Many parents initially have difficulty understanding the concept of ownership of problems.

The best clue for parents comes when they begin to sense their own inner feelings of unacceptance, when they begin to have inner feelings of annoyance, frustration, resentment. They may find themselves becoming tense, experiencing discomfort, not liking what the child is doing, or monitoring the child’s behavior.

Suppose:

- A child is getting too close to a valued piece of china.
- A child has their feet on the rungs of your new chair.
- A child in interrupting your conversation with a friend.
- A child is tugging at you to leave and break off your conversation with a neighbor.
- A child has left their toys on the living room floor.
- A child appears about ready to tip their milk over onto the rug.
- A child is demanding that you read them one more story, then another, then another.
- A child won't feed their pet.
- A child is not carrying their load of work around the house.
- A child uses your tools and leaves them in the driveway.
- A child drives your car too fast.

All these behaviors actually or potentially threaten legitimate needs of parents. The child’s behavior in some tangible or direct way affects the parent: Mother does not want her vase broken, her chair scratched, her rug soiled, her discussion interrupted, and so on.

Confronted with such behaviors as these, a parent needs ways to help themselves, not the child.

The following chart helps to show the difference between the parent’s role when they own the problem, and when the child does.
When the **Child** Owns the Problem | When the **Parent** Owns the Problem
---|---
- Child initiates communication.  
- Parent is a listener.  
- Parent is a counselor.  
- Parent wants to help the child.  
- Parent is a "sounding board".  
- Parent facilitates the child finding their own solution.  
- Parent accepts the child's solution.  
- Parent is primarily interested in the child's needs.  
- Parent is more passive.  | - Parent initiates communication.  
- Parent is a sender.  
- Parent is an influencer.  
- Parent wants to help themselves.  
- Parent wants to "sound off".  
- Parent has to find their own solution.  
- Parent must be satisfied with the solution themselves.  
- Parent is primarily interested in their own needs.  
- Parent is more aggressive.  |

Parents have several alternatives when they own the problem:

1. They can try to modify the **child** directly.
2. They can try to modify the **environment**.
3. They can try to modify **themselves**.