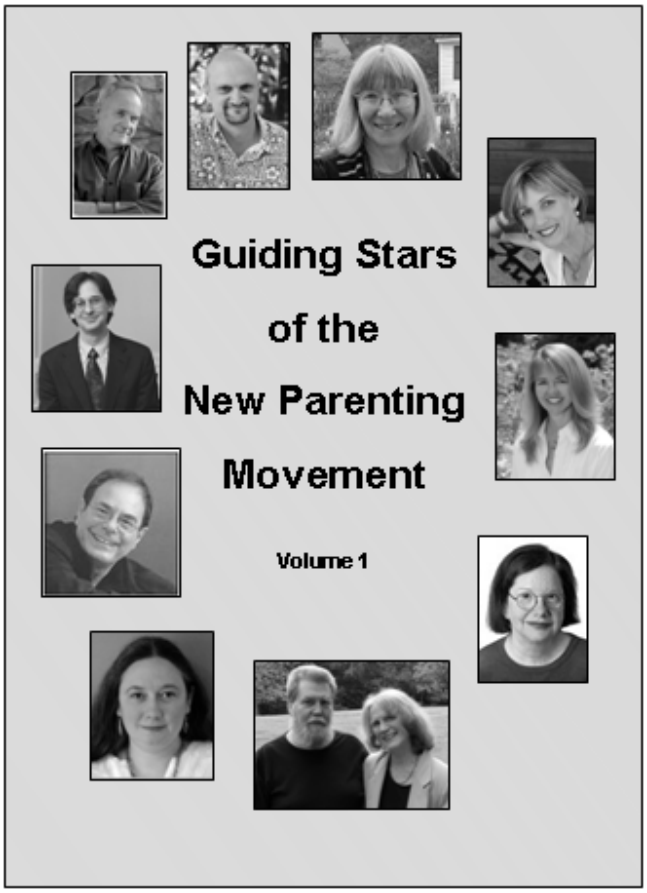

Guiding Stars
of the
New Parenting
Movement
Volume 1

Guiding Stars of the New Parenting Movement

Volume 1

Edited & Published by Bob Collier

The Parental Intelligence Newsletter
www.parental-intelligence.com

SECOND EDITION

Guiding Stars of the New Parenting Movement

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This book is dedicated to

My wife Mary, the mother of our two children, who has always been the rock solid foundation of our happy family.

And to those wonderful children themselves, Bronnie and Pat, who, between them, turned my life into a Fabulous Adventure and who have demonstrated to me 'before my very eyes' that magic happens when we're allowed to be who we are.

Special Thanks

THANK YOU from the bottom of my heart to these people who have made a major contribution to the publication of this book:



Kelly Jo Murphy - "The Dancing Butterfly Mama" - former parenting coach now homeschooling mom, who inspired me to create my 'Guiding Stars' project.

The 'Guiding Stars' themselves, whose generosity in giving their time, energy and expertise and their ongoing support to this project made it happen.

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"No man is an island ..." - and that has certainly been the truth in the production of this book, *Guiding Stars of the New Parenting Movement, Volume 1*.

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Introduction

How many parenting books are there in the world these days? Thousands? *Tens* of thousands? Millions, perhaps?

Sometimes it seems like it, doesn't it?

I used to pay no attention whatsoever to parenting books.

Throughout my first seventeen years as a parent, I never so much as looked at a parenting book, never mind read one. I read only personal development and 'success psychology' books and applied what I learned from those to my parenting activities. That was *my* way of doing things. Call me Frank Sinatra.

Maybe that's given me a peculiar angle. That and spending most of my parenthood as a stay-at-home dad. Who knows? What I *do* know is that my parenting style seems to be highly unusual. I'm very proud of it. It makes me happy and my two children don't seem to mind it either.

In August 2002, for reasons too complex to go into here, I started publishing a parenting newsletter - *Parental Intelligence*. I got the name from reading an article about 'multiple intelligences' and I noticed that particular one was missing.

In the beginning, my newsletter was simply an outlet for my idiosyncratic ideas about parenting *and* it was an opportunity to share with anyone who was interested the ideas of others who I thought of as 'on my wavelength'. It was my small and quiet contribution to the understanding of successful parenting, if you like.

One of the 'side-effects' of publishing my newsletter, however, was that, for the first time since I'd entered the lofty realms of parenthood myself, I was actually taking notice of the kind of advice being given to parents generally.

It was an interesting education.

First of all, I'll say this about it: I do believe that *everybody* who has ever written a parenting book has unique experiences and valid ideas to offer that can help all of us become better parents. I've yet to encounter a parenting book called, for example, "How To Deliberately Screw Up Your Kids".

So, we can be sure every parenting book there is will have *something* useful in it.

However, it transpires that, when I consider all the parenting books I know about these days, the majority of them are of no interest to me. And I wouldn't recommend them to any other parent.

That's because they're books about child management.

Child management is NOT parenting.

The fact is, I count myself as a *successful parent*. That's a perception based on my now more than twenty years of *consistently positive experiences* with my own two children - all of those years in partnership with my wife Mary - and the simple observation of our children's happiness, success and general wellbeing. In short, I have a pretty good idea of what's likely to produce pleasing results and what isn't.

And, in *my* opinion, the only thing child management books are good for is training sheep.

Why, I wonder, should today's parents have to wade through piles of books about child management to get to the parenting books?

They shouldn't. That's why I'm writing this.

Welcome to the New Parenting Movement.

Before I introduce you to what I choose to call its 'Guiding Stars', let me explain to you how my 'New Parenting Movement' came into being.

First of all, I'm a 'child of the 1950s'. And I have a 10-year old son. Believe me, that's a truly *fascinating* adventure. And, more than anything else, it's brought home to me just how much the world we live in has changed in my lifetime. How different our everyday lives are today compared to when I was a boy.

In fact, whenever I talk to my son about my own childhood, I don't start with "When I was a boy…" any more – I start with "A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away…".

It's become clear to me over the past few years in particular that most of what I learned about growing up from *my* childhood is now totally *irrelevant* to my son's childhood. He's living a different kind of childhood altogether.

Yet, at the same time, he's living in a society that, generally speaking, appears not to have *woken up* to that fact or to what it means.

One of the signs of that general lack of awareness, it seems to me, is that child management books are as popular now as they ever were. Perhaps even more popular.

Was child management *ever* a successful way of raising children? I have my doubts. Though the memories might be a little hazy from this distance, of course, I do seem to recall from my own childhood experiences of it that it was a rather offensive way of being treated that did me far more harm than good.

But, even if child management *was* - somehow - the 'best' way to raise children in times past, it *doesn't 'cut the mustard' now*.

Whatever its perceived usefulness to however many generations of parents, a philosophy of raising children that, basically, manipulates their behaviour for the convenience of adults in order to conform it to a relatively fixed and stable social structure (such as

existed in the 1950s) or one that, at most, is only gradually evolving, makes no sense at all in the year 2006.

Because, for *at least* the past ten years - whether we've realised it or not and whether we like it or not - we've been living in a society that is continually *transforming itself* in unpredictable, unmanageable and discontinuous ways.

It's chaos out there, in other words. And tomorrow's winners will be those who can *thrive on chaos*. Who can rise above it and create order and wellbeing for themselves in their own personal experience, whatever may be happening in the world at large.

At a time in human history when making the most of ourselves has become a necessity not an option, parenting in the style of the 1950s - when children were seen and not heard and everybody knew their place and was expected to stay there - is, in my view, quite simply the downward path to results that *nobody* will like.

My contention, therefore, is that, if we're to do our job of raising happy, relaxed and self-motivated children who grow up to become 'assets to society' in a constantly changing world, our parenting has to be far more *conscious* (we must be aware of the context, meaning and consequences of what we're doing) and it has to be far more *child-led* than it has ever been before.

Now, as it happens, although my own parenting may not always have been fully conscious, it has generally *always* been child-led. And, since my experiences with both of my children have shown me that child-led parenting is easily superior to any other kind and I have the results to prove it, I obviously believe that the world at large would be a far, far happier place, in any event, if *more* parents were aware of its advantages and rewards.

But, I'm no parenting expert. As I like to say, if you want to know how *my* parenting style works, first, you have to be me. On a practical day to day level, that's all I know – what works for me with my children.

And, to be perfectly honest, as an individual parent, I'm only too happy to live and let live, since I go my own way in the everyday parenting of *my* children without a thought for the opinion of others.

The thing is, however, I *do know* that child-led parenting is totally kick-ass superior to child management. And it *does* seem strange to me that any parent in their right mind would want to keep faith with a philosophy that seems to generate three problems for every one it solves when there's another way of doing things *readily available to them* that not only produces better outcomes but also can make the process of attaining those outcomes a happier, healthier and more positive experience.

So, the idea came into my head that I must go beyond the small world of my *Parental Intelligence* newsletter and do something to actively promote all the parenting specialists and childhood experts I know of who know, as I do, what *really* helps to raise happy, healthy and successful children in today's complex global culture.

This book is the result.

In the pages that follow, you'll meet and discover something about some very bright, very knowledgeable and dedicated people who, as it happens, have added *substantially* to *my* understanding of my own children, myself, and the world we share. They will add a great deal to *your* life, I'm sure. They may even change it.

I admire these people and the important work they do and I wholeheartedly recommend them to every parent on this planet who wants to learn or develop *genuine parenting skills*.

All but one of the people featured in this book have written their own books about various aspects of parenting and child development. You can be sure these are the kind of books I like – books for eagles not sheep. And I hope they'll appeal to you, too. This is an opportunity for you to choose the books that resonate with you the most as a gift to yourself and to your children. Perhaps you'll discover that they're *all* 'on your wavelength', as they are on mine.

My final 'Star' is the publisher of a progressive parenting magazine. Please subscribe to it and be enlightened.

These, then, are the first of the Guiding Stars of the New Parenting Movement.

On June 23, 2005, I sent an email to eight people (my 'original Stars') initiating this project and asking them if they would help me. This is a part of that email:

The idea comes from my realisation that an historically very significant and now very apparent shift has occurred in the way we live our daily lives compared to ten or twenty years ago – compared even to the beginning of the new millennium - and that the successful parenting of our children requires a positive and creative response to the radical changes in our society that have resulted from it. Not only to negotiate the unprecedented experiences of modern parenthood but also to safeguard the timeless aspects of our children's lives. In other words, if there isn't already something called the 'New Parenting Movement', it's my opinion that there ought to be.

And now there is.

Bob Collier
Canberra, Australia
October 2006

The Guiding Stars



Michael Mendizza

Michael is an author, educator, documentary filmmaker, founder of Touch the Future, a nonprofit learning design center and CEO of Nurturing, Inc., which is a producer, publisher and distributor of support resources for parents and early childcare providers. Michael's passion centers on the state of optimum learning and performance, what Athletes call the *Zone*, researchers call *Flow* and children call *Play*. His book, *Magical Parent-Magical Child, the Art of Joyful Parenting*, co-authored with Joseph Chilton Pearce, applies research on optimum states to parenting and to education.

Inspiration for this work emerged from personal relationships with Pearce, physicist David Bohm, philosopher J. Krishnamurti, and a wide range of scientists, authors and educators. If being in an optimum state is important to professional athletes, imagine what this could mean to parents, childcare providers, educators, coaches and the children they love. Michael writes and speaks internationally on the *Next Frontier in Education, The Intelligence of Play, Transcendent Mentoring of This And Future Generations, Media and the Brain, Corporate Exploitation of Children, The Brave New World of Un-Schooling and Home-Schooling, Seven Principles that Transform Adults and Children, The Childlike Mind, Rational Imagination, Raising Children in a Sport-Crazed Culture,* and other topics.

Background for Michael's insights emerge from twenty-five years of personal relationships and over seventy-five film and video taped interviews with scientists, authors, visionary educators and athletes including:

Joseph Chilton Pearce, author of *The Magical Child* and many other works
Suzanne Arms, natural birth advocate and author of *Immaculate Deception*
David Bohm, one of the most influential physicists of the 20th century
David B. Chamberlain, author of *The Mind of Your Newborn Baby*
Marion Diamond, brain researcher, author of *Enriching Heredity*
Fred Donaldson, play researcher and author of *Playing by Heart*
John Doulliard, athlete, elite coach, Ayurvedic practitioner, author *Body, Mind & Sport*
Barbara Findeisen, President, Association of Pre and Prenatal Psychology & Health
John Taylor Gatto, author of *Dumbing Us Down*

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Tim Gallwey, author of *The Inner Game*
Peter Jacobsen, athlete, PGA Tour
J. Krishnamurti, educator, author of more than seventy books including: *The Ending of Time, The Future of Humanity* and *The Awakening of Intelligence*
George Leonard, author of *Education & Ecstasy* and *Mastery*
Jean Leidloff, author of *The Continuum Concept*
Bruce Lipton, cellular biologist, author, *The Biology of Belief*
Nancy Lopez, athlete, LPGA Hall of Fame
Jerry Mander, author, *The Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television, In the Absence of the Sacred, A Case Against Globalization*
Johnny Miller, athlete, PGA Hall of Fame
Marshall Rosenberg, founder Center for Nonviolent Communication
Michael Murphy, founder Esalen Institute, author *In the Zone, Future of the Body*
James W. Prescott, pioneering brain researcher on the Origins of Love & Violence
Raffi, children's songwriter
Ashley Montagu, author of over fifty books including *Touch, The Natural Superiority of Women, The Dehumanization of Man* and *Growing Young*

Conferences, Public Speaking & Workshops

Beginning in the 1980's Michael has been challenging national and international audiences. He organized *Learning Without Limits,* a national educational conference on play-based models of learning and performance. He has presented workshops and keynote addresses in San Francisco, Atlanta, Washington DC, Dallas, Los Angeles, in Canada, India, Poland, Amsterdam, London, Milan, Salzburg, Stockholm, Munich, Innsbruck, and many other venues before the Association of Pre and Prenatal Psychology & Health, the Transpersonal Psychology Association, Waldorf educators, Child-Spirit groups, educational, home school, research and business associations.

Nurturing, Inc.

Nurturing is a revolutionary community based "systems approach" for parent support and continuing education of childcare providers. *Nurturing* partners civic organizations with childcare providers, drawing together, on a regular basis, civic-mentors, parents and providers in creative dialogue. The goal is to surround parents and early childcare providers with a village, to plant into this village inspired information and develop the personal relationships required to meet local needs with local resources, neighborhood by neighborhood, all across the land. (see: www.nurturing.us)

Touch the Future

Touch the Future is a nonprofit 501c3 learning design center. The mission is to apply research on optimum states of learning and performance, what athletes call the Zone,

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what researchers call Flow and what every child knows as Play, to parenting and to education. Touch the Future's website (see: www.ttfuture.org), hosts an extensive archive of interviews and publications on birth, bonding, brain development, imagination, fitness, sports, competition, and an array of inspired educational and play based learning models.

Film and Media Production

Michael has over twenty-five years of professional experience producing film, video, print and interactive media programs for public education, medical research, corporations, national and international television broadcasters, UNESCO and private foundations. Most notable is a twenty year history working with the life and teachings of J. Krishnamurti, directing two feature documentaries, *The Challenge of Change* and *With A Silent Mind* plus a twelve-part encapsulation of major themes entitled *Beyond Myth & Tradition*. Michael also produced and directed a ninety-minute biographical documentary on the life of Paramahansa Yogananda, teacher and author of *Autobiography of a Yogi.*

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The Philosophy of Touch The Future

The future of humanity is being defined today, as the developing human brain meets and is sculpted by the environment/culture. We call the period when this interaction is most obvious childhood. For millions of years human development emerged in harmony with the natural environment. Today human artifacts, beliefs and behaviors, what we call culture, shape the developing brain. Neuroscientists call this reciprocal-dynamic between body and environment cultural biology.

Inherent within each child is the entire evolution of life on this planet. This vast history, with its limitless potential, senses the environment and expresses only those capacities needed to adapt. Nature, including the human brain, is profoundly creative and lazy. Innate potential clearly plays its role; it is, however, the model-environment that predetermines to an indeterminable extent what kind of adults will emerge from childhood. Adults, being shaped by the model-environment, become that model-environment and impose their limited set of skills on children, a cycle that repeats generation after generation. Being distracted by cultural constructs, comparison, contests, competition and entertainment, this conditioning unfolds and habituates seamlessly beneath the child's and adult's awareness.

Human development has reached a turning point. Mounting evidence from a wide range of fields demonstrates that the culture-environment now shaping the human brain is not developing the specific capacities needed by future generations to solve the contradictions inherent in the current model. More of the same, at home, in school, in business and in government, will only compound our problems.

The challenge is for individual adults, who are themselves the result of this cultural conditioning, to perceive and model in their daily lives a quality of awareness and creative intelligence that lies outside the habitual model, and to do so in relationship with children. Only in this way will the next generation evolve the worldview and capacities needed to meet and solve the challenges we have placed before them. The next generation can't do this without our example and we can't survive the mess we have created without their help. This is what we mean by Touch the Future. All of our efforts are designed to awaken and support this alert awareness and creative intelligence in adults, and by implication, to transform all of childhood.

Michael Mendizza
Executive director
Touch The Future
October 26, 2003

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Magical Parent-Magical Child, the Art of Joyful Parenting

Magical Parent-Magical Child, the Art of Joyful Parenting is the first book to define parenting, coaching and educating children as developmental, transformative practices for adults. The central theme of the book is the transformation of childhood through the transformation of adults. Our goal is to optimize the adult-child interface by applying the proven strategies that allow top athletes and other specialists to consistently perform at extraordinary levels. If optimum learning, performance and well-being is the goal when relating to tennis balls and hockey pucks, what about you and I? What about our children? Do they, or we, deserve anything less?

We do this by helping adults rediscover the "playful" and "childlike" genius of their own innate intelligence, as they guide, learn from and mentor children, which awakens and develops in adults new capacities and possibilities. Infusing the adult-child relationship with this fresh creative energy and attention transforms the adult which results in a radically different learning environment for children. Changing the adult changes the environment we call childhood. This transforms the child, which cycles back and transforms the adult. We call this playful, reciprocal-dynamic, the *Optimum Learning Relationship*.

...

Magical Parent-Magical Child invites every parent, educator, childcare provider and coach to discover completely new states of perception, performance, and experience in themselves, while guiding, modeling and mentoring the future of humanity.

For more information about *Magical Parent-Magical Child*, please visit:
Touch The Future

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Joseph Chilton Pearce

Best-selling author and co-author of the book *Magical Parent-Magical Child,* Joseph Chilton Pearce is a visionary developmentalist, a true living treasure. Pearce is best known for his national best-selling book *Magical Child*. He has published seven books and for thirty-five years has lectured internationally on human development and the changing needs of children. He was a faculty member on child development at the Jung Institute in Switzerland. He spoke on the new paradigm of human development at the seventh annual Transpersonal Psychology conference in India. Oxford University invited Joe to present information on the impact that current obstetrical practices are having on the development of child intelligence. The Canadian government sponsored a workshop with Joe for Native Americans on the prevention of violence and substance abuse. Sony Corporation sponsored a seventeen day lecture series on the future of education in Japan. He addressed Hawaii's crime prevention commission on the current causes of crime and violence. Louisiana sponsored an address on the crisis facing the American family. Departments at Harvard, UCLA, Stanford and Columbia University have sponsored educational conferences featuring his work. The governor of California invited Joe to address two special legislative planning sessions on the challenges facing children and families. Currently he finished a new book, *The Biology of Transcendence*, which describes the biological foundation for evolution's next great leap forward.

To learn more about Joseph Chilton Pearce and his work, please visit:

www.ttfuture.org/

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Magical Parent-Magical Child: the Art of Joyful Parenting

Part One
The Intelligence of Play

Introduction

Real Jedi Masters Play

Athletes, martial artists, musicians, dancers - people whose lives depend on peak performance - describe a magical state where extraordinary performance is easy. They call it the *Zone*. In the Zone their personal best flows naturally, without effort. At times even the miraculous feels normal and natural. Researchers call this state of optimal performance *Flow*. Children call it play.

Elite athletes understand that being in a good state rather than in a bad one can make a critical difference in a championship playoff. For centuries being in the Zone was sought after by ancient performance specialists, Zen archers, Yogis, the Samurai, and others. Long ago in a galaxy far away, the Star Wars myth is filled with images of Jedi masters flowing in the Zone. For some women, pregnancy and birth are Zone experiences. Sexual intimacy can be transcendent.

The Zone is not some far-off, mystical fantasy. It is right here, right now, pulsing in every cell of our bodies. Optimum is easy, the miraculous natural when resistance to learning and peak performance are reduced or eliminated. If being in the Zone is good enough for athletes and Aikido masters, why not for you and me? Why not for our children? Imagine learning, performing and parenting "in the Zone," not just in rare moments, but most of the time. Imagine if the resistance and conflict found in most adult-child relationships were reduced or eliminated. Becoming a Jedi master may be easier than we "think." We are "the Force," so why not use it? Our goal is to apply what is known about this optimum state to the most important relationship of all, the relationship between adults and children, right now, at any age, in any field.

In the Zone, *Optimum Learning Relationships* unfold naturally. Magical parents nurture and mentor magical children while magical children challenge and encourage adults to rediscover their own magical nature. The child challenges the adult to discover undreamed of possibilities, and the adult models similar possibilities for the child. In the Zone, parenting, childhood, and learning become a dance, a playful, expansive exploration of new possibilities, optimum learning, and extraordinary performance.

Magical Parent - Magical Child

We begin by using sports as a metaphor. Any experience that transcends our ordinary sense of self will do - walking in the woods, creating sand castles at the beach, dancing,

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childbirth, watching a sunset, making love. Being in the Zone is not about the activity; it is all about our state of being.

In the Zone

In 1995 Michael Murphy, co-founder of Esalen Institute, and researcher Rhea A.White published *In the Zone, Transcendent Experiences in Sports*. The book combined 6,500 sources and stories, from both professional and amateur athletes, stories that described moments of illumination and ecstasy, out-of-body experiences, altered perceptions, and exceptional feats of strength and endurance spanning almost the entire spectrum of sports and physical adventures.

Sports have enormous power to sweep us beyond our ordinary sense of self, to evoke capacities that have generally been regarded as mystical…The great seers of the contemplative traditions have explored the inner life more deeply than most of us, and they have opened up spiritual territories that we may or may not enter. But many athletes and adventurers have followed partway, however inadvertently, through the doorways of sport.

Michael Murphy, Rhea A. White
In the Zone, Transcendent Experiences in Sports

There is no formula for being in the Zone. It is not just one experience, nor is it limited to athletics. Being in the Zone is not really an activity; rather, it is a unique quality of relationship. It is not the activity that determines great performance; it's our relationship to the activity that counts. Being in the Zone is simply being in an optimum state.

Acute well-being, peace, calm, stillness, detachment, freedom, weightlessness, ecstasy, power, control, being in the present, mystery, awe, unity, altered or extrasensory perception, flow, optimum experience, and authentic play…What people have in common is that they're describing a state that is beyond their ordinary functioning.

If you unfold what they mean, you find that there are hundreds of different ways in which people go beyond ordinary. Our book, In the Zone, catalogued these different experiences and asked the question, "Why do they happen?" "How might they be evoked?" If we look for the patterns of activity that lead to these experiences we can be deliberate and start training for them. These are technologies of transformation and the period I think we are now in.

Personal Interview
Michael Murphy
Co-Founder, Esalen Institute, Author, *In the Zone, Future of the Body*

Johnny Miller, a world-class athlete, discovered the Optimum Learning Relationship on the golf course.

The strongest energy in the world is love. And if you love what you are doing, you've got a chance to hook on to a clear channel. You become energized, your brain is alert, your body feels strong, your intuitions are there, you have clear thinking; you can be the most that you can be. In 1970 when I went out to win the Phoenix Open, it was like I

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was playing by myself. I had zero anxiety. No tension. No stress. I was completely confident. When I was over the ball I felt like I was weightless. I had a feeling that I almost could just float off the ground. It was a feeling of confidence but also a warm feeling inside that I was in control. I could dictate my own energy and paint my own picture out on the course. I was able to address every situation and find a creative answer. The shot would talk to me. I'd say fine.

It was so much fun I couldn't wait to hit the next shot. I was taking every shot to the highest level, playing "E" ticket golf. Most golfers are only in the zone for a round or two in their life. I was in it more often, because I would listen to my heart. I did all my homework, but I'd listen to the child in me. I listened to that inner voice.

Personal Interview
Johnny Miller
PGA Hall of Fame

Imagine being a parent or educator and relating to children in this optimum state. If it's good enough for a golf ball, isn't it good enough for you and the children you love? Do we, or they, deserve anything less?

