?



Part D: Solutions

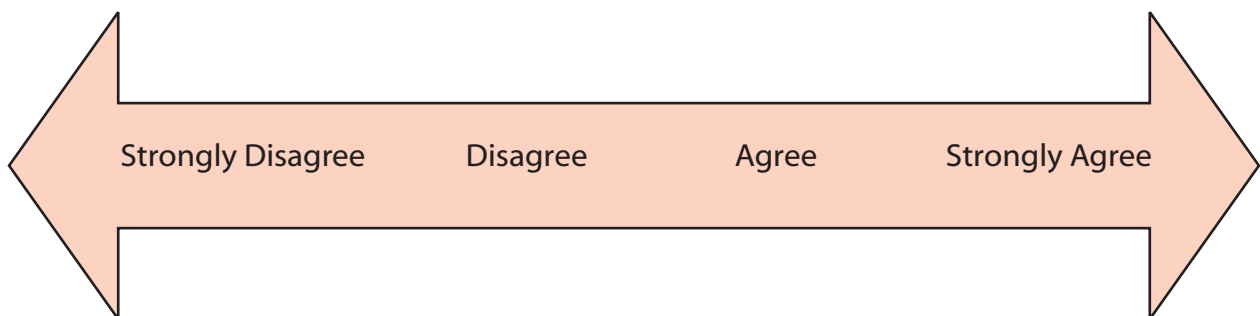
It is probably safe to say that no one has complete control over anyone, especially after they become a toddler, nor would we want complete control over another person. Youth must experience some independence if they are going to learn how to act responsibly. Mistakes will happen; we learn from those mistakes. At the same time, youth need structure and boundaries because they are at risk of engaging in behavior that could harm themselves or others. Fortunately, we do have influence over our child's behavior, just not complete control. In Part D, we are going to discuss how we can both take care of ourselves when our child is maturing but making bad choices along the way and how we can help our child learn from those choices.

Thinking about your responses to frustration. Look at your answers in Part A, where you listed how you respond when you get highly frustrated. List the top three things that you tend to do when your frustration level is high.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

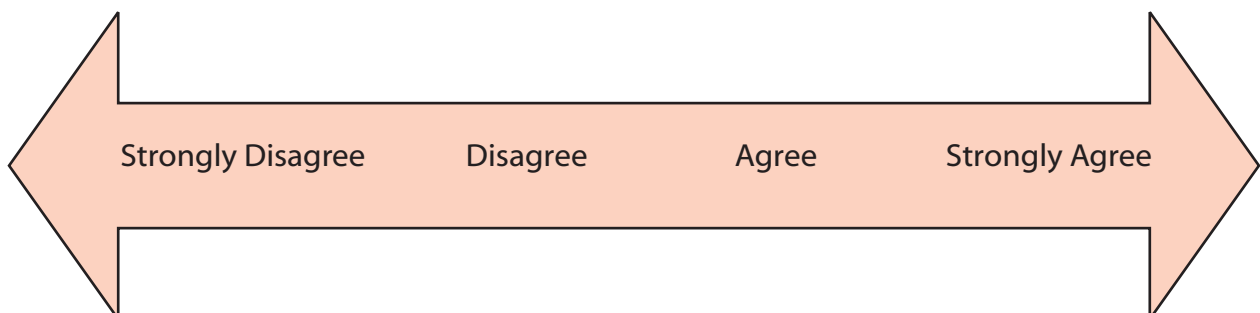
Now, keeping in mind what you have learned – including those behaviors that frustrate us can sometimes be signs of youth strengths and that reckless or noncompliant youth behavior may actually be normal adolescent behavior, given how their brains are developing – answer the following two questions.

1. I feel satisfied with my response when I am highly frustrated.



Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

2. I am satisfied with how my child responds to me when I am highly frustrated.



Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

Identifying Your Thoughts. Few of us can “strongly agree” with either of the statements “I feel satisfied with my response when I am highly frustrated” and “I am satisfied with how my child responds when I am highly frustrated.” We want to learn some ways we can “strongly agree” more often. We are going to do that by thinking about our thinking.

All of us have thoughts that occur just before we think or act, often so quickly we are not always aware of them. Sometimes our thoughts about our child's behavior may lead to increased (or decreased) frustration. For example, sometimes we make assumptions. Sometimes we don't understand what is behind the behavior. Sometimes we forget that we were once youth who made irresponsible decisions but we turned out OK. Often these thoughts are quick, and we are not aware of them, but with a little effort we can recall them.

