

From community support to everyday family life

The Positive Systems Approach (PSA), developed by Dr. Bob Carey and Terry Kirkpatrick, grew from their work supporting individuals with developmental disabilities and the people involved in their care. Its central principle is that behaviour is best understood within the broader context of a person's life, including their relationships, environment, communication, skills and the expectations placed upon them. Understanding these interactions helps us identify what needs to change and what support will make a more positive response possible.

PSA has been widely used throughout Southwestern Ontario. For more than 20 years, Dr. Carey, in conjunction with Regional Support Associates, provided formal workshops and courses in PSA and Applied Behaviour Analysis to thousands of community support staff and college students. This experience informed the introductory book he co-authored with Terry Kirkpatrick, *Managing Disruptive Behaviour with a Positive Systems Approach: How to Prevent Challenging Behaviours Before They Occur*.

Readers subsequently asked how these principles could help parents navigate difficulties at home. In response, Dr. Carey wrote *What If It's Not Just the Behaviour? A New Way to Parent with a Positive Systems Approach*, released in 2025. The book brought PSA into family life, helping parents consider what a child's behaviour may be communicating and how routines, relationships, developmental needs and expectations can contribute to recurring difficulties.

The Parent's Companion builds on that foundation, offering a practical guide to understanding and responding to 45 common parenting challenges. From morning battles and bedtime struggles to homework, screen time, sibling conflict and teenage independence, it helps parents explore what might be happening, adjust the circumstances contributing to the difficulty, and teach useful replacement skills.

Parents can begin with the challenge they are facing today, try one or two manageable changes, and observe what happens. Throughout, the emphasis remains on maintaining safety and clear boundaries while strengthening communication, cooperation and relationships.

Together, these books carry the Positive Systems Approach from its origins in community support into everyday parenting, inviting families to ask: **“What is contributing to this pattern, and what can we change to help our child succeed?”**