Optimum means best possible. Learning implies the discovery and perhaps mastery of new patterns or possibilities. Relationship means connection, interaction, and interdependence. An Optimum Learning Relationship, therefore, is *the* most effective process for children and adults to transcend their individual limitations; to grow and to learn together. Only through such a relationship can we reduce and eliminate the limitations, conflicts, and aggression we impose on ourselves and our children, generation after generation.

Optimum Learning Relationships open the door to the unknown. In these relationships something unexpected is waiting to be discovered. There is no authority, no fixed rules. The child and the adult are moving targets, growing, learning, changing every day. To respond appropriately in such a dynamic and changing relationship, both must be sensitive observers. What was appropriate yesterday, or even a few moments ago, may be completely inappropriate now, this living moment. To give such complete attention requires discipline, deep respect, care and affection.

The word *discipline* often implies obedience, doing what we are told, following one's own or some outside authority, conforming to a pattern. It usually means coercive or forced action, involving rewards and punishments designed to limit or modify behavior. The root meaning of the word *discipline* is *disciple*, which meant originally to be a joyful follower. True discipline involves no coercion, no external rewards or punishments. The disciple joyfully follows the teacher.

In Optimum Learning Relationships the adult follows the child as a teacher as the child follows and responds to the adult. Each follows the "model" and the modeled behavior is precisely what the other needs to "discover" and "learn" at their unique stage of development. For the child, the model may be physical skills, walking, holding a fork, or rollerskating. For the adult the model may be curiosity, spontaneity, or playfulness. Each is guided into new ways of playfully transcending their current limitations.

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To follow a model one must be aware that it exists. In Optimum Learning Relationships the primacy of one's "state of being," in relationship, is valued over the information, content, task or challenge of the moment. This attention given to the ever-changing states in relationship occurs naturally in bonded relationships. We can't really see and respond to others as they are while looking out for our agenda, our self interests. A prerequisite to Optimum Learning Relationships is a bond of care and affection.

Learning means the discovery or mastery of new patterns and possibilities. For something new to blossom, there must be an opening, and an ending or suspension of the old, of the known and its "agenda." Optimum Learning Relationships imply a new relationship with knowledge itself, with information, especially the knowledge and beliefs we hold about parenting and learning. Beliefs are very active. They imply an agenda. This is right and this is wrong. The gravity or active quality of our assumptions often blinds us to what is actually going on, this present moment. We often miss or misunderstand what the child is experiencing, expressing, and needing. We see only our agenda, and whether or not our darlings are meeting our expectations, conforming to our image of who they should or should not be.

Entering an Optimum Learning Relationship demands a shift of emphasis from the adult's agenda, a focus on predetermined results, to the place where the child is now, and responding appropriately to the actual needs being expressed in the relationship this very moment. Obviously, the relationship embodies more than just the child. Optimum Learning Relationships value and meet the needs of both child and adult. The relationship is reciprocal. Each is bringing the best out of the other as they meet ever-new and increasingly complex challenges, together.

The highest expression of human love and creativity is mentoring the next generation. This moment may be the first step for the child and for us may be a post graduate experience. In Optimum Learning Relationships the adult and child experience the same act, but from totally different points of view. Parenting brings us to a higher level of the same growth process as the child. And with that, we really come into our own. Through this Optimum Learning Relationship we begin to catch a glimpse of what our next stage of development is all about, a step that transcends our current limitations.

One has to be in the moment to rediscover the caterpillar for the first time, again, to actually see and feel "what is." Sharing in the child's wonder and curiosity reopens our wonder and curiosity. The bond of affection with a child's innocent state creates a profound shift in the adult. The shift is seeing the child as he or she actually is rather than looking through an agenda. It has been said we can't enter the kingdom unless we become little children. Participating in a child's state of innocence and wonder opens the door to the kingdom once again.

Human development ultimately involves spiritual development and parenting is, or can be, a powerful spiritual process. Adults discovering and opening to their next stage of development, by serving a child they truly love, transforms the meaning of parenting and of education. In taking this step, one discovers that human development, which is our own development, is infinitely open-ended. We, and our children, approach the infinite nature-of-our-nature through stages. Each stage has boundaries. The growth, learning, and development we experience at each stage ultimately means exploring and transcending the boundaries of that stage. Optimum Learning Relationships become a

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playful spiritual process for those willing to leave behind the limitations they have accepted about themselves and their children.

The current approach to parenting, and to education, often means just the opposite. We deny the child's and our own infinite nature by punishing and rewarding children into accepting and conforming to the same limited patterns we have accepted. We validate our limitations by imposing them on our children.

Culture is bound together by certain ways of thinking. How we perceive ourselves and our children is formed by this cultural model. Conforming to the limitations of culture can never transcend the problems culture creates. A completely different approach is needed.

Optimum Learning Relationships provides a way for each individual parent, coach, childcare provider, and educator to create a new set of boundaries for themselves and for the children they love, a wider set that reaches beyond the punitive parental-teacher models we all know so well. Optimum Learning Relationships free parents from the limitations imposed by their own conditioning. In freeing the children they love from accepting false limitations the adult becomes free. Cultural patterns and beliefs, which are implicitly aggressive, are replaced by sensitive, aware, intelligent attention. And this intelligent attention "acts" naturally, spontaneously for the well-being of all.

Optimum Learning Relationships invite adults to discover evolution's next step forward, hand in hand, with each new life. The tools for this new relationship are sensitive awareness, affection, the art of listening and true observation, intuition, playful intelligence, and insight. By taking our cues from the child we discover and create, right now, this moment, the appropriate response. True observation and intuition inevitably lead to new insights, and new insights lead to new models. Playful, always fresh, ever new and challenging, the child is the teacher of the adult and the adult is the teacher of the child. Their relationship becomes the ultimate classroom for both.

The parent-child dance begins anew each moment with simple awareness of the state of their "being" in relationship. Affection surrounds them, protects them in an atmosphere of trust, safety, and mutual respect. They listen and observe with great care and clarity, as if just that moment having discovered some unknown treasure. Each takes their cues from the other, suspending fixed assumptions of how they should or should not be. They connect, not with ideals and expectations, rather "as they are," that moment. The ever-changing dynamic of their "actual relationship" becomes the object of playful exploration and novelty, play being the act of learning and learning being pure play. The limitless realm of imagination reveals new patterns and possibilities. New insights are embodied which transform the relationship. And the cycle repeats, the next moment and the next, playful, always fresh, dynamic, and ever so challenging.

Is such a relationship just another ideal, a fantasy? We don't think so. The dynamic qualities found in Optimum Learning Relationships seem to reflect the underlying principles found in the scientific theory know as Chaos. John Briggs and F. David Peat in *Seven Life Lessons of Chaos* define chaos theory as the study of the underlying interconnectedness that exists in apparently random events. "Chaos science focuses on hidden patterns, nuance, the "sensitivity" of things, and the "rules" for how the unpredictable leads to the new." Percolating through the lessons of chaos are three

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underlying themes, which, when applied to our lives and relationships, can reduce stress and conflict and enhance creativity: Control, Creativity, and Subtlety.

Life is uncertain, the scientists say. We humans feel this uncertainty more keenly because our consciousness allows us to remember past injuries and project new disasters into the future. The major use of our creative and intellectual capacity, down through the ages, has been to eliminate uncertainty by predicting and controlling nature and ourselves. The essence of traditional parenting, enculturation really, and most of what we call education is "being in control" or "predicting and controlling" the behaviour of children. The true nature of children - their complexity and open-ended possibilities - places them well beyond our attempts to predict, manipulate and control. Eventually every parent and educator discovers this obvious fact, much to their dismay. Chaos theory suggests that instead of resisting this unpredictable nature, which is our nature and that of our children, we should embrace it, explore it, play, learn and be transformed by it. Optimum Learning Relationships do just that.

The second basic principle of chaos is creativity. True creativity blossoms when there are cracks in our systems of prediction and control. Physicists David Bohm and F. David Peat describe "creative perception" in *Science, Order, and Creativity* as an "extremely perceptive state of intense passion and high energy that dissolves the excessively rigidly held assumptions implicit in commonly accepted knowledge." This sounds very close to the quality of attention found in Optimum Learning Relationships. Creative parenting, a component of Optimum Learning Relationships, unfolds when assumptions about what "should or should not be" a good child or a good parent are suspended. This opens the possibility for something truly new to slip though the cracks of our efforts to predict and control the future. Suspending assumptions frees perception to attend to more subtle process.

Old-fashioned logic and linear reasoning clearly have their place, but the creativity inherent in chaos suggests that actually living life requires something more. It requires an aesthetic sense - a feeling for what fits, what is in harmony, what will grow and what will die. Making a pact with chaos gives us the possibility of living not as controllers of nature but as creative participators... To sacrifice control and live creatively requires attention to the subtle nuances and irregular orders going on around us...Chaos theory shows us how apparently tiny and insignificant things can end up playing a major role in the way things turn out. By paying attention to subtlety, we open ourselves to creative dimensions that make our lives deeper and more harmonious.

John Briggs, Ph.D. and F. David Peat, Ph.D.
Seven Life Lessons of Chaos

The more we learn through personal experience, the more we *can* learn; the more phenomena and events with which we interact, the greater our ability for more complex interactions. Can you imagine a more complex and dynamic learning experience than the challenge of nurturing and developing the open-ended intelligence of a new human being? Meeting this intelligence as it is changing, expanding, creating new patterns and possibilities each day, is a tremendous challenge, a profound responsibility, and a great privilege. Our lives are transformed by responding to the actual needs of the children we love. Discovering that our state of being, moment to moment, is their model, and their

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state is ours, brings about increased awareness and sensitivity to our own behavior. Only love is powerful enough to bring about such a radical change in perception. Awakening to the deep conditioning we find in ourselves, and not wanting to impose our limitations on our children, is a powerful catalyst for our own transformation. With abiding affection and basic trust the child leads the adult playfully into their next stage of development while the adult leads the child playfully into their next stage. And this magical state continues, expanding playfully, lifelong. Yes, this is indeed the Optimum Learning Relationship.

Who's Leading Who and Where Are We Going?

Our proposal is very simple. Optimum is nature's base-line for growth. Children normally enter the world in this optimum state at which point adults normally begin the long process of adulterating their childlike qualities in well-meaning attempts to make children as adult-like as possible. Very early children are rewarded and punished out of the zone, leaving adults feeling quite satisfied that they have done a good job as parents, educators and coaches.

In Optimum Learning Relationships childlike qualities, marked most notably by explosive learning, are shared. The adult is transformed by the child as much as the child is transformed by the adult. Ashley Montagu, a friend and author of fifty books, many of which are classics in human development, referred to this *reciprocal dynamic* as "growing young."

The truth about the human species is that in body, spirit, and conduct we are designed to grow and develop in ways that emphasize rather than minimize child like traits. We are intended to remain in many ways childlike; we were never intended to grow "up" into the kind of adults most of us have become.

What, precisely, are those traits of childhood behavior that are so valuable and that tend to disappear gradually as human being grow older? We have only to watch children to see the clearly displayed: curiosity is one of the most important; imaginativeness; playfulness; open-mindedness; willingness to experiment; flexibility; humor; energy; receptiveness to new ideas; honesty; eagerness to learn; and perhaps the most pervasive and most valuable of all, the need to love. All normal children, unless they have been [adulterated] corrupted by their elders, show these qualities all day every day of their childhood years. They ask questions endlessly; "Why?" "What is it?" What's it for?" "How does it work?"

They watch, and they listen. They want to know everything about everything. They can keep themselves busy for hours with the simplest toys, endowing sticks and stones and featureless objects with personalities and histories, imagining elaborate stories about them, building sagas that continue day after day, month after month. They play games endlessly, sometimes carefully constructing the rules, sometimes developing the game as they go along. They accept changes without defensiveness. When they try to accomplish something and fail, they are able to do it another way, and another, until they find a way that works. They laugh - babies learn to laugh and smile before they can even babble - and children laugh from sheer exuberance and happiness. Unless they suspect they may be punished for it, they tell the truth: they call the shots as they see them. And they soak up knowledge and information like sponges; they are learning

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all the time; every moment is filled with learning. How many adults retain these qualities into middle age?...

Most adults stop any conscious effort to learn in their early adulthood, and thereafter never actively pursue knowledge or understanding of the physical world we inhabit in any form. It is as though they believed that they had learned all they needed to know, and understand it all, and had found the best possible attitude toward it, by age eighteen or twenty-two or whenever they stopped their formal schooling. At this time they begin go grow a shell around this pitiful store of knowledge and wisdom; and from then on vigorously resist all attempts to pierce that shell with anything new....

The entire effort of the educating and training of children was [and is] aimed at making adults of them as soon as possible...The closer their behavior to that of adults the better...Imagination was [and is] frowned upon, even feared; curiosity was [and is] derided ("Curiosity killed the cat!"); free playfulness and humor were [and are] discouraged; open-mindedness was [and is] thought to be heretical; and honesty was [and is] often considered simple rudeness.

As for the most precious of all childlike qualities, the eagerness to learn; it was accepted by adults only so long as the subject was [and is] a "proper" one; otherwise it was [and is] forbidden.... Children who failed to thrive under this Spartan regime were themselves blamed for their failure [as is often the case today with the use of Ritalin and Prozac]. It occurred only to a few people that perhaps the fault lay in the failure of the adult world to understand the nature of childhood, and in fact to understand the development of human beings...

Adults fail to understand that those childlike qualities constitute the most valuable possession of our species, to be cherished, nurtured and cultivated [all the days of our lives]. They fail to realize that the child surpasses the adult by the wealth of his possibilities. In a very real sense infants and children implicitly know a great deal more concerning many aspects of growing than adults; adults, therefore, have more to learn from them about such matters than the latter have to learn from adults....

Children are mediaries, the go-betweens who, whenever we allow them to, help us discover our way toward humanity; in bringing them up we face ourselves, as in a mirror, in a clearer, brighter light.

Ashley Montagu

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For more information about *Magical Parent-Magical Child*, please visit:
Touch The Future

Nurturing

Revolutionizing how communities mentor and support parents, neighborhood by neighborhood, all across the land

Schools and government can't tell parents how to parent. It is up to us, individuals, neighbors and communities to meet this challenge. Parents and childcare providers need support. They need mentors. They need caring, empathic communities. They need to see and hear the best science and best childcare practices from around the world. Continuing education must be convenient, engaging, affordable, relevant and inspiring. Local businesses need to understand the needs of developing families. Communities need an efficient system to match local needs with local resources. *Nurturing* accomplishes all this by creating a subscription based continuing education and support network, neighborhood by neighborhood, all across the land.

Nurturing creates partnerships between civic sponsors (service organizations and corporations) and parents, educators and childcare providers. Every six weeks *Nurturing* delivers to these partnerships an inspired continuing education and support package paid for by local sponsors ($800 annually, less than $0.10/child/day). Each edition creates an invitation for parents, providers and civic sponsors to gather and explore together the challenges of raising children in our fast changing world.

The Nurturing Support System is affordable and local. It delivers an accredited curriculum, provides engaging media and peer mentoring opportunities, builds community, provides facilitator training, involves local businesses, creates distant learning opportunities, and meets local needs with local resources via the internet. *Nurturing* accomplishes these goals without government support and at little or no cost to parents or providers.

The need and market is vast. California has more than 45,000 licensed providers. *Head Start* served 880,000 parents in 2004. Imagine each Rotary International Service Club sponsoring one *Nurturing* partnership for five years. 31,000 clubs x 5y = 155,000 subscriptions serving 20 each = 3,100,000 parents, children and providers.

Imagine each Bank of America branch (5,880) sponsoring one tax deductible *Nurturing* center for five years. 5,880 x 5y = 29,400 subscriptions serving 20 = 588,000 parents, children and providers.

And each Wal-Mart location (5,170) sponsoring one tax deductible *Nurturing* center for five years. 5,170 x 5y = 25,850 subscriptions serving 20 = 517,000 parents, children and providers.

Each U.S Military base (4,700) sponsoring one *Nurturing* center for five years. 4,700 x 5y = 23,500 subscriptions serving 20 = 470,000 parents, children and providers.

Each of Toys R Us location (1,500) sponsoring just one tax deductible *Nurturing* center for five years. 1,500 x 5y = 7,500 subscriptions serving an estimated 150,000 children,

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parents and providers.

And each Target department store (1,351) sponsoring one tax deductible *Nurturing* center for five years. 1,351 x 5 = 6,755 subscriptions x 20 = 135,100 parents, children and providers.

By engaging, connecting and inspiring just six organizations *Nurturing* has the potential of touching the future of six million parents, children, providers, and teachers, civic leaders and small business in five years, neighborhood by neighborhood all across the land. And this is just the beginning. Plans are under way to bring *Nurturing* to Canada, Europe, Australia, India.

For information or to get involved visit www.nurturing.us.

With appreciation.

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Find out more about *Magical Parent, Magical Child,* about Michael Mendizza's work and other Touch the Future projects, become a member and subscribe to its monthly newsletter at the Touch The Future website.



Robin Grille

Robin Grille is an Australian psychologist and psychotherapist in private practice, with over fifteen years' experience working with individuals, couples and families. Robin has also taught and facilitated groups on body-oriented stress management methods. He is known for his articles on child development, parenting issues and family relationships, which have been published in Australia, USA, Canada, South Africa and Israel.

Robin is a Clinical Member of the Counsellors and Psychotherapists' Association (NSW), an Associate Member of the Australian Psychological Society and a committee member of the Australian Association for Infant Mental Health.

Robin Grille is the author of the recently published book *Parenting for a Peaceful World*.

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Parenting for a Peaceful World

In recent years, childhood education and development experts from around the world have learnt enormously about how the foundations of emotional intelligence develop in childhood. Based on leading-edge international research, *Parenting for a Peaceful World* shows how we can best nurture our children's emotional health – as well as how to understand ourselves based on our early childhood experiences. This book also shows how taking care of parents' and children's emotional wellbeing can be one of the most powerful contributions towards a peaceful, just, democratic and sustainable society.

Read ***Parenting for a Peaceful World*** and learn:

1. the five stages of core emotional development in early childhood.
2. how your early childhood experiences have affected your emotionality, your behaviour and your relationships.
3. how to promote your children's emotional intelligence so they can grow to have the most healthy and rewarding relationships with others, and fulfil their potential.
4. up-to-date research into child development, heredity vs environment
5. new understandings about the causes of childhood disorders (behavioural and psychological)
6. what leading-edge child-development research implies for early childhood education philosophy
7. new and exciting innovations in the philosophy of early childhood education
8. how child rearing practices have affected societies and international affairs throughout history.
9. how our child rearing choices can be the most powerful agents for positive social change and planetary healing.

Whether you are a parent, a teacher, a health professional, or just seeking to better understand yourself and your relationships so you can heal and grow, this book is for you.

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For more information about *Parenting for a Peaceful World*, please visit Robin Grille's website Our Emotional Health.

Parenting for a Peaceful World

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

WHAT CHILDREN REMEMBER: AND HOW THIS AFFECTS THEIR DEVELOPMENT

Most of us have been told at one time or another that children aren't supposed to remember anything that happens to them before roughly two years of age. What goes on before this age, even if emotionally traumatic, will therefore have no lasting impact. These words might be reassuring, if they didn't also mean by implication that our infants don't remember the love we have given them. This would mean that our love at this time has no lasting impact either. As science continues to throw open the mysteries of the brain, and the nature of memory, this kind of advice will vanish. We can now verify that everything that happens to an infant is stored in memory. Every emotionally meaningful experience, whether joyous or painful, has a lasting impact on a baby's developing nervous system, whether or not it is *consciously* recalled later. The way our world feels to us as babies influences our unfolding personality, emotionality and relating style for the long term, even without our visual or narrative recall. There are different kinds of 'memory', beyond the stories we can recount. And we 'remember' a lot more than we realise.

Two different kinds of memory

Within the limbic system of the brain - an area concerned with processing emotions - are the amygdala and hippocampus. The amygdala processes highly charged emotional memories, such as terror and horror. The hippocampus processes narrative, chronological memory, which then gets stored in the cortex. The amygdala is mature at birth, so babies are able to intensely feel the full range of emotion, even though they cannot process the content of the emotion and its relation to what is going on around them in the same way adults can. The hippocampus on the other hand, does not mature until sometime between the second and fourth years of life. While the hippocampus is immature, we are relatively unable to organise our memory meaningfully in terms of sequences of events. Only rarely does anybody consciously recall the content or context of early life memory. However, the storage of the *emotional* content of memory is facilitated by the amygdala. We therefore remember every emotion and physical sensation from our earliest days, and even if we have no clarity about the events that took place, these memories imbue the way we relate to each other as adults.

Just as memory can be divided up into the dual categories of 'short term' and 'long term', there are also two qualities of memory, 'explicit' and 'implicit'. 'Explicit' memory is the kind of memory that is conscious and enables us to tell a story that makes sense of what happened. This kind of memory does not reach full maturity until around three years of age. That is why most people feel as if their earliest recollections date back to around this age. 'Implicit' memory, however, is available from birth - more than likely earlier - it

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tends to be unconscious, and is encoded in emotional, sensory and visceral recall. In other words, what we don't remember with our minds, we remember with our bodies, with our hearts and our 'guts', and this has profound implications for our thinking, feeling, and behaviour through life.

Traditional medical orthodoxy once held that children under two years of age cannot record memory because their nerve tracts are not fully myelinised. We now know that the absence of myelin (a fatty sheath covering the nerve) slows down nerve impulses, but it does not prevent them from passing. Immature myelinisation does not interfere with memory.

The process of 'forgetting' is more superficial than we once thought: it only erases conscious recall. Even as adults we are mercifully capable of deleting any recall of traumatic events. If we are unlucky enough to face a situation of panic or terror that we feel helpless to escape, the brain secretes endogenous opioids in order to numb us to overwhelming emotional or physical pain. These brain chemicals also interfere with the storage of explicit memory, though implicit memory of the trauma remains available. Additionally, the excess adrenalin associated with the traumatic stress suppresses the functioning of the hippocampus, so we forget the context of the trauma (though it is possible to retrieve the explicit memory later, under hypnosis for instance).

Experiences that are emotionally too overwhelming to deal with are stored somatically, as a body memory. Thereafter they are expressed as an unconscious response to stress, and thus they modify personality. Henceforth, we over-react to situations that are even vaguely similar to the trauma, without the slightest idea why. Our seemingly 'irrational' over-reactions to mildly stressful or even innocuous situations are often due to traumatic experiences, usually dating back to childhood or infancy, which we cannot consciously recall.

The memory centres that govern narrative recall and emotional memory (body memory) can operate independently of each other. Despite being in a coma, one man went into physiological anxiety states when exposed to a smell that was associated with a personal trauma. Clearly, it is possible to have strong emotional reactions without conscious recall, even without consciousness! Another man whose damaged brain had lost all capacity for short-term memory, still reacted aversively to doctors who had conducted unpleasant tests on him, without any recollection of having met them. A brain-damaged woman who had also totally lost her short-term memory refused to shake the hand of a doctor who had earlier hidden a sharp pin in his hand. She was bewildered by her own refusal, since as far as she was aware, each time she met him was the first. So, much of what we think, feel and do is induced by implicit memories written into our bodies' tissues.

The body remembers

Our brain has an amazing capacity to make associations. Something or someone that 'reminds' our brains of a traumatic situation - a smell, a song, a person who looks like someone from our past - triggers our automatic, self-protective 'fight, flight or freeze' responses. This reflexive reaction occurs too quickly; before the information reaches the cortex where it can be evaluated rationally. That is why we sometimes over-react to

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things, people or situations reminiscent of a traumatic event, without any conscious recollection of the event in question.

There are occasions when implicit memory can be made explicit. Since implicit memory is 'stored' in the body, repeating certain movements, gestures, breathing patterns, or assuming certain postures associated with emotionally charged memories can bounce these memories into explicit, conscious awareness. It is as if the body releases its secrets to the mind. Many individuals have been able to retrieve traumatic memories, both from adult and infant experiences, when induced by strong emotions associated with the original experience. In certain states of consciousness, in psychotherapy, hypnotherapy or meditation, people have spontaneously recalled things that happened to them as babies. Many have remembered how it felt to be a baby, howling for a mother who would not come. In reconstructing a particular body posture, or talking about a similar emotionally charged event, the contextual memories of unbearable longing, rage or terror come back into focus. It is equally possible for sweet, joyous memories of a parent's loving face to resurface. This phenomenon is called 'state-dependent memory retrieval'. Detailed explicit memories can come back to our conscious recall when we are brought back to the emotional state that we were in at the time of the trauma. If treated appropriately, and within certain guidelines, these spontaneous regressions can be extremely healing.

In my own therapy, I have re-experienced some of the intense terror, followed by elation and relief that surrounded the event of my birth. I have also remembered the all-encompassing adoration I felt for my mother as a baby. Although I cannot easily re-capture such intense, early-life feelings in my relatively armoured adult body, the memories are not altogether irretrievable. Not one of our experiences is lost to us. Each experience, particularly those that are charged with emotion, adds to the complex mosaic of our personality.