Write about two times in the last month when you felt very frustrated with your child's behavior.

1. _____
2. _____

Example:

My daughter did not come home on time even though I told her that if she didn't it would make me late for work.

For one of these times, list one or more things you said to yourself that added to the frustration.

- a. _____
- b. _____

Reframing Your Thoughts. Our thinking can lead to increased or decreased frustration. Sometimes we make assumptions. Sometimes we don't understand what is behind the behavior. Sometimes we forget that we were once youth as well and made irresponsible decisions but we turned out OK. When we reframe our thinking, we can be more calm and helpful during conflict. Consider the following **example**:

Situation: Cherise did not return home by curfew one night. You reminded her of the house rule you both agreed to. She promised that she would be home on time the next day. However, once again, she was two hours late.

Parent/Caregiver Thoughts: "Cherise is taking advantage of me. She is doing things she should not be doing. I am so sick and tired of her acting this way. I am going to let her have it."

Result: A significant verbal altercation occurred. Cherise stormed out of the house and said she is not going to follow any rules and there is nothing you can do about it.

Alternative Thoughts: "I am worried about Cherise. I fear she may be doing things she should not be doing, but I don't really know that. Also, she may be acting like a normal adolescent, but I need to find a way to get her behavior under control. I can use this as a teaching opportunity. I can't control her behavior; I can only influence her behavior. I am going to calmly discuss this with her and find out the reasons she is struggling with the rule we agreed to. If I remain calm, I am confident we can work this out."

Likely Result: A calm discussion followed during which you provided a reasonable consequence and/or discovered why Cherise is finding it difficult to follow the curfew rule.

Thinking back on your child's recent frustrating behavior, fill out the worksheet on the following page. List the thoughts you had or might have had that would likely have led to a negative outcome. Then, list as many alternative thoughts you can think of that might have led to a reduced level of frustration and a more positive outcome.

Describe the situation that caused you frustration:	
Thoughts that may have increased your frustration	Alternative thoughts that could have decreased your frustration
1.	a.
2.	b.
3.	c.
4.	d.
5.	e.

Circle the letter next to the two alternative thoughts that you think might work best for you the next time your child breaks the rules or frustrates you. Then, answer these two questions:

1. I feel willing to use these two alternative thoughts in the next two weeks.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

2. I am confident that these two alternative thoughts will be helpful.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree



Assignment. It is time to put alternative thinking into practice. It may seem somewhat easy to do this when working quietly by yourself with a workbook. But, in real life, things can get heated and emotional. When that happens, it will be important for you to take a couple minutes to gather your thoughts.

In the next week, practice using alternative thoughts for at least two times when your child frustrates you. After each incident, write what went well and what did not go so well.

Incident No. 1

Describe the situation that caused you frustration:	
Thoughts that have increased your frustration	Alternative thoughts that decreased your frustration
1.	a.
2.	b.
3.	c.
4.	d.
5.	e.

What worked? _____

What didn't work so well? _____

Incident No.2

Describe the situation that caused you frustration:	
Thoughts that have increased your frustration	Alternative thoughts that decreased your frustration
1.	a.
2.	b.
3.	c.
4.	d.
5.	e.

What worked? _____

What didn't work so well? _____



Congratulations, you have completed the Dealing with Frustrations Workbook. List what you learned below to remember the key lessons.

Strengths. Sometimes, the things that frustrate me about my child are actually strengths. My child's strengths are:

Coping mechanisms. My preferred coping mechanisms when I get frustrated are:

Past successes. Things that I have done in the past that worked when I get frustrated are:

Alternative thoughts. My alternative thoughts when frustration is high are:

FRUSTRATION SURVEY (POST-ASSESSMENT)

Please circle the number that best describes your experience with items A through E.

A. I/we get anxious or frustrated with my/our child's behavior

Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

B. When I/we express dissatisfaction with my/our child's behavior I am pleased with the way he/she responds

Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

C. I/we use effective coping mechanisms to calm down when my/our child's behavior upsets me

Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

D. When my/our child's behavior upsets me/us, I/we see strengths in him/her through that behavior

Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

E. When my/our child upsets me/us I/we change my/our thinking (self-thoughts) to calm down

Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

F. I feel my/our skills in dealing with frustrations with my/our child's behavior has improved.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	----------	-------------------

Comments:

