



Parenting the Strong-Willed Child: Step-by-Step Behaviour Change





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Strong-willed children can be wonderful—determined, passionate, full of energy. But their intense temperaments can also lead to oppositional behaviours, leaving parents feeling frustrated, exhausted, and out of ideas.

If you're feeling overwhelmed by daily battles, constant defiance, and the feeling of walking on eggshells, you're not alone—and there is hope.

Karen Campbell from Child Behaviour Service offers a structured, practical approach that's transforming families across New Zealand.

Understanding Your Child's Temperament:

Why Strong-Willed Children Resist

Children aren't born with "oppositional defiant disorder." They're born with distinct temperaments, and strong-willed children often develop patterns of defiant behaviour. Understanding this link helps parents reframe how they approach behavioural challenges.



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Karen took what seemed like a really complex situation and identified the core behaviour driving it. The change in our home was almost immediate.

PIP, CHRISTCHURCH

Identifying the Real Problem:

What's Actually Reinforcing Defiance

A common misconception parents have is that children "can't help" their behaviour, believing it's purely emotional dysregulation. However, Karen explains:

“Tantrums are often reinforced by what a child gains or avoids. If yelling gets a child attention, or if defiance gets them out of a task, they'll repeat that behaviour.”



REAL-LIFE EXAMPLE:

A mother of a four-year-old struggled with daily tantrums whenever she gave instructions. She mistakenly believed she needed to calm her child's emotions through conversation. But the tantrums continued because each episode provided attention and allowed the child to avoid tasks. Once this reinforcement was identified, the family saw rapid improvement by shifting attention to the positive replacement behaviour instead.

A Step-by-Step Guide to

Creating New Positive Behaviours

Step 1:

Identify the Reinforcer

Determine what your child gains or avoids from defiance—attention, a treat, or escaping an unwanted task.

Step 2:

Consistently Withhold the Reinforcer

Do not reward unwanted behaviours. Every time you 'give in' to a tantrum or defiance, then this strengthens the unwanted behaviours in future.

Step 3:

Be Ready for an “Extinction Burst”

Expect behaviour to worsen temporarily before it gets better. Your child may test boundaries aggressively, checking if old tactics still work. Hold your ground calmly and consistently.

Step 4:

Reinforce Positive Replacement Behaviours

Clearly identify the positive opposite of the unwanted behaviour. For example, if your child refuses to follow instructions, the positive opposite is to follow instructions. Reinforce this positive behaviour every single time with praise and attention.

Step 5:

Allow for "Calm Time"

Teach your child effective self-calming techniques. Create a dedicated, calm space in your home.



Common Mistakes Parents Make

(and How to Avoid Them)

Lack of Consistency

Not reinforcing positive behaviours consistently makes them ineffective.

Giving In

Even occasional yielding reinforces unwanted behaviour strongly.

Over-Talking

Trying to reason during tantrums escalates the issue. Wait until your child is calm before engaging.



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**Karen’s support helped us
stay on track even during
challenging moments. Our
house became calmer, and
parenting feels manageable
again.**

ALICE & MATT, AUCKLAND

How to Stay on Track

Follow Karen's Proven Scripts

Karen emphasises the power of clear, scripted responses. These scripts remove emotional reactions and provide consistent messages, significantly improving parent confidence and effectiveness.

Child:

Child is demanding Mum's attention by whining.



Child:

Begins to play while waiting for Mum's attention.



Parent:

Uses "First and Then" strategy with the app. Shows child "First, (with photo) Mum is vacuuming and Then' (with photo) she will play with you. Choose something from your task board while you are waiting for me".



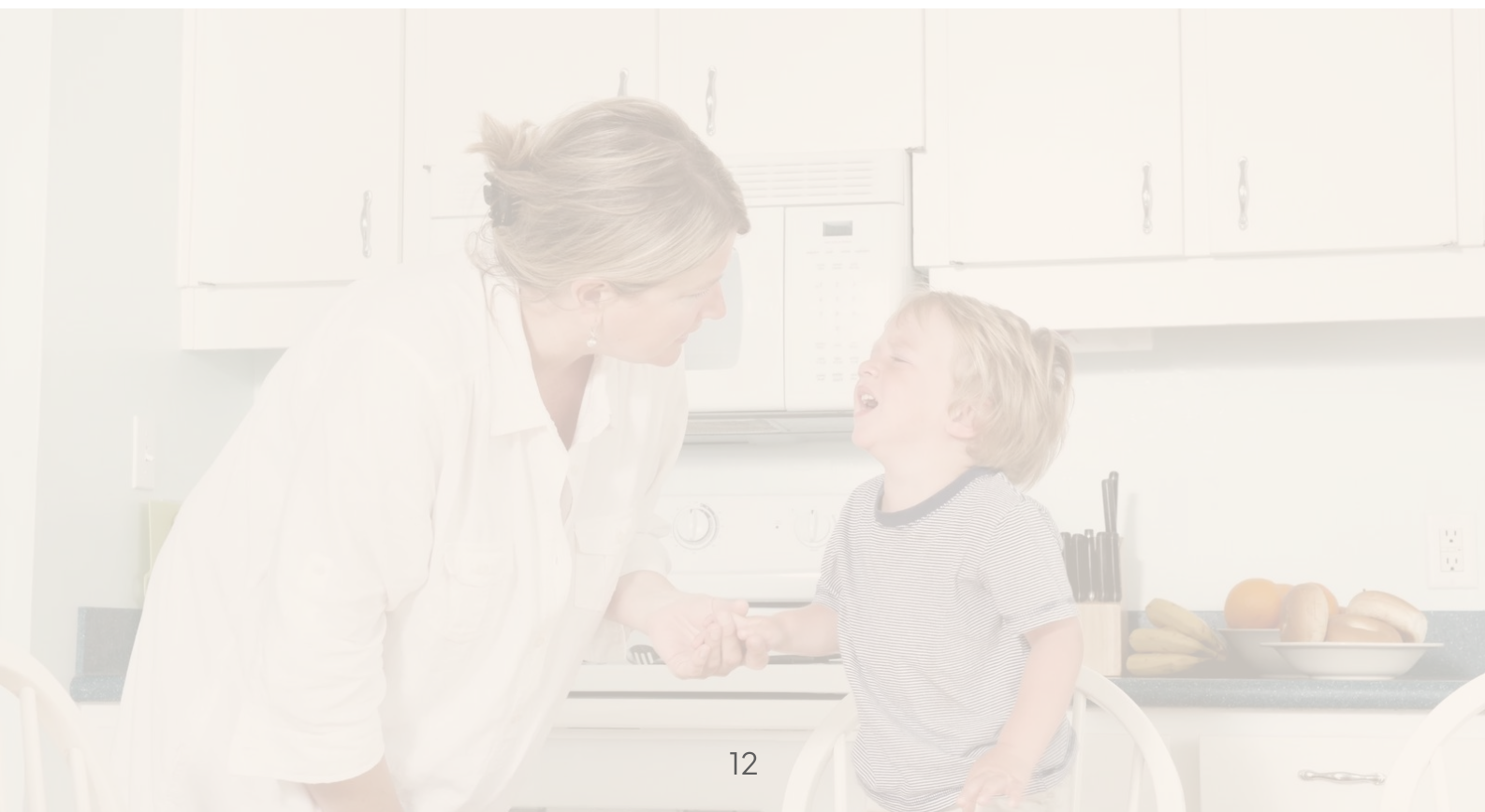
Parent:

Immediately reinforces: "Great playing! I will be there soon to play with you."

Staying the Course:

Overcoming Setbacks

Behaviour change isn't linear. If your child's behaviour intensifies after initial success, remember this is normal (extinction burst). Stay calm, stick to the plan, and reach out for support if you feel overwhelmed.





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Karen checked in regularly,
keeping us accountable and
focused. We could finally
breathe easy knowing there
was a clear plan.

NICKI, AUCKLAND



Ready for Lasting Change?