Even if not consciously remembered, early memories show themselves through behaviour. It is intrinsically human to re-enact defensive reactions to forgotten traumas, though our reactions are no longer relevant. Often early memories become evident through persistent feelings that don't seem to relate to a present situation, or through bodily sensations that don't seem to make any sense. More commonly, these early implicit memories of emotional pain or hurt are indirectly evident through persistent difficulties in relationships, particularly in intimate relations. These relationship difficulties include the many social problems of chronic loneliness, isolation, violence, greed, power-abuse and addictions that beset our world. These are behavioural and relational symptoms of painful disturbances in our emotional development that elude our narrative memory. Often the task of psychotherapy is to help people make their own connections, between their actions and early emotional memory. More recently, it has been the task of psychohistorians to unravel the state of nations and link these to customary and common childhood experiences that escape discussion since they are stored as implicit, emotional memory.

How implicit memory affects relationships

For most of us, relationships are sometimes a struggle, though we might be unsure why this is so. Even the most 'functional' and successful among us can be evasive, clingy, or perhaps insensitive in relationships. These are just some of the problems of relationship

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that have their roots in hurts we felt at the advent of life. To some extent, most of us suffer from some behavioural manifestations of painful implicit memories.

Unwittingly, we each act as triggers for each other's defensive emotional reactions based on early traumas. This process underlies the dovetailing, dysfunctional social relationships that drive the disharmonious and exploitative aspects of societies. War, dictatorship and environmental abuse are collective defensive reactions based on early traumas that are stored as implicit memory, triggered by reminiscent situations. Our societies and cultures are collective expressions of both love and unremembered fear.

Here are some examples of commonly experienced relationship difficulties that are animated by painful childhood memories. Implicit memory - or body memory - explains why, for instance, a woman who was molested as a child remains fearful of intimacy - at least with men that 'remind' her of the perpetrator - even without a trace of conscious memory of the traumatic episodes.

A man fears being alone because it triggers emotional memories of terror as he cried in the crib, and no one came to comfort him. He has no recollection of these repeated events, and people in his life find him likeable and congenial. He has no understanding about his compulsive avoidance of solitude.

Another man, who experienced his parents' care as inconsistent and unreliable, learned to protect himself from unbearable feelings of loss by becoming overly clingy. As an adult, he is easily provoked into a jealous rage, and he is prone to co-dependent or enmeshed relationships. He is otherwise normal and happy and none but those who are closest to him notice his vulnerability.

Habitually violent or dominant behaviours develop along similar lines, as do a host of other defensive or compensatory attributes.

How implicit memory affects parenting

Unbeknownst to our 'rational' minds, we sometimes respond mistakenly to current challenges as if they were the hurts we suffered originally. This dynamic holds true in our relationships with our children. There are many reasons why, for instance, we might find our children's expressions of need aversive and overwhelming. Here is a common scenario: when a baby screams, our bodies react the same way as when our parents screamed at us as children, we are neurologically conditioned to escape or push away, rather than to respond with spontaneous compassion. Alternatively, our baby's cry might trigger in our bodies an implicit memory of a time when our own cries, as infants, were not met with a loving response. Either way, our baby's cries evoke our own painful memory, and so we seek refuge. We are all biologically capable of a wellspring of spontaneously loving responses toward our children, and toward each other. Sometimes this love is blocked by automatic defensive reactions to unresolved, implicitly remembered hurts. We are neither insensitive nor neglectful; we are *wounded.*

For centuries, parents have acted-out the symptoms of forgotten emotional injuries onto their children, through no fault of their own. The cruelties suffered by history's children have been the neurologically-mediated symptoms of the parents' own emotional traumas. Alongside the love we have received, we have all been, at one time or another,

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victims of parents' and teachers' unhealed post-traumatic stress reactions. The continuity of human suffering is the product of this cycle of violence and neglect, that ensues when the wounded, who have no access to healing, in turn wound the next generation.

Memories create 'personalities' - how 'states' become 'traits'

In most cases, a single painful event is not formative for a child's developing personality, unless it is intensely traumatic. Even small babies are able to process a certain level of anguish by crying, screaming, suckling and resting in their carers' arms. These are natural, expressive reflexes that help to return their nervous systems to a healthy balance. It is the persistent or repeated dynamics, such as leaving a baby to cry unattended, or regularly punishing a child, that throw their nervous systems off-balance, creating neurological and behavioural compensations that may turn out to be permanent. When recurrent, emotionally overwhelming experiences exceed the brain's capacity to return to the original balanced state, this alters beliefs, attitudes, and personality for the long term. That is how the emotional 'states' of early childhood can become personality 'traits'.

Once a neural response such as dissociation (freezing) or hyper-arousal (fight-or-flight) becomes over-activated, it takes lesser stresses to re-activate it. We either dissociate or over-respond more readily, even minor stresses set us off. That is because, as neuro-scientists believe, some of these early changes to brain chemistry and neuronal connections are long lasting, if not permanent. When parents repeatedly fail to tune-in to their child's emotional needs, the child gets over-sensitised to a broad range of even vaguely similar situations. He or she thus becomes predisposed to pattern-like, defensive responses.

Here is an example of how this might work. A child who is terrified of her punitive parents learns to protect herself by withdrawing; she becomes resigned or over-compliant, and thus less of a target. If this type of escape happens repeatedly, her nervous system adopts it as her characteristic, automatic defence. Henceforth, she isolates herself, or she tends to respond passively or meekly in social situations that augur even mild conflict. This way of relating would persist well into adulthood, so that others would recognise it as part of her 'personality'.

Infants tend not to respond with fight-or-flight, but with a 'freezing' or 'dissociative' response that involves surrender, resignation and detachment. The compliance and docility that many parents and teachers admire in children is often a defensive response to early trauma, emotional deprivation or harsh, authoritarian control. This adaptive passivity is erroneously seen by many adults as evidence that the child is OK, when in fact their terror and despair is masked, and unrecognised. Neuro-biologist Bruce Perry explodes the contemporary myth that states "children are resilient". They are not resilient, they are adaptive; their distinct personalities are cast around key emotional and relational experiences. Certainly, most children quickly 'forget' their hurts, and they bounce back full of playfulness and vigour. However, this does not mean they bounce back unchanged.

Adaptive defences are not pathological, they are skilful self-protective devices that make absolute sense given the way an infant experiences his or her world. Our interpersonal

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defensive pattens are solidly wired into our unique neurological and endocrinological systems, emerging as unconscious, automatic, and spontaneous impulses. It is this 'hard-wiring' that makes our interpersonal defences so reliable and protective, but also resistant to change. These defensive response tendencies comprise much of what we commonly refer to as our 'personality traits'. Each personality tends to be a unique blend of defences and gifts that are partly innate, and partly developed in response to the prevailing emotional and relational climate that it is born into.

Is healing possible?

We don't know exactly how completely the emotional hurts of childhood can be healed. Though some remarkable progress has been made in the psychological healing arts, we do suspect that there are limits to how much healing can take place once a child's immature and fast-growing brain has been subjected to chronic and persistent emotional stress. Some neuro-scientists go so far as to claim that "emotional memory is forever". While I agree that there are some aspects of our unique character structure that resist change, I also believe that many of our problematic relating patterns are amenable to healing and growth.

Every personality is a dynamic and growing system. We keep developing and adding new layers of wisdom to ourselves throughout life. Our emotional intelligence is open to learning if we are willing, and our childhood environment need not be a life sentence. However, the earlier the experience, the deeper the neurological impact, and the more the resulting behavioural patterns are resistant to change.

My experience as a psychotherapist - and as a client of psychotherapists - has shown me that profound healing and continued emotional development are eminently possible in adulthood. Nevertheless, it is wiser for us to place more emphasis on supporting emotional wellbeing from the very dawn of life - that is, when the brain is most absorbent and adaptable.

By tracing the universal pathways of early childhood emotional development, Part VI will offer many suggestions for how to secure your children's emotional health. As societies increase their efforts to protect children's wellbeing, we can achieve more than an alleviation of gross forms of suffering such as addiction and crime. We can also do much to alleviate more ordinary forms of suffering, among those we consider as 'well adjusted individuals' - the most 'normal' and 'ordinary' difficulties with human relations can also spring from painful implicit memories. Even in relatively democratic and functioning communities there is much we can do to deepen the fulfilment that is possible for the human heart.

Myth of the 'well-adjusted individual'

A number of child-rearing practices that are common these days can still be emotionally wounding to babies and children (as we'll see in Part VI), though they seem such ordinary practices that most people take them for granted. As most of us were raised in a 'socialising mode' era, we would have experienced these painful yet widely accepted practices, though we might dismiss them as 'normal'. In fact, many of our deepest emotional wounds may have resulted from practices that were considered 'good

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parenting' at the time. Though we might be essentially happy individuals, our bodies and nervous systems have not forgotten these hurts.

In this socialising mode age, few of us can claim that our parents and teachers did not hit us or shame us as little children, few of us can claim that our parents did not leave us to cry in our cribs until we panicked, or as babies made us sleep alone in a separate room. Though such occurrences are so routine these days that they hardly attract attention, early experiences such as these shape our distinct personality quite profoundly - without necessarily making us 'pathological' nor hopelessly 'neurotic'. On an emotional level, we remember these incidents quite distinctly, and they silently but powerfully shape our behaviour, our beliefs and attitudes.

The 'ordinary' emotional injuries that are not given the legal classification of 'abuse' and 'neglect', tend to manifest as problems of intimacy. These are lesser injuries arising from gaps in emotional sustenance that are ordinary results of socialising mode parenting and education. They affect us as individuals, and permeate our relationships on many levels.

When trying to understand human suffering, most of us tend to simplistically divide humanity into two groups, those who are 'crazy' or 'sick', and those who are 'normal'. Similarly, we conceive of childhood emotional development in two categories: those who experienced 'happy' childhoods, and those who are abused and/or neglected. The threshold of what constitutes abuse and neglect remains high, we only use these terms to describe extreme traumas.

This superficial view of human relations is based on a disease model, and it obscures from our view the multi-layered complexity of 'normal' psychological suffering. If a child grows up to exhibit socially 'normal' behaviour we say he or she, like a loaf in the oven, has 'turned out alright'. To attain this bland tag of normalcy or 'OK-ness', it seems sufficient for a child to grow up able to work, get married and raise more children, and avoid criminal behaviour. It is as if there are no more dimensions to the human experience than the trappings that are superficially visible.

Almost all individuals I have worked with in my practice have been successful and admired individuals. Their friends and colleagues would consider them to be contented and doing OK. As far as their peers are concerned, many of my clients are the epitome of the 'well adjusted individual'. Nevertheless, within the relative safety of my consulting room, they speak of great pain, often life-long pain - a hurt that becomes highlighted through the challenge of close relationships. I have become accustomed to seeing that, alongside a well of 'good' feelings, many of the most 'normal' people harbour long-held emotional wounds. Most of us have buried within a considerable depth of hurt, anger and fear, which remains hidden - even from ourselves. We conceal our private anguish and shame from each other; it even defies detection by professional diagnosticians and personality tests. It is manifestly possible, and in fact extremely common, for us to function capably, and keep smiling, while enduring long-held, secret pain - much of it dating back to early childhood. Though we may not realise it, our emotional wounds and defensive reactions are enacted in relationships with our loved ones, as 'ordinary' difficulties with closeness and intimacy.

The thin veneer of 'normalcy' is also apparent among our animal cousins. When rhesus monkeys were maternally deprived early in life, they were subsequently observed to

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adjust normally to their social group. The monkeys that had suffered early deprivation were indistinguishable from the rest, and observers would have declared them to be perfectly 'healthy' and 'happy'. However, under situations of stress, their responses were quite different, more exaggerated than those of their peers, "as if they were being traumatised all over again". It is similar with humans. Many of our unhealed emotional injuries are invisible to people around us, even to ourselves; they only emerge when we are emotionally stressed - or when we face intimacy and love.

'Normal' problems in relationships

So many of the behaviours we accept as 'normal', among 'well-adjusted' individuals, are unrecognised reactions to implicit memories of pain and loss. The 'normal' can be extremely jealous and possessive, while engaging in loveless sexual relations that lack contact or tenderness. Innumerable partners remain married for years with barely an inkling of awareness of each others' inner emotional worlds, not knowing how to - let alone why - share these with each other. The 'normal' have enormous difficulty exposing emotional vulnerability, we fear trusting each other with those parts of ourselves. Instead, we lose ourselves in a dizzying acquisition of excess consumer goods and capital, we anxiously hoard our resources - yet we scarcely enjoy what we have. Though life's beauty and riches surround us we are unable to be nourished to the depths of our being, and so, the 'normal' among us seek solace in gambling, tobacco, alcohol, pharmaceutical or recreational drugs, or endless hours in front of the TV. We have so strayed from our hearts and distrusted our passion that work has come to be synonymous with suffering and drudgery. Though we love our children, too often they feel burdensome to us - and in our overwhelmed states we hit them, shame them, or ignore their crying. All these are conventional social behaviours; they pass off as unremarkable in our culture - yet they speak of entrenched emotional pain.

Many ordinary traits that we take for granted, or blame on our genes - such as compulsive attention-seeking, seductive charm, paralysing shyness, gullibility, chronic discomforts around intimacy, an uncontrollable temper, mental or moral rigidity, self-effacing behaviour - are probably the results of child-rearing practices that are culturally accepted and integral to the socialising mode. These are our ordinary impairments to human relations. In fact, most of us would have answered a number of items in the questionnaire on 'emotional intelligence' (Chapter 22) in the negative. We endure or hide our pain, and 'get on' with our lives. We tell ourselves and each other that we are 'alright', doing 'just fine', content with our lot. But we remain a step back from the depth of joy, fulfilment and love that is the fullness of our human potential. A wholeness of intimacy with ourselves and those we love eludes us, we fear it and long for it all at once. While Part VI is intended to assist your understanding of your children's core emotional developmental stages, it may also help you to gain valuable insights into personal areas of emotional difficulty, since we have all passed through these key formative stages.

In Part VI we will look at root causes of ordinary emotional wounds, as well as causes of the most problematic social ills. There has been such an explosion of knowledge about how to promote healthy brain development and emotional intelligence, that we may have to reconsider the limits of human potential. I believe that we have barely begun to tap into the collective human capacity for joy, loving relationships and harmonious community.

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[Endnotes have been omitted]

To find out more about Robin Grille's book: 'Parenting for a Peaceful World' visit this website: www.our-emotional-health.com



Laura M. Ramirez

Laura Ramirez lives in the sage-dotted foothills of Nevada with her husband Larry, a Pascua-Yaqui Native American Indian, and her two sons Dakotah and Colt. Laura has been publishing *Family Matters Online Parenting Magazine* for the past six years. Her articles feature a mix of child development and Native American philosophy and are available for browsing on her website: www.parenting-child-development.com

Laura also writes about child discipline, learning disabilities, family values and the joys and challenges of raising children.

Laura Ramirez is the author of the book *Keepers of the Children: Native American Wisdom and Parenting*.

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Keepers of the Children: Native American Wisdom and Parenting

The Parenting Book that Will Deepen and Sweeten Your Relationship with Your Child.

As a parent, what is your greatest hope? Think about it for a moment …

If you imagined the best possible outcome for you and your child, what would you foresee? If you could raise your child to lead a life of joy and meaning, would you feel fulfilled?

In *Keepers of the Children*, Laura Ramirez uses little known Native American concepts and teaching stories to show parents how to raise children to know their nature and use their strengths to create lives of meaning and contribution. By raising children to unfold the gifts within their hearts, parents touch the essence of your own. In this way, parenting is a process of becoming for child and parent.

In *Keepers of the Children*, you will learn:

- How to encourage your child's uniqueness and set him upon the path of purpose from the start.
- How to teach your child to act from integrity and strength.
- The true meaning of discipline: How to teach your child to make life-affirming choices on her own.
- How a knowledge of nature teaches your child the basics of psychology so she will avoid the traps of peer pressure and those who intend to do her harm.
- All about child development and your development as a parent.
- Why parenting is a path of personal growth for child and parent.
- How to create a lifelong, mutually fulfilling relationship with your child.

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My personal review of *Keepers of the Children* from the September 2004 issue of the *Parental Intelligence* newsletter:

Keepers of the Children: Native American Wisdom and Parenting by Laura M. Ramirez

From the Preface to *Keepers of the Children*:

"As a white woman married to a Native American man, my family is a mix of cultures. The parenting ideas presented in this book are a reflection of this cultural blend. In these pages, I have woven together an understanding of child development with little known Native American wisdom. The result is a unique blend of ideas that shows parents how to raise children to know their nature, hone their strengths and create lives of meaning, purpose and contribution. By helping children create fulfilling lives, parents deepen their sense of satisfaction with their own."

In her book *Keepers of the Children*, Laura Ramirez has combined her expertise in child development with her understanding of Native American perceptions and the customs and rituals that have grown from them to produce an analysis of the art and science of successful parenting that's both comprehensive and highly original.

This is much more than a 'training manual' for the aspiring parent. It's a deeply spiritual book that explores important issues of human nature and development that transcend both Native American and 'western' cultures. It will appeal to parents of all races and creeds who desire to expand their abilities beyond the mere mechanics of 'child management' to the attainment of true parenting success.

Laura Ramirez writes knowledgeably and with passion about the necessity of having a clear vision for our children and of understanding the sacred nature of our part in their lives; of the importance of honouring our children as unique individuals and of constantly promoting their wellbeing and development even as we work on ourselves to become the best role models for them that we can be.

This book, once read, can be referred to again and again for good ideas, for comfort and support, for hope and inspiration. Virtually every page is a reminder of something we can do as parents to make the world a better place for our children and for ourselves and others.

A work of meaning with its heart very much in the right place, *Keepers of the Children* is a very welcome addition to my personal library of parenting books and I'm sure it would be to yours, too.

Buy yourself a copy and join Laura in her mission: to raise a generation of children who use their strengths to create a sense of belonging, meaning and contribution. "Such children will grow up to be adults who are lights unto our world."

For more information about *Keepers of the Children*, please visit:
www.walk-in-peace.com

Keepers of the Children: Native American Wisdom and Parenting

Chapter 3
The Nature of Identity

A child who is raised to know his nature grows up to lead a purposeful life.

Encouraging Your Child's Quest for Identity

The quest for human identity is the journey of a lifetime. Some people lead their lives without ever truly knowing themselves, while others take an entire lifetime to catch a glimmer of who they are. Those who fail to know their nature lead a life of self-confusion, self-destruction, rage and desperation. Although they have never known their nature, they feel the tragedy of its loss.

Like an adult, a child's emotional and spiritual needs are met by discovering who he is and how he can contribute to his family and the world. A child who knows himself and heeds his inner voice will grow up to find his purpose. Purposeful living creates meaning and fulfilment.

Knowing yourself and finding your purpose give you a place in life. Like a star in the evening sky, you're connected to other stars and everything in the cosmos. You shed your light into the darkness, allowing others to see and revealing a frequency that is uniquely yours. In giving what you are here to give, you feel a sense of place, meaning and connection to something bigger than yourself.

Giving your child the tools to lead a fulfilling life is the greatest expression of parental love. Are you willing to teach your child to lead a purposeful life, even if you aren't yet doing so yourself?

Think about the alternative. Look around you and you will see it - the dull despair or silent rage behind some people's eyes. But you don't need to look any further than their actions. You can see it in people who self-medicate with alcohol or drugs. You can see it in those who have traded their passion for a job that pays, but slowly robs them of their soul.

The philosopher, Joseph Campbell, once said, "The privilege of a lifetime is knowing who you are." This privilege is earned by finding the courage to express what is in your heart. It is the inner world that gives birth to our experience of the outer.

As a parent, one of the most generous gifts you can give your child is to show him how to earn this privilege. You can do it even if you haven't earned it yet yourself. In teaching your child to know his heart, you'll come face to face with your nature.

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Let's take Joseph Campbell's quote and apply it to parenthood: *The privilege of parenting is getting to know your child.* By helping your child discover who he is, you'll experience the depths of parent-child intimacy and uncover yourself more fully in the process. For those who haven't yet walked the path of self-discovery, parenthood offers a second chance.

Embracing Humbleness

My husband, Larry Ramirez, is a Native American psychotherapist. In his tribe, it is believed that man is the humblest of all creatures because he is born without direction. In order to find his way in life, man must find his nature. This is the purpose behind the Vision Quest.

Unlike humans, animals are born "knowing" who they are. Although an animal may not consciously *know* himself, he follows his instincts which make him behave like the animal he is.

In Chapter 2, I shared a children's story I wrote called *How Coyote and Beaver Became Good Friends*. As you may remember, Beaver takes ill and Coyote invites him to his den to nurse him back to health. Coyote kills several small animals for his friend to eat, but Beaver isn't interested. Without proper nourishment, Beaver grows weaker until finally he refuses water. Frightened that his friend will die, Coyote paces outside by the pond. When he notices the differences between his den and Beaver's dam, he realizes how different coyotes and beavers are. Knowing this helps Coyote see beyond himself and recognize the nature of another being.

Like animals, we have physical needs, but we also have emotional, mental and spiritual needs. We recognize animals by observing what they *do*; we know ourselves by *doing* what we *love*.

Animals instinctually "know" themselves, while humans have to "find" themselves. While this distinction should make us humble and encourage us to become students of the natural world, it makes us arrogant instead. It's an arrogance borne of fear because behind our claim that the brain and its technology can solve life's mysteries, are a bunch of humans who deny their basic nature.

Man's fear of nature has divorced him from the animal world. In his arrogance, he assumes that his claim to consciousness elevates him above it, but consciousness without conscientiousness makes us less than human. Rather than embracing the mystery and allowing it to unfold, man seeks to control, dissect and destroy it. He hasn't realized that the Nature that surrounds him is a metaphor of self that leads to an understanding of *his* nature and a profound grasp of the universe.

To find your nature, you must accept that unlike animals, you were born without direction. Although it may seem scary at first, accept it. Rather than hiding behind your intellect, let helping your child discover his nature become part of your Vision Quest and a developmental task for you both. As a human being, this is one of the greatest adventures you will ever undertake. As a parent, it is a privilege to witness your child's spiritual unfolding.

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Although this book will not specifically teach you how to find *your* nature, as you assist in your child's *becoming*, you'll touch your essence many times.

Creation Unfolding

Nature is our greatest teacher and shows herself in a myriad of forms. When we align ourselves with Nature, we glean her secrets. Like any clever teacher, Nature's language is couched in symbolism that leads towards subjective truth. Through observance of the natural world, we discover our nature, the order of things and the possibility of transcendence.

In *The Biology of Transcendence*, Joseph Chilton Pearce points out that Nature repeats the history of our evolution each time a human fetus is conceived. At conception, each of us begins life as a single cell that replicates into many. As cell differentiation takes place, the fetus develops gills, a tail and slowly achieves a more human-looking form. In this way, Nature shows us that we have all emerged from the same primordial soup.

Pearce emphasizes that the structure of the human brain also reveals our evolution. We are born with a triune brain – a reptilian brain, enfolded by a mammalian brain, topped by the uniquely human prefrontal cortex.

At birth, a baby has one hundred billion neurons. These neurons emerged from a single cell that began its evolution in the womb. Stimulation from the child's environment causes the neurons to migrate throughout the brain, specialize and connect the various structures. The environment is the stimulus for reinforcing certain pathways and pruning others. As Pearce points out, the brain mirrors its early environment while building a structure that can survive it. Love and bonding create interconnections that increase complexity, function and the capacity to thrive.

The prefrontal cortex gives us the capability to reason, to create art and written language – something other mammals cannot do. But there is a price for this higher function – a heightened sense of responsibility. Since Native Americans believe that form follows function, they know that our *capacity* for higher awareness is what dictates our *responsibility* as caretakers of the Earth.

What mainstream American culture has seen historically as its relationship to Earth is not a relationship at all because its focus has been on man's *power over* Earth, rather than his *place* in it. Our relationship with Earth reflects our ability to relate to others, particularly our children. The basic difference in philosophies between mainstream and native cultures explains why white people once viewed their children as possessions, while Native Americans saw children as spiritual equals.

The white man's tendency to separate the part from the whole in an attempt to comprehend it means that he often misses a bigger truth. To truly understand the nature of a thing, we must observe it within its context. For example, if you spot a spider crawling across your picnic table, you may swat it because you see it as a pest. However, when you view the spider within the context of its environment, you realize that its function is to help control the insect population and protect the delicate balance of life on Earth.

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Our tendency to focus on the content, while ignoring the context, is a habit that divides us along political, cultural and religious lines. A good example of this is the conflict between the evolutionists and the creationists. Whenever people have a piece of the puzzle, they divide into separate camps and cling rigidly to their view. As David Hawkins points out in *The Eye of the I*, in defending their positions, such people miss a higher truth: evolution *is* the unfolding of creation. Creation *contains* the seeds of evolution. Each gives rise to the other in a stunningly dynamic interplay. In much the same way, your child assists in your *becoming* as you strive to teach and model for him what it means to be a mature human being.

When you understand this, you see what Native Americans have long known – human beings are life's keepers. Although we have evolved past life's lower forms, they are not *below* us, but *within* us. We are connected to everything because we have passed through all life's permutations.

To substantiate this, recent research by the Heart Math Institute has discovered neurons in the heart. This makes the heart our fourth brain. Like the triune structure in our head, the heart evolves through appreciation, love and caring. The heart determines who we are, what we love and what we have to give.

Animals *know* themselves by following their instincts, while humans *find* themselves by following the heart. The heart is the *organ of purpose and direction*. The heart determines nature. Native Americans have long known what science is only beginning to divine. As Jimalee Burton of the Ho-Chee-Nee tribe once said, "The white man thinks with his head – the Indian thinks with his heart."

Development of the parental heart is fostered through love and caring. In this way, your relationship with your child provides you with many chances to unfold the petals of your heart. Instead of relying solely on the brain's ability to separate, learn to use the integrative function of the heart.

Development of the child's heart is facilitated through his relationship with others and a growing awareness of who he is and what he loves.

Although brain development and physical growth is believed to stop in the late teens or early twenties, development of the heart – the fourth brain and vehicle of transcendence – is ongoing and culminates in the adult realization of purpose, compassion and oneness. The evolution of your heart begins with the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual stewardship of your child. Borrowing Native American terminology, we may refer to these as the Four Directions of parenting.

Nature is our teacher and our Heaven here on Earth. Heaven is waiting to be discovered in each minute expression of God's nature – in you, in me and particularly, in our children who are fresh from the lap of God.

The Truth about Cats and Dogs

Most people don't realize that Native Americans were the first psychologists because they understood that observation of the animal world gave them a basic understanding of

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human nature. Rather than holing yourself up in the forest to learn nature's secrets, start in your own backyard. Begin with what you know about cats and dogs.

Although cats and dogs are both animals, they have different natures. For the most part, cats are independent, while dogs are more reliant upon relationship. If you approach a cat, she might snub you, but most dogs won't turn down your affection. You might roughhouse your dog to show your love, but you would never rough up a cat.

Although there are generalities that apply to certain classes of animals, there are unique differences within each type. For instance, my akita, Cochise, turns his nose up at bread, while my akita, Basheen, performs tricks for it. Believe it or not, this dog chooses bread over meat. Knowing my dogs' likes and dislikes enables me to honor their differences and acknowledge their uniqueness.

It's the same with children. Paying attention to what they like or dislike is how you begin to see their nature.

Different animals must be treated differently because their nature requires it. Things are no different in the human world. You can't raise two children in exactly the same manner because the differences in their nature create a dynamic, which determines how *you* act. If you fool yourself into thinking that treating your kids exactly the same is fair, then you're committing an injustice. First of all, it can't be done. Second and more importantly, by failing to recognize the differences between your children, you deny the uniqueness of their nature.

In America, many of us celebrate the differences between ethnic groups, while a few do not. The same thing happens in families. Some parents celebrate their children's differences, while others pretend that all children are the same. In addition to being lazy, this is inhumane. It is the parents who are afraid of life and don't know themselves who force their children to become replicas of each other or of themselves. Such parents are often envious of their children's high energy, passionate curiosity and firm knowledge of their preferences because it reminds them that they've barely scratched the surface of their lives.

A child lives deeply and fully. A child is in the moment. For a mother who was seldom permitted to experience this freedom as a child, it might be difficult to witness her child enjoying what she was forbidden. It's not that such parents don't want a better life for their children, but that the child's expression of freedom acts as a trigger for their unconscious rage at never having had the opportunity to experience this themselves.

Although your child may look like you, he is not you. He may mimic your behavior, he may swallow your beliefs, but he is *not* you. One of the most tragic errors you can make as a parent is to shape your child into what I call a "mini-me". Don't make the mistake that Kevote made in *Spirit-Boy and the Gift of Turquoise*. It's an error that sacrifices your relationship and symbolically or literally, can cost your child his life.

When thinking about the importance of knowing your child's nature, consider this: it is the nature of a bird to fly. While no one questions the unfolding of a bird's abilities, parents often deny their children's natural gifts. By doing so, they clip their wings before they've had the chance to try them. A child who has never had the opportunity to test his

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wings has little hope of reaching his full potential. This is a tragic loss for all of us. Parents who are compelled to make their child into a mini-me do so because, on some level, they yearn to relive their childhood. These parents had parents who fashioned them into their likeness. And so the torch is passed.

A Family of Many Species

The natural world is comprised of many different animals. Each class of animals has a nature and there are individual differences within each type. Your family is no different.

Although you share the same genetics, your family can be viewed as a pack of dissimilar "animals" because each person has a different nature. As a parent, your job is to see and *en*courage your child's recognition of her nature. Turning to Mother Nature will illustrate this point.

In the jungle, there are gorillas, elephants and piranhas. Even if you've never been to the jungle, you know you wouldn't see a gorilla acting like a fish. This doesn't happen in the animal kingdom, but in the human world, it happens all the time.

In the human jungle, human "monkeys" act like human "tigers" because they don't know what animal they are. Perhaps because we've grown up with the knowledge that we're all human, we assume this means we're all the same. But there are many different "animals" in the human world. The first step in knowing ourselves is to recognize our nature.

This fact of nature is seldom acknowledged in schools where children's behavior is normalized and individual expressions are often discouraged. It's not recognized in families in which parents lump their children into the same category in an effort to make things easy or fair. Of course, doing so is neither fair nor just. And it's certainly not easy on the child. A parent's failure to recognize and encourage her child's nature is at the root of human desperation.

If your child doesn't know his nature, he doesn't have a basic understanding of himself. Such a child grows up alienated from his heart. He feels like a fraud when he notices that his behavior is not consistent and that his 'values' are predicated upon the situation or whom he's with. He develops a tendency toward self-righteousness and becomes a public and/or private critic of others. As harsh as he is with others, he's even harsher with himself. As he grows, he tries to push away the void of self-despair with alcohol, drugs, sex, overwork or other forms of excessiveness. The faster he runs from the void, the more it consumes him because it is within.

Getting to know your child's nature is a privilege. In no other endeavor in life do you have the opportunity to nurture the growth of something as beautiful or profound.

Remember that those who consider themselves above the animal world are lost because they have misplaced the thread that connects them to the natural world and to their nature. Although this is probably the opposite of what you've been taught, please consider the value of these words. The animal kingdom is symbolic of the human world and there is much that it can teach us.

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The first and most important lesson that we can learn from our animal brothers and sisters is that unlike them, we were born without direction. In order to find our purpose in life, each individual must find his or her own way.

The Nature of Nature

If you have more than one child, then you know that each of your children was born with a unique personality. Although experience shapes a child, she is more than a product of her environment. Even though your child's genetics determine her appearance and aspects of her personality, she is more than her genetic profile. Although your love nurtures and encourages her, she is more than a product of your love.

Your child's nature is the essence that grounds her in the physical world. Although love and experience will set her along a certain course, her nature reveals her purpose here on Earth.

A child's nature is intangible and is known through its expression. Like the natural world around us, it's a mystery of sorts. Although lack of love and repeated trauma can disconnect a child from his nature, at its core, it is unalterable.

Your child's nature can be likened to the wind: although you can hear it rustling through the leaves and watch it quiver through tall grasses, it is invisible, except through its effects. Nature is revealed through its continuum – the wind can be creative or destructive – it can seed the land with wildflowers, cool and sweep the planet or it can rip apart your home. A child's nature is much the same, except that its expressions can be channeled by parental love. When tempered with humanity, it expresses itself positively. If ignored or broken through cruelty or harsh indoctrination, it destroys itself and others.

Teaching your child about her nature helps her to own her inner strengths. Teaching her that her uniqueness is a gift to give to the world will inspire her to develop it and make a contribution that benefits us all. As your child's strengths grow, she will begin to recognize the special qualities in others and encourage them to shine. This is crucial in today's world in which so many people believe that happiness exists outside them.

Raising your child to know her nature encourages self-direction. Self-direction is the compass that will guide your child through the perils of adolescence and around the traps of indoctrination. For some it is experienced as a voice, a thrum or an inner stillness; for others it is a vision, an impulse or a knowing. However it is experienced, it is a call to take the leap of faith that initiates the journey of unfolding.

Help your child find this path by teaching her about the natural world. Discuss the nature of different plants and animals. Teach her to know animals by what they *do*: dogs bark, cats meow and birds chirp.

Once she understands the natural world, teach her that in the human world, things are not always what they seem. Human animals often reveal themselves in covert ways: what they say doesn't always coincide with what they do, particularly in times of opportunity or conflict. Since your child will have already been primed by her observations of the natural world, she'll have an easier time spotting the different animals that comprise the human race.

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Losing and Finding the Way

When babies are born into the world, they are connected to their center. They cry when they are hungry and smile when they feel happy. Their ability to communicate their feelings through facial and vocal expressions gives parents the cues to meet their needs.

As children emerge from the toddler years, they learn that certain expressions are unacceptable in certain situations. Expressions that were previously met with open arms may be met now with disapproval, as parents attempt to "grow up baby" and socialize their child. This can be a confusing time for children because they're used to being encouraged. While yesterday, they were applauded for their ability to talk, walk and run, now their parents tell them to sit still and be quiet. Although children must learn to live with others, it's tragic that they often lose themselves in the process. During the socialization process, all children are at risk for this. When children are taught to deny their feelings and sacrifice themselves for others, they suffer what I call a "rupture of the heart."

The road back to the heart is not straight and narrow, but circuitous. In this way, losing the self may be part of finding it. Although a rupture of the heart may be an unavoidable consequence of human socialization, there are certain precautions that can be taken to lessen its severity, so that a child grows up with a strong, intact sense of self.

When utilized by parents, these precautions become proactive strategies that help children stay attuned to their nature, even as they are learning how to live harmoniously with others. These strategies include: polishing the stone, naming nature, engaging interests and helping your child become people-smart. Using these strategies will help your child know herself, claim her strengths and follow the compass of the heart.

Polishing the Turquoise

In my husband's tribe, when a woman is pregnant, it is said that she has a piece of turquoise inside her womb. When that turquoise is born into the world, it is the parents' job to polish it until its matrix is revealed.

Each piece of turquoise has a different matrix. The matrix is a symbol of a child's uniqueness. Since turquoise is a mix of green and blue – of Earth and Sky – it represents the union of form and spirit. Your child came through you, but he is *not* you because his matrix is different from yours.

This striking metaphor aptly describes our role as parents. Our job is to help our children find their uniqueness, so they can give it to the world. Helping your child find himself is an honor. Not only have you had the privilege of being present at his physical birth, you have the opportunity to witness the unfolding of his spiritual nature.

Like Kevote in *Spirit-Boy and the Gift of Turquoise*, your job is to encourage what your child loves. By *polishing the turquoise* with love and wonder, you reveal its matrix – the gift the Creator placed in each child's heart. The expression of this gift gives a child a sense of purpose. Purpose leads to contribution, self-actualization and personal fulfilment.

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The matrix in the turquoise is a unique expression of nature that never existed before and will never exist again. Without it, life is meaningless. This is why the greatest quest we undertake in life is the search for identity. It's a universal quest that cuts across both time and culture. As a generation that has been influenced by New Age beliefs, we must embrace the knowledge that we only have *this* lifetime in which to claim our strengths and make a difference. Even if you believe in multiple lives, you must not allow this to guide you because then it becomes too easy to be lazy or give up entirely if you think that your work can be continued in another life.

You have this life to make an impact. Never again will you exist in this way, in this body, with these particular characteristics, in this family comprised of these personality types and in this specific space-time continuum. Your nature combined with the insights gleaned from personal experience enables you to realize your purpose here on Earth.

The most spiritual task of parenthood requires helping your child find his nature and giving him the tools to reconnect with it during trying times. If you're still searching for your nature, then you can appreciate the gift a parent gives when she acts as a mentor from the start, helping to ground her child in the realization of his nature.

Although I've quoted Thoreau before, his words are appropriate here again: "Most men lead lives of quiet desperation." To this I reply that a child who is taught to follow his nature will create a fulfilling life. If you help your child uncover his interests and abilities at each stage of development, he will grow up expressing his natural gifts. In this way, he will not have to lose himself to find himself because he will have been living from his center all along.

Naming Nature

For centuries, parents have been providing for their children's physical needs and thought that was enough. In Maslow's "Hierarchy of Human Needs" the physical is first. While taking care of physical and emotional needs may have been sufficient one hundred years ago, now that modern conveniences have afforded us leisure time and time for self-reflection, we've become increasingly aware of our spiritual needs. In a society that is disconnected from Nature, it is crucial to be connected to the self. As parents who envision the highest for our children, we must help them find their nature (or "spiritual intelligence"), so they move beyond a life of mere survival and learn what it means to thrive.

This is accomplished in other cultures through naming ceremonies. In the Native American culture, typically, the grandmother gives the child his spiritual name. Among native peoples, you're not a real woman until you've become a *grand*mother because by then, you have polished the turquoise heart of many a child. The same is true of a grandfather – you become a real man after you've done what is necessary to raise a child into an adult who is *mature* enough to raise children of his own. Once again, we see the emphasis on stewardship and how action determines role – in this case, naming the nature of a child.

Giving a child a spiritual name serves four purposes. First, it distinguishes him from other members of the family or tribe. A child who knows his nature has a strong sense of

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identity. His name is proof that his uniqueness has been acknowledged by the elders of the tribe.

Second, his spiritual name gives him a sense of belonging to something greater than himself. A spiritual name is something that he grows into. This gives him a sense of responsibility to himself and others because he has a name that he must live up to and a purpose to unfold.

Third, a spiritual name gives him a sense of meaning and direction. Within his nature are the seeds of his awakening – his identity, means of belonging and contribution to the whole.

Fourth, his spiritual name is a form of self-preservation that grounds him securely to the Earth. While a child's given name may be Frank, his spiritual name may be "Running Deer." (Keep in mind that Native American spiritual names are given in native languages, rather than in English.) The fact that this image has an action attached to it reminds him that in order to be realized his nature must be expressed. Since the vehicle of expression is the body, the child learns that he must care for it in order to allow its full articulation. In this way, the physical and the spiritual are intertwined. The image conjured by his spiritual name which is a metaphor-in-motion connects him with the apparent and subtle attributes of his nature from which he will take direction, despite external circumstances. For instance, when Frank is feeling down, the powerful attributes of his spiritual name will call him from his isolation and remind him of his purpose. In this way, his spiritual name gives him a sense of inner power that helps him rise above the struggles and trivialities of life.

Although naming rituals originated with Native Americans and other indigenous cultures, don't worry that such a practice will conflict with your religious beliefs. Religion is defined as a particular faith and its means of worship, while spirituality focuses on our connections to self and others. In this sense, religion is the content, while spirituality is the context. Where religion divides us into separate camps, spirituality unites us in our humanness. The techniques described herein are spiritual and will not conflict with your beliefs.

Before we can connect with others, we must have a means of feeling connected to the self. There's no better illustration of spirituality than in the interconnectedness of Nature. This is why finding our nature and naming it is not a religious practice, but a spiritual task because in nature, we find our gift to others.

We need people. We need each others' strengths. Each child needs to find out who he is, so he can weave his own glistening strand into the web.

Giving Your Child a Spiritual Name

To choose your child's spiritual name, look at his strengths, attributes and what he loves to do. Watch your child for a couple of days and notice what he most enjoys doing with his body. Does he like to jump, whistle, tumble, sing, whisper, screech, dance, smile, run, laugh or giggle? Notice an activity in which he engages with abandon and write it down.

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Make a list of your child's attributes. Is he strong, smart, fast, quick, caring, courageous, adventurous, happy-go-lucky, kind-hearted, loving, curious, industrious, affectionate, patient, creative, contemplative, fierce or loyal? Record his strengths. Take a week or so and read these attributes during quiet moments. You might not get an animal image right away, but sooner or later, it will come – maybe while you're vacuuming or in the shower, while you're driving, falling asleep at night or awakening in the morning. When the image comes, write it down.

Combine the action with the animal name. For instance, you might have a name like "Spinning Tiger," "Dancing Mouse" or "Laughing Hawk". Don't worry if the action seems to contradict the nature of the animal. Trust what comes. Don't shy away from names like "squirrel" or "monkey" due to unflattering connotations, although for the benefit of your child, I recommend that you choose animals that are native to your continent. What is most important is that the name aptly captures your child's strengths and what he likes to do.

Don't worry that you may not have picked the *right* spiritual name. There is not *one* right name. As your child matures, the deeper meaning of his spiritual name will be revealed to him through his interests, experiences, insights and reflections. It's not up to you to assign a meaning to his name – your challenge is to choose a name that most accurately depicts his physicality and attributes as a child. What is most important is that his name connects him to a place and time when he was most connected to and expressive of his nature. If a child is in that preconscious stage, when he's not yet been indoctrinated with what he's *supposed to be* or how he's *supposed to act*, he instinctively follows his nature, although he's unaware of it. Through his physical proclivities and natural strengths, he's closer to his animal spirit than perhaps at any other time.

While it is up to you to carefully choose your child's spiritual name, it is up to him to discover its meaning. Meaning is personal and has many levels of interpretation, so as long as you commit yourself to seeing what is before you, you will come up with a resourceful name.

Positively associate your child with his spiritual name. For instance, if you have a child who likes to climb and leap off things and you see him engaging in these activities, say with enthusiasm, "There's my Climbing Cougar." If your child is fiercely loyal and protective, when she displays these attributes say, "You are like the wolf: fierce, yet protective of your loved ones." If your child is wild and free, she could remind you of animals as different as a hawk or mustang. The label matters less than the feeling of authenticity it evokes.

If your child is at least five years old, you can create a ceremony in which you give him his spiritual name. This can be as simple as creating a quiet space, lighting a candle and telling him that now he's older and you have seen what is in his heart, you are giving him a spiritual name that describes his nature. Explain that this is different from his given name because it is private and will only be used in a sacred way by those who truly know him. It is a name that celebrates the best in him and the things he likes to do. It's a tool to help him remember how strong he is when he forgets. (Older children can be given animal spirit necklaces that are emblematic of their nature. See the Resources page at the end of [the book *Keepers of the Children*]. For a description of the naming ceremony that I gave my children, see the parenting workbook that is available from my website.)

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The author, Hermann Hesse once said, “Every man has only one genuine vocation: to find the way to himself.” Since it’s a hobby of mine to take great quotes and alter them in a manner that best serves parenting, I’ll take the liberty of misquoting Mr. Hesse: *Every parent has one genuine duty: to help their child find the way to himself.”* As a parent, make this your number one rule of engagement.

Engaging Your Child’s Interests

In American society, ‘quiet desperation’ runs deep. We have more money, education and leisure time than any other nation in the world, yet from a big perspective, these surface achievements haven’t improved the quality of our lives or deepened our relationships with our children. In fact, the source of quiet desperation can often be traced back to childhood – to cruel or indifferent parents or parents who spent little time or had no interest in their kids.

Although this sounds discouraging, there is a cure. The medicine for ‘quiet desperation’ is a daily dose of passion. Your child’s passionate interests reveal his nature and unveil his purpose. This means that parents must encourage their children’s interests.

Keeping children attuned to their interests is fairly easy because they’re extremely vocal regarding the subjects about which they care. The key is to learn how to *listen*. Many parents hear, but do not listen. According to *The New Oxford American Dictionary, listen* comes from the Old English *hlynan*, which means to “pay attention.” While hearing engages your ears in the perception of sounds, listening engages the heart and mind in true communication. The art of listening requires you to be alert to the cues beyond the words. Paying attention in this way helps you to perceive what your child is trying to communicate, which is not always the same as what he says.

You’ve heard the old saying: “Children should be seen and not heard.” Although this was a common saying thirty years ago, it’s not used much today. If you discard one saying in your parents’ or grandparents’ bag of quips, make it this one. Children must be seen and heard and in order to feel loved and cherished, they must be *listened to*.

When you listen to your child, you acknowledge him. When this happens with consistency, a child feels *seen* in his entirety, which fosters bonding and a feeling of self-worth. When your child gets your attention by sharing stories, concerns or interests, he won’t need to get your attention in negative ways. In fact, ploys for negative attention may be signs that your child is crying to be listened to.

Listening to your child is your way of being present – of being there for him. Remember that listening requires much more than hearing words. It’s an embrace of the whole person: his demeanor, facial expressions, posture, body language, tone, content, subtext and understanding of his nature. When you listen, you establish a connection. Without this, your child will fall into trouble and despair.

When your child shares her passions with you, consider it a gift. If you’re financially minded, think of it as an investment. Your child is the investor and you are the bank. When your child invests you with her passion, give it back *with interest*. You do this by listening attentively, asking questions and physically engaging your child. This may

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require playing a game of catch, making a finger-painting or watching your child's favorite show. When you ask your child a question about her interests, she'll feel a surge of pride at being able to answer it, particularly when she knows that you didn't know the answer. This will allow her to feel like she knows something, which will inspire her to engage her interests further. There's no greater rush for a child than to feel that she can help someone or teach someone something that she knows. Since sharing interests requires the art of conversation, it's magical in the sense that it connects two hearts in space and time.

When you learn to "listen with your blood," as one of my teachers used to say, you engage your child in full contact with your love. In its highest terms, loving another means having a genuine interest in their highest good, which requires encouraging them to know their nature and follow their dreams. Any other form of parental "love" is rooted in self-interest, which is driven by dependency or the desire for control.

Poke-MOM

Although the Pokemon® craze may have passed somewhat, it provides an excellent model for how you can engage your child's interests to communicate abstract concepts and teach him about nature. In case you're not familiar with this phenomenon, Pokemon are cartoon characters who duel each other. The main character is a young boy named Ash, who teaches Pokemon how to use their strengths to evolve to higher levels. Since Ash aspires to be the best Pokemon trainer in the world, he is evolving too.

There are many things I like about Pokemon. The first is that although there is some violence because the characters duel, when a character loses, he faints, rather than dying.

Second, Pokemon are identified by various elements of nature. There are Leaf Pokemon, Fire Pokemon, Water Pokemon, etc. The strengths and weaknesses of the Pokemon derive from their classification and follow Mother Nature's rules. For instance, a Fire Pokemon can beat a Leaf Pokemon because fire can burn a leaf.

Third, when a Pokemon uses his strengths to battle another Pokemon and wins, he evolves to a higher level. As a mother, who encourages her children to know their strengths and how to channel them, Pokemon provides a means of teaching the principles of human growth at their level of comprehension. As such, I've dubbed myself "Poke-Mom" and tell my children that I'm their Poke-trainer and that it is my job to help them use their strengths to gain a better understanding of their nature.

Fourth, although Pokemon characters evolve by learning how best to use their strengths in a variety of situations, there are unscrupulous Poketrainers, who force their Pokemon to evolve prematurely. Although the creature appears to be evolved, it lacks the benefit of training, so it usually loses to lower level Pokemon.

As you can see, there's some great material in Pokemon for teaching children how to recognize their nature, use their strengths when faced with challenges and take the steps necessary for lasting growth. Since the Pokemon characters are evolving, children learn that they are evolving too.

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In this way, I've used my children's passionate interests to create a language by which I can teach them abstract concepts. While some parents are sick and tired of hearing about Pokemon, I've used my boys' interests to mutual benefit.

This is one way that parents can connect with children. If you learn to speak a language that has captured your child's imagination, then you can communicate with him on a level that transcends words and speaks directly to his heart. When you understand this concept, your relationship evolves to a higher level.

In order to communicate in this way, start by embracing one of your child's interests. Once you understand its symbolism and basic premise, you can create a bridge of communication. The best way to learn about your child's interests is to allow him to teach you. In addition to making an opportunity for him to spend time with you, it creates a sense of intimacy and allows you to see into his heart.

When you learn to speak the language of your child's heart, you can convey values and complex constructs in such a way that he will embrace them as his own. In this way, you create a forum for true exchange and avoid the need for lectures.

How Knowing Nature Makes Your Child People-Smart

Your child's knowledge of his nature will help him to see the nature of others and recognize and accept them for who they are. In other words, he'll learn how to see beyond people's words to the behaviours that reveal them. In addition to making your child people-smart, this is a self-preservation skill that allows your child to recognize those who are dangerous and choose to stay away from them.

To underscore the importance of this skill, let me share a story from my youth. As I was growing up, my family moved all over the country. My father was always getting a new job or being transferred and so, we moved from state to state. Although at most we'd stay in one place a few years at a time, sometimes we moved yearly and once, we moved three times in one year. As a child, this meant being uprooted constantly and having to face the pressures of being the "new girl" and fit into previously established cliques. It also meant that I had no peer support system – no best friend or group of trusted friends with whom to share my troubles.