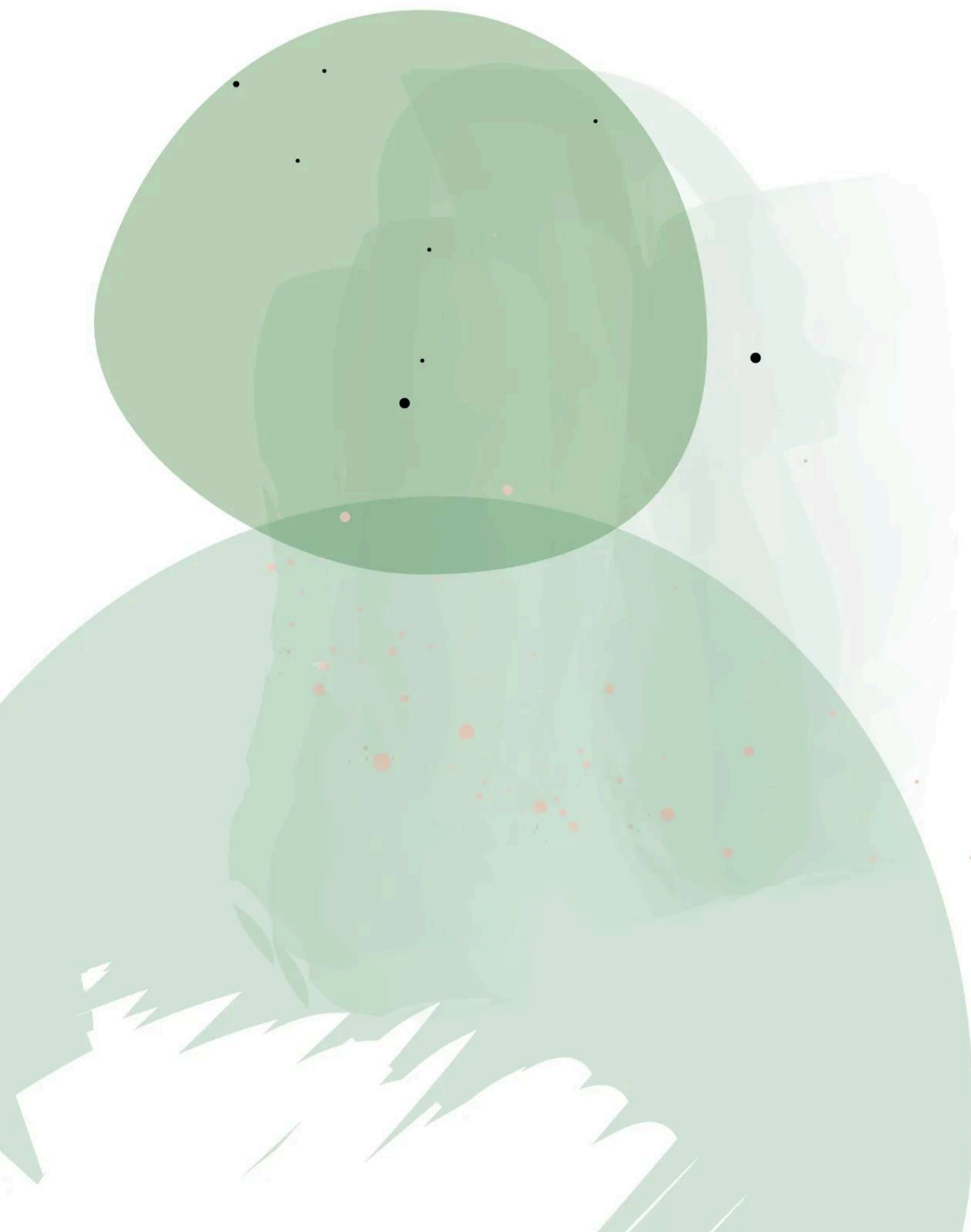
Karen Campbell's structured, research-based approach provides parents with tangible tools and lasting solutions. If you're ready to transform your relationship with your strong-willed child, you're just one step away from creating a happier, calmer home.

Next Steps:

- Visit childbehaviourservice.co.nz to learn more.
- Book a consultation or explore online courses tailored specifically for parents of strong-willed children.

This structured approach—backed by real success stories—ensures you don't have to navigate the challenging behaviour of a strong-willed child alone.

Once you are on track with Karen's research based techniques you will notice your stress levels reduce dramatically as you really enjoy your child's positive qualities!





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