Although I didn't know it then, some girls were jealous of my status as the "new girl" and would make fun of me to my face or pretend to be my friend and then spread rumors behind my back. Despite my realization that such people were mean, I was raised to be a "nice" girl and thought that there was something wrong with me that made others behave so cruelly. Even though I was smart in school – a straight 'A' student – I was far from being people-smart.

My naivete and lack of understanding of the dark side of human nature caused me needless confusion and suffering. The end result was that I felt bad about myself and afraid of others.

How comforting it would have been to have someone to guide me through those years. A compassionate witness to recognize my pain – to teach me about jealousy and how it steals power by diminishing what is beautiful in others. Someone to teach me how to

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recognize a person who had the qualities of a true friend and how best to avoid, ignore or devise comebacks for the rest. But I had no such mentor, no lifelong friends and no close extended family because we were always moving. I handled things the only way I could – by taking others' cruelty to heart.

When I look back on some of my childhood experiences, I realize that I want to prevent my children from going through what I did. As such, I've given them a stable home environment and kept a pulse on what's going on with their friends and the kids with whom they have conflicts. While I want my kids to enjoy healthy relationships, I realize that playground taunts and teasing are a fact of growing up and have taught them how to handle it. By helping my children see their nature and know their strengths, the taunts of others are considered for the most part as little more than "background noise." My children are learning that behavior reveals beliefs and values and that a person's actions, rather than his words, looks, smarts, athletic abilities or popularity, reveal his capacity as a friend.

On the occasions when my children's friends have lied or stolen from them, we've talked about how these actions affected the trust in their relationship. This led to conversations about the qualities of a close friendship and how when certain values have been repeatedly violated, it might be time to make a different choice about whom to call a friend. My children are forgiving because like all children, they are resilient, but this is tempered by the knowledge that they cannot allow someone to keep hurting them. In this way, they've learned to separate themselves from others' behavior, establish limits and refuse to be victims.

Although it may make them feel a bit lonely to recognize things that others don't yet see, I'd rather they be lonely, than alone. By knowing themselves and allowing their nature to unfold, they will come to recognize the gift of others. In this way, they will attract kindred spirits into their lives. This is how our spiritual awareness grows – one heart at a time.

The Gift of Turquoise

By noticing what your child loves to do and giving it a name, you are crystallizing a way of being into a metaphor that your child will use throughout his life to stay connected to his center. In this way, you teach him to create a life that unfolds from strength and give him the courage to be himself.

If you reflect upon all the benefits of naming your child's nature, you'll see that it makes sense to set your child upon the path of purpose from the start. In this way, he avoids the trap of quiet desperation because he comes to know himself and derives joy from the feeling of coherence and harmony this brings. If your child feels good about himself, if he knows who he is and what he loves, then nothing – not people, drugs, money or the temptation of material things – can seduce him from his path.

Like Spirit-Boy in *Spirit-Boy and the Gift of Turquoise*, your child is like a rough-cut piece of turquoise. Your job as caretaker is to polish the stone until it gleams. When its matrix becomes visible, your child will know himself and assume his role as keeper. He will polish it the way you polished him and use his strengths in service of the people.

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For more information about *Keepers of the Children*, please visit:
www.walk-in-peace.com



Jan Hunt

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Her parenting column *The Natural Child* appeared in Natural Life Magazine from 1989 to 1998. One of her columns, "Ten Reasons Not to Hit Your Kids" was selected as an appendix to Alice Miller's book, Breaking Down the Wall of Silence (New York: Penguin USA, new edition 1997). Jan is the parent of a 19-year-old son who was homeschooled from the beginning with a learner-directed approach.

Jan Hunt is the author of *The Natural Child: Parenting from the Heart* (New Society, December 2001) and founder of The Natural Child Project.

Her latest book is *A Gift for Baby*, a charming and beautifully illustrated children's picture book that celebrates the many joys of attachment parenting.

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Natural Child: Parenting from the Heart

The Natural Child makes a compelling case for a return to attachment parenting, a child-rearing approach that has come naturally for parents throughout most of human history. A collection of essays from Hunt's newspaper column, the short, inspiring chapters describe the benefits of extended breast-feeding, shared family sleeping, child-parent closeness, and gentle guidance. With its clear focus on mutual respect, *The Natural Child* offers a caring approach to raising a loving, trusting, and confident child.

The Natural Child explains the value of extended breast-feeding, family co-sleeping, and minimal child-parent separation. Homeschooling, like attachment parenting, nurtures feelings of self-worth, confidence, and trust. The author draws on respected leaders of the homeschool movement such as John Taylor Gatto and John Holt, guiding the reader through homeschool approaches that support attachment parenting principles.

Being an ally to children is spontaneous for caring adults, but intervening on behalf of a child can be awkward and surrounded by social taboo. The Natural Child shows how to stand up for a child's rights effectively and sensitively in many difficult situations. The role of caring adults, points out Hunt, is not to give children "lessons in life" - but to employ a variation of the Golden Rule, and treat children as we would like to have been treated in childhood.

Sections include Parenting with Empathy and Trust, Living with a Baby, Living with Children, Guiding Children, Helping Children Learn, and Advocating for Children. The book is published by New Society Publishers, and printed on acid-free, old-growth forest free paper.

The Natural Child: Parenting from the Heart includes a foreword by Peggy O'Mara, editor-publisher of *Mothering Magazine*. It has been approved by La Leche League International for Group Libraries and is available through the La Leche League International book catalog. It has also been reviewed by the Nurture by Nature Network and is included in their Approved Library List.

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For more information about *The Natural Child: Parenting from the Heart*, please visit: The Natural Child Project

Confessions of a Proud Mom
by Jan Hunt, M.Sc.

My son is 15 and has brought me nothing but...

"Trouble?"

I thought you'd say that! No, my son is 15 and has brought me nothing but joy.

"You're kidding! How did you do that?"

I am proud of my son but, unfortunately, I cannot take personal credit. His father and I were simply fortunate enough, after some missteps at the start, to read insightful parenting books and magazines, and to explore parenting issues with knowledgeable and compassionate friends. Today he is the most caring, thoughtful, and generous person I know.

"Tell me, please! What did you do?"

Well, we did everything we were told by society not to do. He slept next to us, breastfed for several years, was never punished, threatened, bullied, or teased, and was allowed to express anger as well as happiness...

"Oh, you spoiled him?"

Well, let's examine that word. The dictionary defines "spoil" as "to cause to demand or expect too much by overindulgence." In my dictionary, this is the third definition. It mirrors the common usage of this word in our society. This definition denotes a cause and effect: overindulgence, it says, causes spoiling. But is this belief true? Or does this definition merely represent a widespread misunderstanding of the true nature of children's behavior? A definition that would be accurate in terms of the way children actually learn and react is the first one listed: "to damage or injure, to destroy."

What actually spoils a child, what actually damages, injures, and destroys vital qualities in the child are the other choices of parental behavior: punishment, separation, and rejection. These experiences spoil a child's inborn sense of trust, capacity to love, creativity, and potential for joy. Robbing a child of these treasures is surely one of the most harmful acts a human can perform.

"So the proof is in the pudding?"

Exactly. Adolf Hitler was frequently and severely abused in childhood. As an adult, he expressed the anguish and pain of those years in ways that brought about misery and suffering for millions. By comparison, Albert Einstein was cherished by his parents. His mother was accused of "spoiling" him. Yet Einstein became not only one of the world's greatest scientists, but a most gentle, caring man, deeply concerned about social issues.

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"Where do I find the kind of information which helped you?"

Read *Compleat Mother, Empathic Parenting,* or *Mothering* magazines. Talk with midwives. Meet with caring mothers in La Leche League and other breastfeeding support groups. Read books by Alice Miller, Joseph Chilton Pearce, Tine Thevenin, and John Holt. Meditate and listen to what your heart tells you. Truly believe that your baby will let you know what is right... and what is wrong.

"How can a baby tell me this?"

Babies come into the world with perfect love and trust. They do not suspect, mistrust, play mind games, doubt motives, or in any way cloud communication unless and until this trust is betrayed by such painful experiences as punishment, rejection, and separation. A baby's smiles and tears are the most potent form of communication on this planet.

"What about the mistakes I've already made?"

There are no perfect parents. While we have all made mistakes, punishing ourselves is no more effective or reasonable than punishing our children. Loving ourselves and understanding that we have done as well as we could have with the information and inner strength we had at that moment, is as important as loving and understanding our children. All we can do is put forth the love that we feel, recognize the critical importance of parenting, and continue to discover compassionate ways of relating to the children we are blessed with.

"What are the most important things a parent should know?"

Two things: First, in our society, it is assumed that children and adults, for some unexplained reason, operate on two separate and distinct principles of behavior. We adults know that we behave at our best toward those who treat us with kindness, patience, and understanding. Yet children are presumed to behave in the opposite way; that is, behave best toward those who threaten, punish, and humiliate them. If we try to pinpoint the age at which this mysterious transformation from "children's principles of behavior" to "adult principles of behavior" occurs, we are at a loss, because there is no such transformation. There is no difference between the "operating principles" of children and adults: we all behave as well as we are treated.

The second important consideration is that so-called "bad behavior" is really a blessing in disguise, as it affords the best opportunity for learning about life. If punishment is introduced at that point, this golden opportunity is lost, because the child's attention is taken away from the matter at hand, and drawn into feelings of humiliation, anger and revenge. Further, superficial "good behavior" obtained through threats and punishment can only take place until the child is old enough to fight back; angry teenagers do not fall from the sky. But trust, kindness and empathy, kept intact within the child from birth, and strengthened by parental examples of those qualities, will last a lifetime.

"I see. It's all a matter of trusting children, of recognizing that children may be less experienced and smaller than we are, but that they are equally deserving of being

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treated with dignity and respect. From newborns to centenarians, all human beings behave as well as they are treated.

Precisely. In parenting, as in all human relationships, let us give only love and love is all we will receive.

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The Critical Importance of a Child's First Years: A Baby Speaks by Jan Hunt, M.Sc.

Statistics tell us that something has gone wrong in our world. A steadily rising rate of social ills, and the proliferation of self-help books and therapy techniques for "reparenting the inner child" attest to the sad fact that we have lost our way in raising our children.

It is up to us as parents - despite our personal limitations - to give our children the right start in life: to help them become fulfilled, emotionally healthy adults, capable of loving and trusting others. Philosopher Blaise Pascal wrote that "the entire ocean is affected by a pebble." Our children should be like pebbles bringing forth waves of joy, not more sorrow and suffering.

Current thinking about our failure to fulfill our children's needs points to the importance of the earliest years of childhood, making it clear that the first three years are especially critical. What should we be doing during those years to ensure that our children have the best chance of becoming healthy and happy - as they deserve to be? Consider what a member of that age group might recommend to us - if only they could speak:

I am eleven months old. I can't talk yet, so when I am hungry, tired, wet, lonely, ill, or in pain, I cry. It is the only means I have to let my parents know that something is wrong.

If my crying is ignored, all that happens is that my needs become greater - I get even more miserable. On top of that, I have to face the fact that apparently no one cares about me. I'm sure Mommy would feel the same way if she were crying and Daddy ignored her. Believing that no one cares about you is a very devastating thought.

When my tears are ignored, I begin to believe that no matter how hard I cry, and no matter what is wrong, no one will ever come. If no one ever comes, I worry that I will die, because I cannot meet my own needs yet. You see, I have no concept of time, and two minutes is forever to me.

Sometimes I stop crying - but I am not learning patience - I am learning despair. When I stop crying, it means that I have lost all hope of ever being loved again, and all I feel is helplessness and despondency. I worry that I will never learn to communicate with words if I am not allowed to communicate with cries. And I worry that if I feel this frustration too many times, I will withdraw and stop feeling anything.

It sure can be frightening to think that no one cares enough about me to meet my needs. In fact, when my cries are ignored, I begin to think the world is a really bad place, and I worry that this will give me a negative and selfish outlook on life. But when my needs are met, I feel loved and secure enough to return that love to others, and eventually to my own children. I do so want to become a loving, caring person, but how will I learn to be like that if I don't see examples of it?

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I get very lonely if I am separated from my parents. For nine months, my mother and I were inseparable, and I felt so much love inside her. She was all I knew when I arrived on this strange planet. It will require a certain amount of time - perhaps three years or longer - before my sense of trust is established and I am ready to spend extensive time with other caregivers. The more secure I can feel now, the sooner that time will come. If I am forced to face this separation before I am ready, it will take a lot longer; in fact, I may never reach the level of maturity that I hope to reach by the time I am an adult.

At night, I like to sleep next to my parents. Being able to touch them and hear them during the dark hours of the night are my only means of knowing that they have not disappeared. There are other reasons for wanting them near: their presence helps to regulate my heart rate, blood pressure, body temperature and sleeping cycles, and their breathing regulates my own breathing.

I love to breastfeed. Breast milk is the best food for me; it contains important substances, not found in formula, which will help to keep me healthy for many years. When Mommy breastfeeds, she produces a hormone which keeps her happy too. Best of all, breastfeeding keeps Mommy and me close.

I have no desire to take unfair advantage of my parents. I love them very deeply. I am simply asking for the same care that was given to babies for thousands of years until recent history. If my needs are met, I will be free to demonstrate all the love and trust I was born with. All I want is a chance to express that love fully.

[Endnotes have been omitted]

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The Parenting Golden Rule
by Jan Hunt, M.Sc.

"Treat all others as you would like to be treated yourself."

The Golden Rule has proved its excellence as a moral guide since ancient times. Greek and Jewish thinkers, Confucius, Jesus, and other teachers of ethics all taught this rule, which is called "golden" to indicate its revered place as the ultimate rule of life. What better teaching can we utilize in our day-to-day approach to parenting? A variation of the Golden Rule for parents would be "Treat your child as you would like to be treated if you were in the same position."

It might be illuminating to apply this "Parenting Golden Rule" to several common methods of discipline, by considering the case of a husband and wife in the "same position" as that of children being disciplined in various ways.

1. Physical Punishment

The wife accidentally spills coffee on her husband's new jacket. He hits her.

Will the wife be more careful with his belongings in the future? Or might she have him arrested for spousal abuse?

2. Time-out

The husband starts to argue with a visiting friend. The wife tells him "It's not nice to argue with your friend! I won't have this! Go sit in the bedroom for half an hour!"

Will the husband become less argumentative? Will the embarrassment of the situation set him straight? Will he feel like apologizing to his friend?

3. Consequences

The wife is out driving, forgets to fill the tank, and runs out of gas. She phones her husband to ask him to take his car to buy some gas and bring it to her. He refuses, explaining that she has to learn from "natural consequences" to be more responsible.

The next time the tank is low, will the wife remember to get it filled? Or will she be too preoccupied with fantasies of divorce to think about less important matters like car maintenance?

4. Counting

The wife reminds her husband, who is reading the newspaper after dinner, that it's his turn to do the dishes. He murmurs, "Mm hmm," and keeps on reading. The wife says, firmly "You have to do the dishes *now*! 10-9-8-7..."

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Will the husband then feel like cooperating with his wife? Or will he conclude that he's married a lunatic? And would he feel the least bit loved?

All of these disciplinary methods look ridiculous when viewed in this way. But the reason for this is that our society at some point decided that children and adults respond to others according to different principles of behavior. This has been a very harmful mistake. The truth is that children, like adults, feel most like cooperating with those who treat them with kindness, respect, understanding, and dignity. The only "method" that makes sense in a humane relationship - whether with a child or an adult - is unconditional love.

In our society, we have been asking the wrong question. We have asked, "Which set of rules work with children, and which set works with adults?" The reality is, happily, far simpler: all humans behave as well as they are treated. Age makes no difference.

Parents wanting to help their children grow to be loving and responsible adults can do no better than to remember the Parenting Golden Rule: "Treat your child as you would like to be treated if you were in the same position." It's simple, straightforward, and effective. And we don't need to spend any time finding out what age someone is before consulting this rule. One size fits all.

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For more information about *Natural Child: Parenting from the Heart* and about The Natural Child Project, please visit The Natural Child Project website.



Pam Leo

Pam Leo is an independent scholar in human development, a parent educator, a certified childbirth educator, a doula, a parent, and a grandparent.

"After my first child was born in 1972, it became my passion to understand human behavior. I began to study child development, psychology, sociology, and anthropology. I wanted to learn why we are each born as a tiny innocent being, and some of us grow up to be a Mahatma Gandhi while others become an Adolf Hitler. What determines the difference? I was determined to find out."

"My journey has been and continues to be a wondrous one. While raising my two daughters, I supported us by being a family child care provider for children ages two to ten, fifty hours a week, fifty weeks a year, for twenty-two years. During that time I homeschooled my daughters and continued my own independent study of human development. In 1989 I developed the seven-session parenting series, **"Meeting the Needs of Children"** which I teach publicly and in the prison system with inmate parents."

"The feedback I most often get from parents is, "I wish I'd had this information from the beginning." In response to this feedback I created a prenatal parenting class. I became certified as a childbirth educator and as a doula as preparation to teach my new class. The **"Bonding with Your Baby"** class draws from the works of Joseph Chilton Pearce, Jean Liedloff, Ashley Montagu, and James Prescott. The class focuses on supporting expectant parents in creating the best possible foundation for a strong parent-child bond."

"If I had to put into one sentence all that I have learned about optimal human development and parenting it would be this: **our effectiveness as parents is in direct proportion to the strength of the bond we have with our child.** Securing and maintaining that bond is our primary work as parents and is the key to optimal human development."

"My passion to learn how to support optimal human development grew into a mission to share all I had learned. In addition to teaching my classes, I have been sharing this information through my "Empowered Parents" column in the **Parent & Family** paper here in Maine since 1994. When one of my articles was reprinted in the **Empathic Parenting Journal** I was invited to work with the group of people who have now become the Alliance for Transforming the Lives of Children."

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“It's been a dream come true to have the opportunity to work in person with many of the people who have unknowingly been my mentors. Our common bond is our passion for and dedication to working together to make this information available to all people who either raise children or impact the lives of children.”

“I can think of no work more worthy of my time, energy, resources and love.”

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Connection Parenting
www.connectionparenting.com

Connection Parenting
Parenting through Connection instead of Coercion ... Through Love instead of Fear

A Brief Note before the Review:

Pam is my former wife and current dearest friend. If you think that makes me biased, you are absolutely correct. I suspect that there is no one in the world, other than Pam herself, who is more intimately familiar with her work than I am. Throughout the decades of our relationship it has been, without exception, an extraordinary privilege to know her, to learn from her, and to be a witness to the evolution of the body of ideas set forth in Connection Parenting. How many divorced men do you know who are willing and able to say that about their former wives? If I have been able to contribute to her success in some small way, that too has been one of her many gifts to me.

My Review:

Henry David Thoreau first read his essay on "Civil Disobedience" in public during a lecture in 1848 and within fifty years, a young Indian lawyer in Africa had read it and incorporated those ideas into his own life. That lawyer was named Mohandas Gandhi, and Thoreau's work, along with the work of Russian writer Leo Tolstoy, became the foundation of a movement that brought down an empire and changed the course of world history. Someone once said to me, "There is nothing in the world so powerful as an idea whose time has come." Pam Leo's book, "Connection Parenting: Parenting Through Connection Instead of Coercion... Through Love Instead of Fear" is a book of ideas whose time has come.

After reading this book, I understood myself better than I ever have from reading any other book. And trust me, I've read a lot of books, on average two or three a week for the last 35 years. In every book, I've found one or two useful bits about the human condition that I could both absorb and put into practice. This is the only body of work I have ever encountered where all the scattered pieces are in one place, all at the same time.

There are at least four layers in "Connection Parenting". The first layer is the most obvious; it's a book about parent/child bonding and attachment. This is a practical framework for optimizing family relationships so that everyone in a family gets their essential needs met and can thrive. This book lays out what we need to do differently so our children don't drive us crazy, so they can grow up to be whole, functional adults able to have healthy relationships, find meaningful work, and have satisfying lives. This alone is worth the price of the book, just for the information we need to become more effective parents.

A second layer is that this book also maps out a process for building a Connection Parenting support community, using these ideas as a foundation for developing our current relationships with other parents into proactive resources. Many of us have lost the strong connections and support from our extended family. We are hungry for real community, and we desperately need the resources and support that community can

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provide. This is a workshop in a book, and though I'm certain it will be incredibly useful for any parent who reads it and completes the exercises by themselves, its greatest power and effect will be realized by those who put it into practice as a member of a parenting group committed to mutual support.

The third layer speaks to self-reflection, which is where I started this review. It is impossible to read Connection Parenting without some small, quiet, internal aspect of our heart saying, "Wait a minute, if this is what I really needed as a child, and that is what I got instead, well no wonder I have these kinds of challenges in my life as an adult." While the primary focus of "Connection Parenting" is indeed creating and sustaining healthy parent/child bonds, the reality is that this book carries both a theoretical and a practical framework for optimal development in all human relationships.

The fourth layer may not be so obvious. At its core, "Connection Parenting" is about love, about deep, human bonding through trust, compassion and respect. If we raise generations of children in this way, millions of them throughout the world, what kind of society and culture will they create over time? What if everyone knew this, lived it, and practiced it in every family, in every relationship? Perhaps you think it was marketing spin, pure hyperbole, for me to compare "Connection Parenting" with "Civil Disobedience". Ok, that's fine, but I'll make a prediction here: Connection Parenting is going to shake the world in ways we can't even begin to see today. What effect will these ideas have on war, crime, domestic violence, child abuse, drug addiction, poverty and so on? How will positive changes in those persistent and problematic social challenges affect our global economy? This body of work implies downstream impacts that are monumental in scope.

I suspect "Connection Parenting" will be incredibly controversial. I've already seen a direct correlation between the level of my reaction to some of the ideas set forth here and the level of wounding I still carry inside myself from my own childhood. If I've seen that in myself, I can only imagine how people from groups based on coercive ideologies will respond. Let me say that a different way. If you read this book and find yourself reacting with strong resistance, your reaction will likely be in exact proportion to the degree to which your needs were not met as a child, as they are set forth in this book. I personally don't see that as a bad thing, in fact, I see it as helpful when ideas new to me illuminate the darker corners in me that I'm still working out.

Whatever your reaction, my deepest hope is that everyone reads this book and applies Connection Parenting principles within their families and in their relationships with children. I will gladly recommend this book to every client I work with. Gandhi said, "Be the change you wish to see." "Connection Parenting" can change the world one family at a time and that's good enough for me.

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For more information about *Connection Parenting: Parenting through Connection instead of Coercion …Through Love instead of Fear*, please visit Connection Parenting.

Our Parenting Choices
by Pam Leo

"Everyday, every parent makes major and minor, conscious and unconscious decisions about how to interact with their children. We may be pushed by the traditions of culture, or the approval or disapproval of family members, but in the end, all parents decide for themselves how to treat their children."
- Dr. Meredith F. Small, Author of *Our Babies, Ourselves*

From the moment we decide to have a child or find out that we are having a child, we begin making important choices about how we will care for our children. Parenting our children will likely be the most important and challenging job any of us will ever have. The parenting choices we make daily are determined by the information and support we have at the time, our life circumstances, how we ourselves were raised, and the parenting practices of our culture. Unlike all other important jobs, parenting is the one job for which we get no formal preparation, education, or training.

Parents seeking information and guidance often find the advice of child experts and parenting books to be confusing and contradictory. One book or expert says to do one thing and another says to do the exact opposite. Parents often ask me, "How do I tell 'good' parenting advice from 'bad' parenting advice? How am I to choose what is best for my child?"

Our primary work as parents is securing and maintaining a strong bond with our children. A secure bond or connection with at least one other human being is the greatest emotional need of every child. It is also the biological key to optimal human development. Parenting advice is relevant only to the extent that it honors our human biology and promotes parenting practices that support secure bonding. When considering any parenting advice we must ask ourselves, "If I follow this advice, will I be providing nurturing, guidance, and limits in a way that maintains a secure bond with my child?" Our effectiveness as parents will be in direct proportion to the strength of the connection we have with our child. In any interaction will our words and actions strengthen or weaken our connection with a child? Any advice that promotes parent behaviors that compromise trust is counterproductive and undermines the strength of the parent-child bond.

One of the most interesting and important things I have discovered in studying human development is that parenting practices are cultural. What is considered the "normal" way to care for infants and children in one culture can be very different from what is considered normal in another culture.

In many cultures, normal includes:

- natural birthing practices that protect the vital mother-infant bond
- honoring genital integrity (no circumcision)
- breastfeeding ideally for two years or beyond
- babies spending the majority of time in human contact, being carried in arms or worn in slings

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- babies and young children sleeping with parents
- babies and young children being cared for by parents and relatives the majority of the time

Cultures where these parenting practices are observed are considered high-touch cultures.

In our technologically advanced Western culture, normal includes:

- technological birthing practices that interfere with the vital mother/child bond
- circumcision
- formula-feeding from a bottle until the child can drink from a cup
- babies spending the majority of time in plastic baby containers, out of human contact
- babies and young children sleeping alone in a crib in a separate room
- babies and young children being cared for by unrelated others

Cultures where these parenting practices are observed are considered low-touch cultures. The United States is the lowest touch culture in the world. While the high-touch nurturing practices of other cultures may sound strange to parents in our culture, the low-touch parenting practices of our culture sound just as strange to parents in other cultures. Dr. Meredith F. Small, author of "Our Babies, Ourselves: How Biology and Culture Shape the Way We Parent," reports that, in a survey of 186 societies, researchers found "infants are carried most of the time in nonindustrial societies, 56 percent of the time in less traditional societies, and 25 percent of the time in the United States."

Many of the infant and child behaviors that are challenging parents in our culture are unheard of in cultures that practice high-touch nurturing. While our culture has changed dramatically to keep up with our technology, our biology has not. Babies are biologically programmed to expect the same high-touch nurturing that evolved millions of years ago. Just because we no longer need to keep our babies in close physical contact so tigers won't eat them, doesn't mean we no longer need to carry them. Research shows that carrying and keeping babies in close physical contact does far more than keep them safe from predators; it is critical to their optimal development.

This information about the biological need for high-touch early nurturing and the importance of the parent-child bond is not news, even in our culture. Leaders in the field of human development, Joseph Chilton Pearce, Jean Liedloff, Suzanne Arms, and James Prescott have been writing and speaking out about the need to return to biologically sound birthing and nurturing practices for nearly 30 years. About 20 years ago, Dr. William Sears began using the term "attachment parenting" to describe these biologically sound birthing and nurturing practices. Attachment parenting promotes natural birth, genital integrity, extended breastfeeding, baby-wearing, family sleeping, and parents as the primary caregivers the majority of the time in the early years.

Many parents who have never heard of attachment parenting choose to breastfeed, to respond to their children's needs by holding and carrying them often, to bring their babies and young children into their bed so everyone can get some sleep, and to be their children's primary caregivers the majority of the time in the early years. In spite of the

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dictates of our culture, and the unsolicited advice from family, friends, and neighbors, most parents choose to practice some parts of attachment parenting to some degree, at least some of the time. Dr. Sears says that this is the "style of baby care that parents would naturally practice if they followed their own intuition rather than listening to the advice of others."

In my Connection Parenting workshops, the feedback I most often get from parents who did not have the information or support to intentionally practice attachment parenting is "I wish I'd had this information from the beginning." We can't make life better for our children or ourselves by making ourselves wrong for not doing what we didn't know. However, we can make it better for our children and ourselves by choosing parenting practices now that will strengthen our bond with our children. When we consciously choose behaviors that create a connection with a child, trust is reaffirmed and the bond is strengthened. When we unconsciously behave in ways that create a disconnection with a child, trust is violated and the bond is weakened.

Connection Parenting encompasses attachment parenting as it promotes parenting practices that support maintaining a strong bond with children of all ages. I describe the parenting style promoted in my "Meeting the Needs of Children" workshop series as Connection Parenting because it supports parents in continuing the connection created by attachment parenting. Even if, especially if, we didn't know about or practice many of the early strong bonding elements of attachment parenting, we can learn parenting practices that will strengthen our bond with our children. We don't have to observe low-touch parenting practices just because that is what our culture dictates as "normal." We can choose to take back the high-touch nurturing practices our children are biologically adapted to expect and need for optimal development. Every day is a new opportunity to strengthen the bond. As Dr. Small points out, "we can change the dictates of culture because we are culture."

"The people are the only ones capable of transforming society."
- Rigoberta Menchu

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For Recommended Reading and Recommended Websites related to this article, please visit www.connectionparenting.com

Teaching Through Love Instead of Fear
by Pam Leo

"However we treat the child, the child will treat the world."
- Pam Leo

Can you imagine threatening your partner or good friend by counting "One... two... three..." if he or she did not do what you wanted?

One of the big issues in schools today is "bullying." Parents and teachers struggle daily with how to stop this behavior. Without realizing it, adults teach bullying behavior to children by modeling it when they use the threat of their physical size or power to make children do things. When I hear a parent counting "One... two" at a young child, I always wonder what the child has been told will happen if the parent gets to three. Is it the threat of a spanking, being yelled at, time out, abandonment (I'm going without you) or the withdrawal of love and approval? Whatever the threat may be, I rarely hear "three." As intended, the threat of what will happen if the parent gets to three usually compels the child to do whatever it is the parent is telling the child to do. Parents use threats to get children to cooperate because that was what adults so often modeled when we were growing up. Most of us are familiar with the phrase "or else." We did what we were told out of fear even if we didn't know what the "or else" would be.

While counting may appear to be a magic form of discipline, there is no magic in threats. Children know that adults are bigger and more powerful than they are. They comply in self-defense. If the only way we can get children to do what we ask is by intimidating them with our greater physical size and power, how will we get them to do as we ask when we are no longer bigger and stronger? Ask the parents of any teenager if counting still works. Not only do threats no longer work, they've learned to use the same means to make others do what they want.

Many parents see a child's uncooperative behavior as a challenge to their authority. Once we understand that uncooperative behavior is usually caused by a child's unmet need or an adult's unrealistic expectation, we don't have to take the behavior so personally. Parents and children often have different needs. Sometimes our needs or schedules conflict with our children's needs. Children who are deeply absorbed in play will not want to interrupt their play to go with us to the bank or the store before it closes. When a parent needs to do one thing and a child needs to do something else there is a conflict of needs. This conflict of needs turns into a power struggle when parents use the power of fear instead of the power of love. The bond or connection parents have with their children is their most powerful parenting "tool." A strong bond is created over time when parents lovingly and consistently meet a child's early needs. Threats communicate, "What you think, feel, want or need is not important." Threats undermine the parent-child bond. When we learn to resolve our "conflicts of needs" in ways that show children that their needs and feelings matter, we strengthen the bond and avoid many power struggles.

The most common reason for conflict of needs between parents and children is lack of

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resources. If parents had more resources we wouldn't have to bring the child to the bank or the store because there would be someone else to stay with the child. As long as there is lack of resources there will be conflicts of needs. Until we figure out how to bring more resources into our lives we have to find other ways to resolve our conflicts if we are to stop teaching children to be bullies. If we want to teach children to love instead of hate, we must learn to use conflict resolution skills in our daily interactions with children. Just as children learn bullying from what adults model, they can learn conflict resolution and problem solving skills from what we model. When children learn the skills from how we treat them at home they will bring those skills to their relationships at school.

Very young children can learn conflict resolution if we model it. An older sibling can be taught to find another toy to exchange with their younger sibling instead of just snatching their toy back. When two children want the same toy at the same time we can help them "problem solve" a solution. When there is a conflict of needs because the parent wants to do an errand and the child just wants to stay home and play we can say "let's problem solve to see if we can find a way for us both to get what we need." Maybe the child could take the toy in the car or perhaps the errand could wait until tomorrow. When the parent is ready to leave the playground and the child wants to stay longer we can suggest a compromise of five more minutes and doing something fun when we get home. Often it's not that the child doesn't want to leave as much as it is that she doesn't want the fun to end. When we teach children that everyone's needs are important by honoring their needs they learn to honor the needs of others.

There will be times that we won't have the time or the resources to meet a child's need. There will be times that even after honoring the child's need, the child is still unable to cooperate. At those times it is important to communicate that parents have needs too and even though it makes the child unhappy we do have to go now and then allow the child to have his feeling about having to leave. It is never OK to tell a young child that you will leave without them. Threatening a child with abandonment terrifies a child. When a child has a tantrum about leaving it may not be about leaving the playground at all. Leaving may just be the last straw that unleashes the day's accumulation of little frustrations. The child may just need to cry to empty out the stresses of the day. A child will be able to move forward much more readily when we can say "I know you're sad and it's OK to cry" than if we say "Stop that crying or I'll give you something to cry about!" When the crying is done the child will usually feel better and be more able to cooperate.

When children's needs are met and nothing is hurting them they are usually delightful to be with. Whenever a child responds negatively to a reasonable request we need to look for the conflicting need. Once we know how our needs are in conflict we can try to problem solve. I have learned to say, "When you behave that way I know something is wrong, because we love each other and people who love each other don't treat each other this way. Can you tell me what you need or what's hurting you?" If I can remember to stop and ask that one simple question it changes the whole context of the conflict. That question communicates, "I love you and what you feel and need matters to me."

Sometimes there isn't a way for both people to get what they need. But not getting what we need is much easier to bear if we are treated in a way that allows us to keep our dignity. Counting at a child communicates, "I am bigger and more powerful than you and you'd better do as I say or I'm going to (in some way) hurt you." When a big kid says to a smaller one, "Do what I say or I'm going to hurt you," we call it bullying. When an adult

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communicates the same thing to a child by counting, we call it discipline. When we treat children in ways that take away their dignity we teach them how to take away other's dignity. If we want kids to stop bullying, we have to stop bullying kids. The power of fear is easy and quick but short-lived. The power of love requires more work and takes longer but children never outgrow its influence.

Suggested Reading:

"Kids, Parents and Power Struggles" by Mary Sheedy Kurcinka

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Pat and Larry Downing

Background:

Our experience includes counseling teenagers and their parents, social services, mediation and grief counseling.

In addition, we bring the wisdom and skills acquired in the process of raising our children and step-children.

Work with teenagers:

In 1997, we created an effective program for troubled teenagers in Asheville, North Carolina.

Through our "Smart Choices" Program, we worked with several hundred teens and their parents. With group sessions, one-on-one counseling and family mediations, we empowered the teens to create successful lives and helped families to communicate more effectively.

Through that work, we came to realize that, in order to help children and teens, the most important thing we can do is to help parents learn to interact with their children in a more effective way.

It became clear to us that, with all the information available for parents, they were not being taught one essential key to successful relationships. That key is the ability to control their own emotional energy and to use it effectively in all their interactions with their children.

In order to share that skill with as many parents as possible, we wrote the e-book "Feel Good Parenting: How to Use the Power of Your Heart to Create an Extraordinary Relationship with Your Child."

In the book, we teach parents and grandparents how to tap into the powerful resources within them to turn conflict into harmony and to create peaceful, cooperative, loving relationships with their children that meet the needs of everyone in the family.

Learn more about the book

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The Philosophy of Feel Good Parenting

We believe that:

Our children are powerful, wise, compassionate beings who are already whole and complete. They come into this life with their own preferences, passions, talents and purpose.

They deserve to be treated with dignity and respect.

Our job, as parents, is:

- to love our children,
- to provide them a safe, nurturing home and
- to give them the tools they need to become happy, confident, successful adults.

We do this best when we:

- treat them with kindness and consideration;
- teach them compassion and appreciation of other people;
- provide guidance and inspiration, rather than control, criticism and manipulation;
- nurture their spiritual life,
- teach them how to tap into the love, power and wisdom that is within them;
- allow them to make choices - appropriate for their age;
- teach them how to use their mistakes to learn about themselves and others;
- honor their unique gifts, rather than imposing our ideas of who they should be;
- listen to them,
- ask for their ideas; and
- acknowledge their experiences as real, even if they are different than our own

Our heart connection with our children is the foundation for the entire relationship. As we nurture, support and deepen that connection, we are able to create strong, loving, cooperative relationships that are satisfying for all of us.

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Feel Good Parenting

My personal review of Feel Good Parenting from the *Parental Intelligence* website:

Feel Good Parenting: How to Use the Power of Your Heart to Create an Extraordinary Relationship with Your Child
by Patricia Downing and Larry Downing

"Do you remember how good you felt the first time you looked at your newborn baby? Do you remember the love that welled up within you? Something happened in that moment - something that went beyond the physical. Something within you reached out to meet something within your child, and in that moment you felt your oneness, a connection so profound that no words could describe it.

That is the heart connection."

So begins the introduction to this rather special parenting book - a book that takes the reader on a fascinating journey "beyond the physical" to the deeper unseen levels of parenting where our hearts and minds are one with a power far greater than ourselves. That recognises and honours both the natural magnificence of our children and the often ignored truth that we, as their parents, must look to ourselves first in order to better look after the children that life has placed in our care.

Feel Good Parenting is, in the end, a hugely encouraging book that resonates from start to finish with my own discoveries as a successful parent over twenty years. Exploring ideas not even considered in most conventional parenting books, authors Pat and Larry Downing explain in clear and easy to understand language how our thoughts generate our experiences, why we need to be constantly aware of our feelings and the crucial importance of choosing our words carefully - and how, by acting from the heart and utilising the power of our imagination, we can consciously create happy and successful relationships with our children that are exactly as we want them to be.

Parents used to reading run of the mill parenting books that peddle the superficialities of 'behaviour management' and sell themselves by promoting the myth that parenting is a complex nightmare of constant struggle may well be both astonished and delighted by the philosophy of *Feel Good Parenting* - and inspired by the creative techniques that support and enhance that philosophy.

Seldom can *what really works* have been more helpfully presented than in Pat and Larry Downing's quiet masterpiece.

Please visit the *Feel Good Parenting* website to purchase the book or for further information.

Subscribe to Pat and Larry Downing's ezine *Parents Time Out* and receive a copy of their FREE ebook *How to Get the Best From Your Children*.

Feel Good Parenting: How to Use Your Heart to Create an Extraordinary Relationship with Your Child

Chapter 1

Tapping Into the Power of Your Heart

The Single Most Important Thing You Can Do to Transform Your Relationships with Your Children Is to Relate to Them from Your Heart

Most parents would say that they always love their children, even when they're angry with them.

But there is a difference between loving them and interacting with them **from a place of love**.

Sometimes, when my children were young, I found myself feeling anger, frustration, or even helplessness.

Yes, I always loved them, but in the moment, love was not always the dominant emotion that I was FEELING. In fact, at times, what I was feeling was far from love. It was so easy to be pulled into other emotions.

That is normal. We all do it.

Don't beat yourself up for it.

But stop and think about it.

What does it communicate to your children?

I can remember my mother saying to me, "I love you," when I was a child - even when she was angry with me.

I was totally unable to understand the love part when all I was FEELING from her was the anger part. Why is that?

Because, in that moment, the anger was communicated more powerfully than the love.

What was going on WITHIN her reached out to me and I felt it. The message I got from her was one of anger, of disapproval. The words were meaningless.

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But I'm human too, you may say. *There are times when anger is appropriate - don't I have a right to feel my emotion?*

The answer is "Yes." You have a right to feel whatever you feel.

But I ask you: Is that the most effective way of dealing with the situation?

Does your anger give you more or less control over the outcome of your interaction with your child?

Well, at least he knows his behavior is unacceptable to me.

Okay, so how does that play out?

When you and he are both angry, what happens?

Well, I yell at him and he yells back at me and he ends up storming out the door.

And I feel angry, frustrated, helpless, …. (you fill in the rest).

So what does that get you?

Is it really working for you?

Well, don't I have a responsibility to discipline him?

Of course you do.

Children and teenagers need limits. They need guidance. I am not suggesting that you let your child get away with inappropriate behavior. That would not serve him.

But how can you provide that guidance in the most effective way - in such a way that he is open to hear your guidance?

Why Come From Your Heart?

There are two reasons for staying in your heart while raising your children:

1. The first is that it works. It is the most effective way to communicate and to elicit cooperation from your child or teenager. This approach will encourage him to cooperate with you and to interact in a way that is respectful and pleasant.

2. The second reason is equally important. **It just plain feels good**. The experience will be more pleasant for every one involved.

In fact, you will know when you are in your heart, because you will FEEL GOOD.

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Your Heart is a Place of Power

Being in Your Heart is Not a Position of Weakness, but One of Strength

It is a way to get the best from your child, not through coercion or threats, but through invitation and appreciation and inspiration.

Now let me be clear about something. This is very important to understand:

We Are Not Talking About Being Lenient

Because you love your child, you want to raise her to be a responsible, happy adult.

That means that you need to set limits, to teach her the kind of behavior that will enable her to lead a successful, fulfilling life.

But the **way** in which you discipline or set limits or provide guidance - the **energy** you bring with you when you communicate with your child - will determine how receptive she will be.

When we talk about being in your heart:

We are not talking about acting from uncontrolled emotion.

We are talking about becoming aware of your anger or frustration or stress, and using those emotions as a signal to you that you are **not** in your heart.

You can then make a conscious decision to get back in your heart**,** so you can tap into the unlimited well of love and power and wisdom and peace and joy and intelligence that exist within you already, within your heart.

From that place, you will be able to listen to your child.

She will feel that, and she will be more likely to listen to you and to tell you what is happening with her.

When You React With Anger or Take Offense, You Are in a Position of Weakness

If your child can push your buttons and you lose your temper, then she is controlling you.

If you can observe with an open heart, if you can respond to him with compassion and be open to what he has to tell you, then you are able to maintain your emotional balance.

You are in control of yourself.

That is a place of strength.

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From that place, you are in a better position to help him; and you are also in a better position to invite him to cooperate with you.

The Power of the Heart

It is time to liberate our hearts, to allow them to lead us.

It may be our best hope of creating the harmony and joy that we are longing for.

But I don't want to be soft hearted. Children need discipline, you say.

Being heart-centered is not being soft or wishy-washy.

Being open and receptive is not being easily manipulated.

Your heart is not the place from which you receive foolishness or get pulled off track by out-of-control emotions. No. It is the place from which you are most clear about what you want.

It is the doorway through which you can connect with your child and with your own deeper wisdom.

Children Need to Feel Loved

They need to have the sense of belonging, being accepted for who they are.

They need to feel loved and welcomed and valued.

They need to feel connected with others, especially their parents and siblings.

We can give them that by being in our hearts.

Then, as we allow ourselves to feel our connection with our children, we will communicate with them from a position of love and appreciation.

Communication Begins Within Us

Our thoughts and feelings about our children spill over into our outer expressions such as words, tone of voice and body language.

They are also communicated silently, invisibly - and our children are very good at picking up our true feelings, whether we express them outwardly or not.

Coming from the heart is a way to elicit cooperation from others.

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It is a way for everyone to win, because everyone becomes part of the same team. Isn't that what you want for your family?

Parents Are the Decisive Factor

As a parent, you provide the example for your family.

Do you want to turn that over to your child?

Do you want your child to decide the emotional energy in your home?

What is the atmosphere like in your family now?

Is it peaceful - or is it full of tension and anger?

Does everyone in your family relax and unwind when they walk through the door - or is your home chaotic and tense?

You Have the Power to Set the Emotional Tone for Your Family

You can create an atmosphere:

- in which everyone feels emotionally safe enough to be open and honest,
- that feels good to come home to every day,
- that is inviting and welcoming,
- where everyone feels acknowledged, and does not need to act out in order to be noticed.

Is that what you want?

Here is a simple way to begin to create that kind of harmony and peace:

A Simple Daily Practice

The first step to creating - or enhancing - an atmosphere of love and harmony in your family is a simple exercise that you can do anywhere, any time.

I prefer to do this first thing in the morning and last thing before falling asleep at night. Choose a time - or times - that work for you.

PLEASE TAKE IT SERIOUSLY.

If you do this once or twice a day, within a few weeks, you will have created a habit that will serve you for the rest of your life.

Very soon, you will notice positive changes in your relationship with your child and within yourself.

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You will need to have your notebook with you. You may also want to have some pictures of your child.

Creating a Heart Connection

EXERCISE 1:

Find a quiet place. Sit or lie comfortably. Take a few deep breaths and allow the tension to leave your body. Imagine that you are leaving your worries and concerns outside a door and you are shutting the door.

Take a few more deep breaths and relax even more.

Still your mind.

Now remember a time in the past when you felt very close to your child.

Perhaps it was the first time you held her and looked into her eyes.

Did the love well up within you in that moment? Did you feel a sense of connection and overwhelming love?

Get a vision of that now. See her face before you. Allow yourself to feel the love now. Feel that powerful connection Stay with it for a few minutes.

When you are ready, move on to other good memories:

Take a few minutes with each good memory.

Get the FEELING of each of those times.

Write them down. This is important.

Make a note in your notebook of each of those memories. Do not assume that you will remember them.

As you go through your day, think about other times when you felt joy at being with your child. Make a note of all of them.

Looking at pictures may help trigger those good memories.

This list provides the foundation for your new, improved relationship.

The love is there.

The joy is there.

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No matter how your child may be acting in the moment, you can always get back in your heart - back to this powerful awareness of your profound connection and love.

The more you practice reconnecting in this way, the more easily you will be able to re-create those **good feelings** when you need them the most.

And I assure you, no matter how good things may be right now, the time will come when it will be important to be able to get back to the love.

Before you go to bed:

Take your notebook and revisit each of the memories.

Go to sleep with the feeling of those times when you felt close to each other.

Allow yourself to feel the love.

Sleep well.

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Chapter 2

Creating a Vision

What is an Extraordinary Relationship?

We all have the ability to create extraordinary relationships.

In order to change anything outwardly in our lives, we need to change what is happening within us.

First we have to **believe in the possibility**.

Then we need to **be clear about what we want.**

We will help you explore what an extraordinary relationship means to you. For each person, it will be different.

Don't worry about what your relationship is like now. This is about discovering what you want it to be.

In order to do this exercise, it is important that you are willing to expand your idea of what is possible in your relationship.

Are you willing to be bold and step out of whatever assumptions you have about what is possible for you and your child?

Be honest with yourself. Don't settle for what you think you can have.

Go all the way to what you really want to have, ideally - if you could have the very best that life has to offer.

Are you willing to do that?

Open your note book:

Go to a blank page and at the top, write: "My Ideal Relationship with (your child or children)."

Now sit quietly and imagine what that ideal relationship would look like to you.

Begin to list the **things that define an extraordinary relationship** for you. (As time goes on, your idea of an extraordinary relationship will expand and you can keep adding to the list.)

What you are looking for here are **qualities of relationships.**

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This is not a list of things that you want your child to do. It is a list of things that define the relationship - the way in which you interact and communicate.

For example, I would **not** write, "my teenager comes home by 10:00 at night."

I might say: "We all keep our agreements."

It is also about **the feelings you have about each other**.

I might include: "I feel good when I think about .....(my child)."

Here are some examples of ideas that other parents have included in their Vision:

- (My baby) is peaceful and happy, and we enjoy being together.
- (My toddler) plays happily with me or other children.
- I smile when I think about (my child).
- She smiles when she sees me.
- I feel good when I think about him.
- We all show each other respect and love.
- (My teenager) does his chores with a good attitude.
- We can talk to each other calmly about anything.
- We are always glad to see each other.
- I keep my cool no matter what he is doing.
- We all keep our agreements.
- Our home feels welcoming and inviting.
- We trust each other.
- He talks to me about what's going on in his life.
- We laugh together a lot.

Okay. Your turn.

Write in your notebook the things that describe an ideal relationship for you. Some may describe the relationship you already have. Some will be other things that you want as well.

Write the ideas as they come to you. They do not have to be in any order.

As you go through the day - and days to come - you may think of more. Add them to the list.

This is now **Your Vision** for an extraordinary relationship with your child.

CAUTION: During the day, you may observe some things going on in your family that are not anything like your ideal relationship. Do not dwell on them and compare them to the things on your list. That will take your attention to what you do not want, and **that will undermine your efforts.**

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Imagination is the Key

We've all been there.

We can read a book or watch a compelling movie and we are transported to an imagined world.

We become emotionally involved with the characters and the plot and we are pulled into the setting.

We feel very real and powerful emotions. We relate to the characters. We are excited or afraid with them. We shed tears of joy or great sorrow with them. We have a sense of fulfillment when they reach their goals, and a powerful sense of victory when they defeat their enemies.

Sometimes a good movie pulls us in so that we experience physical reactions. We get sweaty palms and our heart rate and breathing increase when the characters are in danger. Our heart rate and breathing slow when they are relaxed and peaceful.

Why is that?

It's not real. It's only a movie. The characters aren't even in the same room with us and the movie was made months before. So why do we feel all those things?

We feel them because someone has created an imagined world and, as we watch, our **imaginations** allow us to enter that world.

It is the power of the mind that allows us to go beyond the limitations of our physical body or location or life situation.

Many people go to the movies for an escape from the drudgery of their daily lives. Others go to forget, temporarily, a physical or emotional pain. Some go for the rush of excitement (Look at the popularity of horror movies or thrillers). Some go to experience feelings of love and the fulfillment of dreams. Some just for entertainment.

Whatever the reason, almost all of us are affected emotionally and, in some rare and wonderful cases, we are actually transformed - left with a feeling so powerful that we carry it with us and feel it, think about it, talk about it for hours or even days after.

That is the power of our imagination.

With a movie, someone else wrote the script and we merely consented to having our emotions manipulated.

You can, however, write your own script, decide what emotions you want to experience, and become an actor in your own drama. In fact, you do it every day, probably without realizing it.

Now you have the opportunity to make **a conscious decision** to create the story you want to play out in your life. And it starts in your imagination.

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Just know that there is a way to get from where you are now to where you want to go.

Be patient and don't sabotage the process by thinking about what you do not want.

A Few Words About Doubt

Caution: It is possible that people close to you may not share your vision or your belief in the possibility of something better than what you have now. They may not understand or support this process for creating positive change in your life.

That's okay.

Allow them to have their beliefs.

But do not allow them to pull you into their doubt and fear.

You CAN create extraordinary relationships within your family.

If you find yourself being pulled into doubt, you can remind yourself:

Your vision comes from your heart, **and your heart is not a place of foolishness**. It is a place where you connect with your deeper wisdom and your life purpose.

Your heart will lead you to good beyond your wildest imagination, if you allow it.

Your Vision is an important step in creating the extraordinary life that you desire for your family.

EXERCISE 2b:

At the end of the day:

Take 10 minutes - more if you wish - and sit quietly, just before bed. Read over your Vision of an extraordinary relationship.

Bring the Vision Alive

Now, you will take those feelings of love and closeness you felt yesterday and bring in the ideas you have about your ideal relationship.

Trust us at this point. Do the work, even if you don't see how it can help.

Embrace your intention to have an extraordinary relationship.

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Relationships are created step by step, and using your imagination is a powerful first step.

So here you go:

Sit quietly and recapture the feelings of love and connection you felt yesterday.

When you get the FEELING of love, sit with it for a few minutes.

Savor it.

Now review the list of things that define your ideal relationship.

Choose one. For example, "We are always glad to see each other."

Close your eyes. Relax. Take a few deep breaths.

Feel the tension flow from your body.

Now use your imagination. What would it be like to be glad to see each other?

Put yourself into the picture. Imagine your child walking in the door and greeting you with a big smile.

You are not just observing this as if watching it on a movie screen. You are right in the middle of it.

See your child come through the door smiling at you.

Hear his words of greeting.

Feel what it feels like to be greeted in that way. Feel it in your body.

Feel yourself smiling back at him.

Now feel the love and appreciation welling up within you.

Experience that feeling for a few minutes.

Then, you might take another item from your list. Turn it into a scene, and imagine how it would play out in your family. (Do not try to go through your whole list at one time. Even just one a day would be very powerful.)

Take one item at a time and create a scene.

Imagine as much detail as possible: See it, hear it, feel it, smell it and taste it, if possible. The important thing is that you are IN the scene, not just watching it as an observer.

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Be sure to **get the feeling** of it. Stay with the scene until the good feelings fill your body. Feel the love between you and your child.

Stay with it for a few minutes.

If you can experience, in your imagination, even one of the things on your list, and truly FEEL it, you will be taking the first step in creating it in your life.

This may seem silly to you.

Do it anyway and enter into it with as much feeling as you can.

It is very powerful.

Once you have achieved the **feeling**, along with the **vision** of your family being together in what you think of as an ideal way, hold onto that for as long as you can.

IT IS POSSIBLE for your family.

You have already started to create it.

Fall asleep holding that vision and the feelings of love.

Sleep well.

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For more information about Feel Good Parenting: How to Use Your Heart to Create an Extraordinary Relationship with Your Child, to subscribe to the Parent's Time Out newsletter and receive your FREE copy of How to Get the Best From Your Children, please visit the Feel Good Parenting website.



Alfie Kohn

Alfie Kohn writes and speaks widely on human behavior, education, and parenting. His latest book is *UNCONDITIONAL PARENTING: Moving from Rewards and Punishments to Love and Reason*, just published by Atria / Simon & Schuster. Of his nine earlier books, the best known are PUNISHED BY REWARDS: The Trouble with Gold Stars, Incentive Plans, A's, Praise, and Other Bribes (1993), *NO CONTEST: The Case Against Competition* (1986), and *THE SCHOOLS OUR CHILDREN DESERVE: Moving Beyond Traditional Classrooms and "Tougher Standards"* (1999).

Kohn's criticisms of competition and rewards have helped to shape the thinking of parents, educators, and managers across the country and abroad. *Time* magazine has described him as "perhaps the country's most outspoken critic of education's fixation on grades [and] test scores" - and *Fortune* magazine has called him "America's most biting critic of money as motivator."

Kohn has been featured on more than 200 TV and radio programs, including NPR, CNN, and two appearances on "Oprah"; his work has been described in dozens of magazines and newspapers. He lectures widely to parent groups and school faculties, as well as at universities, corporations, and national conferences.

Among Kohn's other books are: *THE BRIGHTER SIDE OF HUMAN NATURE: Altruism and Empathy in Everyday Life* (1990), *BEYOND DISCIPLINE* (1996), and *THE CASE AGAINST STANDARDIZED TESTING* (2000). He has contributed to publications ranging from *The Nation* to the *Harvard Business Review* ("Why Incentive Plans Cannot Work"). His efforts to make research in human behavior accessible to a general audience have been published in *The Atlantic Monthly* and *Psychology Today*, and his articles addressed to parents have appeared in *Ladies Home Journal*, *Parents*, *Parenting*, and daily newspapers across the country.

Among Kohn's essays on education and parenting: "Five Reasons to Stop Saying 'Good Job!'", "How Not to Teach Values," "The Truth About Self-Esteem," "How to Raise an Assertive Child," and "Fighting the Tests: A Practical Guide to Rescuing Our Schools" - all of which are available on his website: www.alfiekohn.org.

Kohn was educated at Brown University and the University of Chicago, and now lives with his wife and two children in the Boston area.

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Unconditional Parenting: Moving from Rewards and Punishments to Love and Reason

Most parenting guides begin with the question "How can we get kids to do what they're told?" -- and then proceed to offer various techniques for controlling them. In this truly groundbreaking book, nationally respected educator Alfie Kohn begins instead by asking "What do kids need - and how can we meet those needs?" What follows from that question are ideas for working *with* children rather than doing things *to* them.

One basic need all children have, Kohn argues, is to be loved unconditionally, to know that they will be accepted even if they screw up or fall short. Yet conventional approaches to parenting such as punishments (including "time-outs"), rewards (including positive reinforcement), and other forms of control teach children that they are loved only when they please us or impress us. Kohn cites a body of powerful, and largely unknown, research detailing the damage caused by leading children to believe they must earn our approval. That's precisely the message children derive from common discipline techniques, even though it's not the message most parents intend to send.

More than just another book about discipline, though, *Unconditional Parenting* addresses the ways parents think about, feel about, and act with their children. It invites them to question their most basic assumptions about raising kids while offering a wealth of practical strategies for shifting from "doing to" to "working with" parenting - including how to replace praise with the unconditional support that children need to grow into healthy, caring, responsible people. This is an eye-opening, paradigm-shattering book that will reconnect readers to their own best instincts and inspire them to become better parents.

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Read Chapter One of Unconditional Parenting at Alfie Kohn's website

Five Reasons to Stop Saying "Good Job!"
by Alfie Kohn

NOTE: This article was published in *Young Children*, September 2001; and, in abridged form (with the title "Hooked on Praise"), in *Parents* Magazine, May 2000.

Hang out at a playground, visit a school, or show up at a child's birthday party, and there's one phrase you can count on hearing repeatedly: "Good job!" Even tiny infants are praised for smacking their hands together ("Good clapping!"). Many of us blurt out these judgments of our children to the point that it has become almost a verbal tic.

Plenty of books and articles advise us against relying on punishment, from spanking to forcible isolation ("time out"). Occasionally someone will even ask us to rethink the practice of bribing children with stickers or food. But you'll have to look awfully hard to find a discouraging word about what is euphemistically called positive reinforcement.

Lest there be any misunderstanding, the point here is not to call into question the importance of supporting and encouraging children, the need to love them and hug them and help them feel good about themselves. Praise, however, is a different story entirely. Here's why.

1. Manipulating children. Suppose you offer a verbal reward to reinforce the behavior of a two-year-old who eats without spilling, or a five-year-old who cleans up her art supplies. Who benefits from this? Is it possible that telling kids they've done a good job may have less to do with their emotional needs than with our convenience?

Rheta DeVries, a professor of education at the University of Northern Iowa, refers to this as "sugar-coated control." Very much like tangible rewards – or, for that matter, punishments – it's a way of doing something *to* children to get them to comply with our wishes. It may be effective at producing this result (at least for a while), but it's very different from working *with* kids – for example, by engaging them in conversation about what makes a classroom (or family) function smoothly, or how other people are affected by what we have done -- or failed to do. The latter approach is not only more respectful but more likely to help kids become thoughtful people.

The reason praise can work in the short run is that young children are hungry for our approval. But we have a responsibility not to exploit that dependence for our own convenience. A "Good job!" to reinforce something that makes our lives a little easier can be an example of taking advantage of children's dependence. Kids may also come to feel manipulated by this, even if they can't quite explain why.

2. Creating praise junkies. To be sure, not every use of praise is a calculated tactic to control children's behavior. Sometimes we compliment kids just because we're genuinely pleased by what they've done. Even then, however, it's worth looking more closely. Rather than bolstering a child's self-esteem, praise may increase kids' dependence on us. The more we say, "I like the way you...." or "Good _____ing," the more kids come to rely on *our* evaluations, *our* decisions about what's good and bad, rather than learning to form their own judgments. It leads them to measure their worth in terms of what will

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lead *us* to smile and dole out some more approval.

Mary Budd Rowe, a researcher at the University of Florida, discovered that students who were praised lavishly by their teachers were more tentative in their responses, more apt to answer in a questioning tone of voice ("Um, seven?"). They tended to back off from an idea they had proposed as soon as an adult disagreed with them. And they were less likely to persist with difficult tasks or share their ideas with other students.

In short, "Good job!" doesn't reassure children; ultimately, it makes them feel less secure. It may even create a vicious circle such that the more we slather on the praise, the more kids seem to need it, so we praise them some more. Sadly, some of these kids will grow into adults who continue to need someone else to pat them on the head and tell them whether what they did was OK. Surely this is not what we want for our daughters and sons.

3. Stealing a child's pleasure. Apart from the issue of dependence, a child deserves to take delight in her accomplishments, to feel pride in what she's learned how to do. She also deserves to decide when to feel that way. Every time we say, "Good job!", though, we're telling a child how to feel.

To be sure, there are times when our evaluations are appropriate and our guidance is necessary -- especially with toddlers and preschoolers. But a constant stream of value judgments is neither necessary nor useful for children's development. Unfortunately, we may not have realized that "Good job!" is just as much an evaluation as "Bad job!" The most notable feature of a positive judgment isn't that it's positive, but that it's a judgment. And people, including kids, don't like being judged.

I cherish the occasions when my daughter manages to do something for the first time, or does something better than she's ever done it before. But I try to resist the knee-jerk tendency to say, "Good job!" because I don't want to dilute her joy. I want her to share her pleasure with me, not look to me for a verdict. I want her to exclaim, "I did it!" (which she often does) instead of asking me uncertainly, "Was that good?"

4. Losing interest. "Good painting!" may get children to keep painting for as long as we keep watching and praising. But, warns Lilian Katz, one of the country's leading authorities on early childhood education, "once attention is withdrawn, many kids won't touch the activity again." Indeed, an impressive body of scientific research has shown that the more we reward people for doing something, the more they tend to lose interest in whatever they had to do to get the reward. Now the point isn't to draw, to read, to think, to create – the point is to get the goody, whether it's an ice cream, a sticker, or a "Good job!"

In a troubling study conducted by Joan Grusec at the University of Toronto, young children who were frequently praised for displays of generosity tended to be slightly *less* generous on an everyday basis than other children were. Every time they had heard "Good sharing!" or "I'm so proud of you for helping," they became a little less interested in sharing or helping. Those actions came to be seen not as something valuable in their own right but as something they had to do to get that reaction again from an adult. Generosity became a means to an end.

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Does praise motivate kids? Sure. It motivates kids to get praise. Alas, that's often at the expense of commitment to whatever they were doing that prompted the praise.

5. Reducing achievement. As if it weren't bad enough that "Good job!" can undermine independence, pleasure, and interest, it can also interfere with how good a job children actually do. Researchers keep finding that kids who are praised for doing well at a creative task tend to stumble at the next task – and they don't do as well as children who weren't praised to begin with.

Why does this happen? Partly because the praise creates pressure to "keep up the good work" that gets in the way of doing so. Partly because their *interest* in what they're doing may have declined. Partly because they become less likely to take risks – a prerequisite for creativity – once they start thinking about how to keep those positive comments coming.

More generally, "Good job!" is a remnant of an approach to psychology that reduces all of human life to behaviors that can be seen and measured. Unfortunately, this ignores the thoughts, feelings, and values that lie behind behaviors. For example, a child may share a snack with a friend as a way of attracting praise, or as a way of making sure the other child has enough to eat. Praise for sharing ignores these different motives. Worse, it actually promotes the less desirable motive by making children more likely to fish for praise in the future.

*

Once you start to see praise for what it is – and what it does – these constant little evaluative eruptions from adults start to produce the same effect as fingernails being dragged down a blackboard. You begin to root for a child to give his teachers or parents a taste of their own treacle by turning around to them and saying (in the same saccharine tone of voice), "Good praising!"

Still, it's not an easy habit to break. It can seem strange, at least at first, to stop praising; it can feel as though you're being chilly or withholding something. But that, it soon becomes clear, suggests that *we praise more because we need to say it than because children need to hear it*. Whenever that's true, it's time to rethink what we're doing.

What kids do need is unconditional support, love with no strings attached. That's not just different from praise – it's the *opposite* of praise. "Good job!" is conditional. It means we're offering attention and acknowledgement and approval for jumping through our hoops, for doing things that please us.

This point, you'll notice, is very different from a criticism that some people offer to the effect that we give kids too much approval, or give it too easily. They recommend that we become more miserly with our praise and demand that kids "earn" it. But the real problem isn't that children expect to be praised for everything they do these days. It's that *we're* tempted to take shortcuts, to manipulate kids with rewards instead of explaining and helping them to develop needed skills and good values.

So what's the alternative? That depends on the situation, but whatever we decide to say instead has to be offered in the context of genuine affection and love for who kids are

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rather than for what they've done. When unconditional support is present, "Good job!" isn't necessary; when it's absent, "Good job!" won't help.

If we're praising positive actions as a way of discouraging misbehavior, this is unlikely to be effective for long. Even when it works, we can't really say the child is now "behaving himself"; it would be more accurate to say the praise is behaving him. The alternative is to work *with* the child, to figure out the reasons he's acting that way. We may have to reconsider our own requests rather than just looking for a way to get kids to obey. (Instead of using "Good job!" to get a four-year-old to sit quietly through a long class meeting or family dinner, perhaps we should ask whether it's reasonable to expect a child to do so.)

We also need to bring kids in on the process of making decisions. If a child is doing something that disturbs others, then sitting down with her later and asking, "What do you think we can do to solve this problem?" will likely be more effective than bribes or threats. It also helps a child learn how to solve problems and teaches that her ideas and feelings are important. Of course, this process takes time and talent, care and courage. Tossing off a "Good job!" when the child acts in the way we deem appropriate takes none of those things, which helps to explain why "doing to" strategies are a lot more popular than "working with" strategies.

And what can we say when kids just do something impressive? Consider three possible responses:

* **Say nothing.** Some people insist a helpful act must be "reinforced" because, secretly or unconsciously, they believe it was a fluke. If children are basically evil, then they have to be given an artificial reason for being nice (namely, to get a verbal reward). But if that cynicism is unfounded – and a lot of research suggests that it is – then praise may not be necessary.

*** Say what you saw.** A simple, evaluation-free statement ("You put your shoes on by yourself" or even just "You did it") tells your child that you noticed. It also lets her take pride in what she did. In other cases, a more elaborate description may make sense. If your child draws a picture, you might provide feedback – not judgment – about what you noticed: "This mountain is huge!" "Boy, you sure used a lot of purple today!"

If a child does something caring or generous, you might gently draw his attention to the effect of his action *on the other person*: "Look at Abigail's face! She seems pretty happy now that you gave her some of your snack." This is completely different from praise, where the emphasis is on how *you* feel about her sharing.

* **Talk less, ask more.** Even better than descriptions are questions. Why tell him what part of his drawing impressed *you* when you can ask him what *he* likes best about it? Asking "What was the hardest part to draw?" or "How did you figure out how to make the feet the right size?" is likely to nourish his interest in drawing. Saying "Good job!", as we've seen, may have exactly the opposite effect.

This doesn't mean that all compliments, all thank-you's, all expressions of delight are harmful. We need to consider our *motives* for what we say (a genuine expression of enthusiasm is better than a desire to manipulate the child's future behavior) as well as

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the actual *effects* of doing so. Are our reactions helping the child to feel a sense of control over her life -- or to constantly look to us for approval? Are they helping her to become more excited about what she's doing in its own right – or turning it into something she just wants to get through in order to receive a pat on the head?

It's not a matter of memorizing a new script, but of keeping in mind our long-term goals for our children and watching for the effects of what we say. The bad news is that the use of positive reinforcement really isn't so positive. The good news is that you don't have to evaluate in order to encourage.

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Atrocious Advice from "Supernanny"
by Alfie Kohn

[*This is a slightly expanded version of the published article, which was titled "Supernanny State."*]

A despot welcomes a riot. Disorder provides an excuse to rescind liberties in order to restore calm. There are only two choices, after all: chaos and control. Even the creators of *Get Smart* understood that.

And so, too, do the creators of *Supernanny* and *Nanny 911*. Each week they poke their cameras into a dysfunctional suburban home where the children are bouncing off the walls and the parents are ready to climb them. There's whining, there's yelling, there's hitting . . . and the kids are just as bad. But wait. Look up there: It's a bird. It's a plain-dressed, no-nonsense British nanny, poised to swoop in with a prescription for old-fashioned control. Soon the clueless American parents will be comfortably back in charge, the children will be calm and compliant, and everyone will be sodden with gratitude. Cue the syrupy music, the slow-mo hugs, the peek at next week's even more hopeless family.

These programs elevate viewer manipulation to an art form. For starters, the selection of unusually obnoxious children invites us to enjoy a shiver of self-congratulation: At least my kids -- and my parenting skills -- aren't that bad! More to the point, these anarchic families set us up to root for totalitarian solutions. Anything to stop the rioting.

We're encouraged to pretend that living with a camera crew doesn't influence how parents and children interact, and to disregard what it says about these people that they allowed their humiliation to be televised. We're asked to believe that families can be utterly transformed in a few days and to assume that the final redemptive images reveal the exceptional skills of the nanny -- rather than of the program's editing staff. By now, a fair number of TV dramas, and even some sitcoms, refrain from serving up contrived happy endings. Sometimes the patient dies, the perp outwits the prosecutor, the jerk is unreformed. Yet here, in the realm of nonfiction programming, a tidy solution must be found before sign-off. Perhaps it's reality television that's most divorced from reality.

We might just laugh off the implausibility of these programs except that they're teaching millions of real parents how to raise their real kids. To that extent, it matters that they're selling snake-oil.

Consider ABC's *Supernanny*. (Fox's copycat *Nanny 911* differs mostly in that a rotating cast of nannies shares top billing.) The show is rigidly formulaic: Jo Frost, the titular nanny and now bestselling author, arrives, observes, grimaces, states the obvious, imposes a schedule along with a set of rules and punishments. The parents stumble but then get the hang of her system. Contentment ensues.

The limits of the show, however, are less consequential than the limits of its star. Ms. Frost's approach to family crises is stunningly simple-minded; it's the narrowness of her repertoire, not merely the constraints of the medium, that leads her to ignore the

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important questions. She never stops to ask whether the demands of work and kids could be more gracefully reconciled if high-quality, low-cost daycare was available. She doesn't even inquire into psychological issues. Are the parents' expectations appropriate for the age of the child? Might something deeper than a lack of skills explain why they respond, or fail to respond, to their children as they do? How were *they* raised?

The nanny never peers below the surface, and her analysis of every family is identical. The problem is always that the parents aren't sufficiently vigorous in controlling their children. She has no reservations about power as long as only the big people have it. Kids are the enemy to be conquered. (At the beginning of *Nanny 911,* the stentorian narrator warns of tots "taking over the household"; the children in one episode are described as "little monsters.") Parents learn how to get them to take their naps *now*. Whether the kids are tired is irrelevant.

Supernanny's favorite words are "technique" and "consistency." First, a schedule is posted -- they will all eat at six o'clock because she says so - and the children are given a list of generic rules. The point is enforcement and order, not teaching and reflection. Thus, rather than helping a child to think about the effects of his aggression on others, he is simply informed that hitting is "unacceptable"; reasons and morality don't enter into it. Then he is forced to "stand in the naughty corner." Later, the nanny instructs Dad to command the child to apologize. The desired words are muttered under duress. The adults seem pleased.

For balance, kids are controlled with rewards as well as with punishments. Those who haven't been eating what (or when, or as much as) the parent wishes are slathered with praise as soon as they do so - a "Good boy!" for every mouthful. Sure enough, they fork in some more food. These children may be so desperate for acceptance that they settle for contingent reinforcement in place of the unconditional love they really need.

The little girl in one family is accustomed to having Mom lie down next to her at bedtime. Forget it, says Supernanny, and the tradition is ended without warning or explanation. When the girl screams, that only proves how manipulative she is. Later, Mom confesses, "I felt like I was almost mistreating her." "Do not give in," urges the nanny, and misgivings soon yield to "It's working; it's getting quieter" - meaning that her daughter has abandoned hope that Mom will snuggle with her.

On another episode, a boy is playing with a hose in the backyard when his mother suddenly announces, "You're done." The boy protests ("I'm cleaning!") so she turns off the water. He becomes angry and kicks over a wagon. Supernanny is incredulous: "Just because she turned the water off!" There is no comment about the autocratic, disrespectful parenting that precipitated his outburst. But then, autocratic, disrespectful parenting is her stock in trade.

Supernanny's superficiality isn't accidental; it's ideological. What these shows are peddling is behaviorism. The point isn't to raise a child; it's to reinforce or extinguish discrete behaviors - which is sufficient if you believe, along with the late B.F. Skinner and his surviving minions, that there's nothing to us other than those behaviors.

Behaviorism is as American as rewarding children with apple pie. We're a busy people, with fortunes to make and lands to conquer. We don't have time for theories or

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complications: Just give us techniques that work. If firing thousands of employees succeeds in boosting the company's stock price; if imposing a scripted, mind-numbing curriculum succeeds in raising students' test scores; if relying on bribes and threats succeeds in making children obey, then there's no need to ask, "But for how long does it work? And at what cost?"

In the course of researching a book about parenting, I discovered some disconcerting research on the damaging effects of techniques like the "naughty corner" (better known as time-out), which are basically forms of love withdrawal. I also found quite a bit of evidence that parents who refrain from excessive control and rely instead on warmth and reason are more likely to have children who do what they're asked - and who grow into responsible, compassionate, healthy people.

If you can bear to sit through them, the nanny programs provide a fairly reliable guide for how *not* to raise children. They also offer an invitation to think about the pervasiveness of pop-behaviorism and our hunger for the quick fix. "I guarantee you," Supernanny earnestly, if tautologically, exhorts one pair of parents, "every time you're consistent, [your child] gets the same message."

Granted, but what message?

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For more information about *UNCONDITIONAL PARENTING: Moving from Rewards and Punishments to Love and Reason* and Alfie Kohn's other books and tapes, please visit www.alfiekohn.org

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Marc Prensky

Marc Prensky is an internationally acclaimed speaker, writer, consultant, futurist, visionary, and inventor in the critical areas of education and learning. Marc is the founder of *Games2train*, an e-learning company whose clients include IBM, Microsoft, Bank of America, Nokia, Pfizer, the U.S. Department of Defense, and the Los Angeles and Florida Virtual Schools. He is the author of the critically acclaimed *Digital Game-Based Learning* (McGraw-Hill, 2001.)

Marc's professional focus has been on reinventing the learning process to provide more engagement, combining the motivation of video games and other highly engaging activities with the driest content of education and business. He is considered one of the world's leading experts on the connection between games and learning. His innovative combination of educational tools and game technology—including the world's first fastaction videogame-based corporate training tool—is becoming widely accepted throughout schools, government and corporate America.

Strategy+Business magazine called Marc "That rare visionary who implements." Marc has designed and built over 50 software games in his career, including world-wide, multi-user games and simulations that run on all platforms from the internet to handhelds to cell phones. Marc has created engaging technology for education, business training and e-Learning.

Marc's frequent speeches and workshops around the world inspire audiences by opening up their minds to new ideas and approaches to technology and education. His products and ideas are innovative, provocative, challenging, and clearly show the way of the future.

The New York Times, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Newsweek*, *Time* and *Fortune* all have recognized Marc's work. He has appeared on MSNBC, CNN/fn, and the BBC. In 2000 Marc was named as one of training's top "New Breed of Visionaries" by *Training* magazine. Marc also writes a column for *On the Horizon*, a publication for leaders in academia.

Marc's academic background includes masters degrees from Yale, Middlebury, and The Harvard Business School (with distinction.) He is a concert musician and has acted on Broadway. He has taught at all levels from elementary to college. He spent six years as a corporate strategist and product development director with the Boston Consulting

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Group, and worked in Human Resources and in Technology at the former Bankers Trust Company.

Marc is a native of New York City, where he lives overlooking the Hudson with his wife Rie Takemura, a writer, and their son Sky. For further information, see www.marcprensky.com.

Marc Prensky's latest book is *Don't Bother Me, Mom – I'm Learning! How Computer and Video Games are Preparing Your Kids For 21st Century Success – and How You Can Help!*

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Don't Bother Me, Mom – I'm Learning!
How Computer and Video Games Are Preparing Your Kids For 21st Century Success – and How You Can Help!

Introduction

Let me begin with a warning: You are about to hear a message that - while absolutely true - will fly in the face of the prevailing wisdom about computer and video games. Summed up in a sentence it goes like this: computer and video games aren't as bad as you think they are - in fact, there's good reason to believe that they do a tremendous amount of good.

To give you an example of just how against-the-grain this message is, before Paragon House bought the rights to publish this book, more than 30 other publishers turned it down - some more than once. Many prospective editors claimed that "parents simply won't believe it." In other cases, the rejections came from in-house marketing and publicity people, who said the message would be too hard to deliver, especially since I am not a well-known psychologist or professor.

In some ways, all those editors and publicists have a point. A lot of parents - perhaps even you - will have some trouble buying the argument that video games aren't as evil as they're made out to be. That's largely because most of the information you get about video games comes from writers, politicians, psychologists, and lawyers, who don't play video games. (The one writer for a major paper who does, the reviewer Charles Herold of The New York Times, is very positive about these games.) Neither do most professors play (one of the few who does wrote the Foreword to this book.)

Today's computer and video games are causing just about everyone a great deal of frustration and concern. Parents worry about the large amount of time their kids spend playing these games, and fear that all that time in front of a screen will wreak havoc on their children's health and academic and social achievement. Teachers worry about the increasing competition of exciting games and other media for their students' attention, and about students' declining interest in schoolwork. And the kids themselves, of course, are frustrated by the wide gap between their exhilarating experiences playing games and their slow-paced lessons in school.

Since pretty much all the information that parents and teachers have to work with is a lot of speculation, conjecture, and overblown rhetoric about putative negative aspects of these games, it's no wonder they're in a panic!

It also shouldn't come as much of a surprise that the people who actually *do* play and make video and computer games have a very hard time getting their positive message heard. This is especially true for game-playing kids, who are totally frustrated by their parents' and teachers' uninformed attitudes, and who, given half a chance, would happily explain why video and computer games are a positive part of their life, and why they spend so much time playing them.

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But kids do not have a voice in our society. Although they are empowered in many areas of their life, they still have a hard time getting their story out.

So I am doing it for them. While not a psychologist or professor by training, I do have a background, both academic and professional, that prepares me for this. I attended Oberlin, Harvard, and Yale, I have three masters degrees, including one in education and a Harvard MBA. I have taught at all levels from elementary school to college, have worked for some of the top firms in the country, and have had my own company for ten years. I published a book, *Digital Game-Based Learning* (McGraw-Hill 2001) which was the first to talk about electronic games and learning, and which spawned an entirely new field, "Serious Games," now just getting off the ground. I have written over 50 articles, several of which have been published or reprinted in well-respected academic journals and in school newsletters all around the world (all posted on my web site www.marcprensky.com/writing/) and designed over 50 computer games for learning, for children and adults. And I speak regularly to educators all over the globe.

But mostly I observe.

And what I see is an almost total inability for most parents and teachers to relate to, understand, or communicate with their kids on the subject of computer and video games. This is an extremely unhelpful (and unhealthy) situation for everyone.

Why This Book Is Important

No one seriously argues - and I certainly don't - that kids should be allowed to play computer games to the exclusion of everything else. Part of our responsibility as adults is to make sure our children lead healthy, balanced lives. And by the time you finish this book, you'll understand why electronic games can - and should be - a vital part of that balance. For example, I'll share with you some important - and too often ignored - information that suggests that game-playing is as beneficial to children's development as reading.

What You Will Learn

My goal in writing this book is to give you new perspective and insight in two important areas. First, I will give you a peek into the hidden world into which your kids disappear when they are playing games. Second, I will help you as an adult - especially if you are a concerned parent or teacher - understand and appreciate the many *positive* things your children are learning while they're playing video and computer games.

Once you realize the enormous teaching power that games have for your kids, you will begin to respect the learning that is taking place. You'll be able guide your kids (and be guided by them), and possibly even work with them to create tools and situations that are directly useful for their success and learning.

In the few short hours it takes to read this book, I will show you:

- What it *feels like* to be in the world of computer and video games;

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- Why the positives from playing computer and video games overwhelm any negatives;

- How to appreciate the breadth and depth of modern computer and video games and the ways they cause your kids to learn;

- How to understand the various *useful* skills your game-playing kids are acquiring;

- How to understand your own kids better and build better relationships using games as a base.

But perhaps the most important lesson you'll learn is *how to augment and improve what your children are learning*, by having conversations - that they want to have - about their games. I strongly believe that there is great benefit to *all* parties, young and old, from understanding more about this phenomenon that so engages our young people.

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Read more about Don't Bother Me, Mom - I'm Learning!

The Emerging Online Life of the Digital Native: What they do differently because of technology, and how they do it

"Students are not just using technology differently today, but are approaching their life and their daily activities differently because of the technology."
NetDay survey 2004, Conclusions

One of the most interesting things I enjoy observing about young people today is the rich online world and life they are in the process of creating for themselves.

For almost every activity in their lives, these so-called "Digital Natives" (See *Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants*, at www.marcprensky.com/writing/default.asp) are inventing new, *online* ways of making each activity happen, based on the new technologies available to them.

This is not to say that *every* young person does *every* one of these things online - many still do only a few - but the *possibilities* for what Digital Natives can do online are growing exponentially, and are being adapted by more and more of them daily (and by some adults as well, although as we will see, there are differences.)

A 2004 survey by the Net Day project of 200,000 U.S. students (www.netday.org) concluded, as noted above, that "Students are not just using technology differently today, but are approaching their life and their daily activities differently because of the technology."

Says one teenage girl in a Yahoo video, "On the Internet you can play games, you can check your mail, you can talk to your friends, you can buy things, and you can look up things that you really like."

And the Internet is just the tip of an enormous iceberg of possibilities. As important as it may be to the Digital Natives, their online life is a whole lot bigger than just the Internet. This online life has become *an entire strategy for how to live, survive and thrive in the 21st century*, where cyberspace is a part of everyday life. Today's third graders, as the Net Day Study observed, already have multiple email addresses.

In the paragraphs that follow I will look at a large number of daily activities that *all* people do - including "Digital Immigrants" - to observe and examine just how the Digital Natives have taught themselves, and learned, to do these activities differently.

One thing we will observe is that even when Immigrants use the *exact same* technology such as eBay, or blogs, Natives and Immigrants typically do things differently. This often causes dissonance and disconnect between the two groups. If you haven't felt this dissonance, at least in some areas, I bet you haven't been with a lot of people from the other age group.

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Also, as far as I can observe from the countries I've been to in the past few months, from Scotland to Italy, to New Zealand, to Japan, to Canada, the phenomenon I am describing is global in the developed world, and is quickly emerging in other countries as well.

AREAS OF CHANGE

So, here follows a number of areas where the Digital Natives are creating their own way of doing things, often "under the radar" of most Digital Immigrant adults. Although this is a relatively long list - which is part of my point - I will do some summarizing at the end.

Digital Natives are Communicating Differently
email, IM, chat

All human communication changed radically with the advent of the worldwide computer network, and for no group more so than Digital Natives. Letters, which once took time and thought to write and time to arrive, were quickly supplemented and often supplanted by email, which could be written quickly and sent instantly to any number of people. But while Digital Immigrants spent, and still spend time worrying about which type of communication was better, the Digital Natives quickly abandoned any pretense of traditional letter writing ("You mean on paper?" asked one incredulously) except when forced to do it by a traditionalist parent or teacher.

At the same time, long-distance communication went from being expensive (and therefore time-limited) to being essentially free. This opened up to the Natives the possibility of frequent, world-wide communication, and again, they have quickly adapted it to their own purposes, just as their parents did in the office. It is now possible for the Natives to remain in close communication with any one they meet, anywhere, and they often do, totally expanding and simplifying the traditional notion of "pen pals." While companies like e-Pals have sprung up to protect kids, most prefer, certainly with people they know, to remain unguided and unfiltered.

Email, and even more its synchronous cousin, chat, allowed another new phenomenon to emerge - online-only acquaintances and friends. Digital Natives began realizing that you could meet people online in various news and discussion groups, and that those would be people who shared your interests. Not only that, but you could read their posts and see how they thought long before you ever contacted them, even online.

Kids quickly realized that "lookism," that seldom-talked-about but insidious social divider, doesn't exist at all on the web, and were thrilled to take advantage of this, with the ones who might be the least communicative in person reaping some of the biggest benefits.

[Of course with this comes the dangers of predators and criminals, which are real, but the Natives are not about to let this spoil their party. As we shall see in a minute, they have begun to create and evolve online reputation systems to keep themselves, and their friends safe (or at least safer) in the digital world.]

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Email is a form of what is called “asynchronous” communication. Asynchronous means that only one of the communicating parties needs to be there at a time; the message is composed and sent at the writer’s convenience, and is read at the receivers’, just like “snail mail” (as the Digital Natives have dubbed the Post Office system.) This type of communication has great advantages, including the time to reflect before you write or answer. While the “etiquette” that has evolved for email demands a quick response, that response does not have to come within the hour or even the same day. So, as fast as it is, email is the Native’s “reflective” form of communicating.

But this does nothing for those who like their communications to be “synchronous,” i.e. live and “real-time.” One form of real time communication, of course, is the phone, and for Digital Natives the cell phone has become a necessity, as we shall hear more about later. But another form of real-time communication, used by the Natives to a much greater extent than by their elders, is chat, also known, in various incarnations as instant messaging and real-time texting. Coming in a number of forms or flavors, chat are text based systems where, typically everyone in the conversation, which can be two people only or very large numbers, is online simultaneously. Today’s Digital Natives thrive on this form of communication - every parent I talk to marvels (and even sometimes brags) at the number of “chat windows” their kids have open simultaneously - often not realizing that this is universal. Most of these conversations are one-on-one, but some are in chat rooms, where the various “speakers” are identified by their online name or ‘handle” before their comment.

Obviously, texting is slower than just talking, so the Digital Natives have invented ways to speed it up. “Correct” spelling is replaced by whatever is readable. Anything that can be done with one key, is: “k” for OK, “c” for see, “u” for you (as in cu later). Numbers replace their homonyms (as in t42) and the way characters look on the screen takes on meaning. Abbreviations are well-known (LOL=laugh out loud.) Brief communications like H4T5TNT (home for tea at five tonight) are common, and are often made up among particular users. And a semi-secret (but widely known among the Natives) code has evolved to protect texters privacy, as in “GTGPOS” (got to go, parent over shoulder.)

I have heard from numerous parents stories about how children who had trouble communicating using normal speaking, writing or even email (because of some form of dyslexia or shyness, for example) completely blossom in the norm-free communication atmosphere of chat, texting and IM, where the only “rule” is to make yourself understood.

The “missing” communication elements of facial observation and body language are often approximated in both email and texting by “emoticons” such as the happy, sad or winking face, or the textual equivalent (<grin>), enriching the communication. And while it is harder, perhaps, to tell someone is lying when you don’t see them in person, technology is addressing this too, through voice pattern and biometric analyses. Importantly, all the various elements of the Natives’ digital life are closely related. Chat, for example, plays a big role in games. Depending on the situation, chat may be preferred even to voice communication, even when available, because it is more private.

Advertisers, who watch kids’ behaviors carefully, have already picked up on this in their sales pitches, such as the TV commercial in which a group of skiers in a gondola, as a

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practical joke, silently text message each other to lure one friend out of the car prematurely.

Digital Natives are Sharing Differently
Blogs, webcams, camera phones

While email and texting are clearly mechanisms for sharing, Digital Natives have evolved other, specific mechanisms to do so. Take blogs, for example (the term "blog" is a shortening of "weblog.") These text-only (originally) sites allow Digital Natives to share the most intimate details of their personal and emotional lives, on a weekly, daily, or even hourly basis. Software has been developed that let kids with online access set up a personal blog at almost no cost. (See www.blogster.com) The entries get archived and the blogs remain permanently on line accessible to anyone with the address or a link.

Blogs have led to a complete reversal of the "diary" phenomenon - where once kids kept their feelings locked up in a book, today they (or at least many of them) prefer to post them online for all to see and share. Friends read each others blogs to know what's going on in the social group. An important feature of blogs are lists of links to other blogs that the writer enjoys, so they serve as a form of interconnection.

The blogging phenomenon, of course, has also entered the Digital Immigrant world, but in a very different way - as an *intellectual* sharing tool. Many intellectuals, from news people to "gurus," to professors, write and publish regular blogs, which become regular reading for their followers. But because the usage is so different (emotion vs. intellect) this is effectively a different medium than the blogs of the Digital Natives.

Cell phone cameras are now the primary means of sharing images among young people in many places, either sending the pictures, or even passing the cell phone around, as I often see school girls doing on the subway. Photo albums appear to be a thing of the past.

Webcams are another device Digital Natives use frequently for sharing, while Digital Immigrants use them typically for monitoring. As a "sharing" phenomenon, webcamming consists of setting up one or more cheap, tiny video cameras that broadcast continually to a web site. Digital Natives might share continuous views of their room, something in nature, a pet - often the weirder the better. Immigrants, on the other hand, typically use webcams for "monitoring" in a security or similar situation, such as a "babycam." As a preview of the Digital Native's future, I recently watched a form of webcam sharing in which a technology-oriented father on the Internet searched the web cams in each room in his house in order to share with me "live" pictures of the baby.

Digital Natives are Buying and Selling Differently
eBay, schoolwork

Shopping - who would have imagined the extent to which the digital revolution has changed it? While for Immigrants the internet has brought convenience, comparison and collectables, for Natives it has brought access to new wealth and access, mainly through the ability to purchase clothing, computers and other things on eBay. I know of

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schoolgirls who buy all their clothes on eBay - and dress only in designer wear. For equipment geeks, the web, and eBay in particular, are a source of a never ending flea market. Of course it also didn't take the Natives long to figure out that the Web is a great place to buy and sell school-related information - in particular papers and exams. This has, unfortunately, led their Immigrant professors to become digital sleuths, rather than searching for, and inventing new teaching methods.

eBay has also become the place for Digital Natives to "monetize," if they choose, the work they do in a game, by offering for sale advanced characters, weapons and other items. This has led one economics professor to conclude, by assuming that the relative value of the assets sold online was applied to everything in the game, that the online game *EverQuest* has a larger economy than Russia!

One other important thing that Digital Natives have learned to buy and sell online are their services, as free lancers, employees, and even spouses. The web is now the preferred means of finding a job (not to mention a mate.) And chances are good that your Digital Native son or daughter will be finding some or all of their dates online.

Digital Natives are Exchanging Differently
music, movies, humor

Digital Natives love to trade, to give and get, especially items that express their personality, such as songs, movies and web sites. Sites that are humorous get passed around particularly quickly, in what has now become known as the "viral" way. This has led to a great clash with the old system, as young people increasingly see things available to them online as "free" of ownership and cost. Although legislation and some widely publicized prosecutions have slowed this sharing down somewhat in the United States, I predict this is just temporary, as new business models evolve. Although the 99 cent song has made some headway in the U.S., free music and video file sharing continues unabated and at record paces around the world and in most of our colleges. The data shows a continual increase of peer-to-peer (P2P) activity, and P2P applications are still the most downloaded on the Internet.

Digital Natives are Creating Differently
sites, avatars, mods

One of the defining characteristics of the Digital Native is the desire to create. Digital Natives are adept (or become quickly so, given the chance) at building Web sites, Flash movies, and other online creations. In their games they create not only avatars (characters to represent them), but entire worlds, including the houses, furniture, clothes, weapons and implements of whatever world they are inhabiting. More and more games now come with tools, such as "level editors", included in the box, which allow interested players to create entirely new worlds and games of their own invention. This process, known as "modding," has a huge number of participants, who create everything from levels to complete games (total modifications) some of which get sold separately. Prizes of up to $1 million are offered for this (usually collaborative) skill. Mods that use the same tools to create passive movies rather than interactive games are known as "Machinima" and they too have a large creative force and following on the web (try

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Googling "machinima.") In many games the volume of player-created content equals or surpasses content created by the game developers.

The important point here is about tools. Digital Natives expect to have powerful tools available to them, and they know, by teaching themselves and teaching each other, how to use them.

Digital Natives are Meeting Differently
3D chat rooms, dating

Meeting used to be considered purely a face-to-face activity. Obviously, people still do meet face-to-face, but online meeting, and arranging meetings online has become an important hallmark of this generation. All kinds of software exist to facilitate this, from instant messaging "chat rooms," to tools like "wikis" and "net meeting." There are tools to help people set up live meetings, such as www.meetup.com. In Japan, people use their cell phones as a meeting mechanism, setting profiles in a program called Lovegety, which set both phones ringing when passersby's profiles match up.

Digital Natives are Collecting Differently
mp3, video, sensor data

I don't know how many Digital Natives still collect stamps, but I do know they collect a lot of songs and videos - the statistics are that 2 *billion* songs are downloaded per month. Young people exchange music as an expression of who they are, and although some are paying for songs under the new schemes from Apple and others, most of what is collected is exchanged and downloaded for free. Peer to peer (P2P) applications that facilitate this collecting are the most downloaded apps on the Net.

Digital Natives are Coordinating Differently
Projects, workgroups, MMORPGs

Teachers would be jealous if they had any idea to what extent Digital Natives are able to coordinate their activities online, and to run projects that may involve hundreds of people. One classic example is that when a game didn't have a wide enough variety of spaceships to suit the players, the players just set up their own teams to create more of them. Some made the wire frame models, others the "skins" others the weapons for these very complex creations, and through a totally ad-hoc coordination process they got added to the game.

In Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games, or MMORPGs, such as *RuneScape, Toontown, EverQuest, Lineage, Dark Age of Camelot, Star Wars Galaxies* and *City of Heroes* (to name only some), players form groups, either ad hoc or standing, to work together on tasks such as freeing a building or storming a castle. Some groups are formed quickly as required, but others are long-lasting clans or guilds, where players have had to prove their skill to join, and pledge to be available when needed. Imagine 50-100 players, all with different powers, all going at a certain hour into the online world

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together (from wherever in the physical world each of them happens to be) to storm a castle - and the castle defenders frantically contacting each other to get online to defend.

Many aspects of these complex forms of self-coordination are second nature to today's game players, and to Digital Natives in general.

Digital Natives are Evaluating Differently
Reputation systems-Epinions, Amazon, Slashdot

When one is working with other people online - people one may never meet face-to-face - it is useful and important to have ways to evaluate whether to trust and believe them. While people with little online experience fret a lot about this (and while online predators do exist and kids need to be careful) much has been done in the online world, by Digital Natives and others, to allow people to establish, and rely on, online reputations.

One of the most widely used ways of establishing a reputation is though rating systems. If you buy or sell on eBay or Amazon, you get to rate the opposing buyer and the seller on their promptness, honesty, efficiency, etc. Bad apples get weeded out and good ones rise to the top. On group blogs such as Slashdot.com (an information site for nerds) and others, people's posts - comments - get rated by the community, from worthless (1) to insightful (5). You the user can set your filter to see only comments of a certain caliber, or only comments from people with a certain reputation. While some Immigrants may see all these rating opportunities (rate this page, rate this post) as intrusions, or wastes of time, natives know their online compass depends upon them and are often more eager to comply.

Of course at the same time one is evaluating others' behavior and content, one is building up one's own reputation. By being honest, following norms (e.g. no cursing or "shouting" (ALL CAPS) when posting, and being thoughtful in comments and posts, one builds up a positive online reputation. Building a negative online rep, or a mixed one, is possible as well.

And as one spends more time online, one's presence and reputation is there for all to see - unlike in the offline world - and can be determined, at one level, by just Googling a person's name. The number of people linking to them (which determines in large part their Google position) as well as the online work they have created, will speak for itself.

Digital Natives are Gaming Differently
"versus," small & large groups

The experiences called "games" by the Digital Natives are totally different than what their Digital Immigrant parents called (and still call) "games", and this difference lies at the root of much of the objection to and rejection of games by teachers, parents and others. Although there is some holdover - known today as casual or mini-games - games today are not the games of the previous generation. Those games - mostly card, board, and word games, were typically short, uncomplicated and even trivial, (with a big one

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even being named “Trivial Pursuit.”) The old games could be won in a couple of hours at most, often much less.

Today’s best-selling computer and video games, by contrast, are deep, complex experiences that take anywhere from 30 to over 100 hours to finish. And even today’s so-called “casual” and “mini” games, which take less time, deliver a much more intricate, adaptive experience than in the past.

Today’s games are also almost exclusively multi-player. Although in many Digital Immigrants’ minds computer and video gaming means “one individual in front of a machine,” solo gaming is pretty much passé - an artifact of the aberrant time when computers were not yet connected. Gaming with others now has so many components that there is something there for everyone. Games (although not the same games) are played by people of all ages and social groups. Multi-player games involving anywhere from two players to up to a million players. Recently a female college senior, a software engineering major who is the top student in her class, admitted to me that she has been a “closet” game player for years, not telling anyone outside of her gaming friends for fear of being laughed at, but that now she is ready to “come out.”

Digital Natives are Learning Differently
About stuff that interests them

Digital Native learning is also very different. Of course it only happens in its true form for things the Natives want to learn about (hobbies, vacations, games, for example.) but the natives are very much aware that if they actually want to learn something (usually for their own purposes) the tools online are available for them to do it on their own.

Recently when a 12-year-old, whose in-school problems were giving his parents fits, wanted a pet lizard, he spent days searching the web for everything he could find on different types of lizards as pets, and the advantages and disadvantages of each, and presented his parents with a 20 page report. (He didn’t get the lizard, but his parents were impressed, as was I.) A third grade girl became interested in butterflies and, on her own, prepared a report that totally impressed her teacher and her classmates.

Today, when a student is motivated to learn something, they have the tools to go further in their learning than ever before - far beyond their teachers’ ability and knowledge, and far beyond what even adults could have done in the past. The Digital Natives exploit this to the fullest, while ignoring, to a larger and larger extent, the things they are *not* motivated to learn, which, unfortunately, includes most, if not all, of their schoolwork.

Digital Natives are Searching Differently
Info, connections, people

Search is now the second biggest use of the Internet, after email. A great deal of what the Digital Natives do online involves searching - for information, products, people, connections - and the Natives have very sophisticated tools available to them for this purpose.

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Did you know you can use Google to search for phone numbers, dictionary definitions, and online images? The Natives do. Build a better search tool, such as Google did when others were using more primitive engines such as Yahoo and Alta Vista, and the Natives will switch *en masse* overnight. This is why Microsoft has spent $100 million to move into the search business.

Is Native searching different from Immigrant searching? Certainly, in terms of the topics searched. And there are also differences, I think, in the type of information each is looking for. Immigrants, in general, want the most filtering - they get overwhelmed easily by lots of information; Natives, on the other hand prefer more raw information so they can filter for themselves. (I've never heard a Digital Native complain about "information overload" - it's a fact of life for them.)

While teachers often complain about their students' inability to discriminate between good bad, true, false, useful or un-useful information, this ability is not lacking in general, but only in the domains the students don't understand well. It is not at all true in domains that they understand - give boys raw information about games or skateboards, or girls information about social groups to which they belong, and they will discriminate just fine.

Digital Natives are Analyzing Differently
SETI, drug molecules

Digital Natives have volunteered in large numbers (along with many Immigrants, to be sure) to be part of massive analysis projects, by running internet connected "screen saver" programs that download chunks of data and use their computer's free processor cycles to analyze them and send back the results.

Data that is being analyzed in this "distributed" way include the information from the SETI (Search For Extraterrestrial Intelligence) project of the University of California, and programs to search through millions of possible drug combinations for the few that seem promising against certain diseases.

Digital Natives are also more open to themselves and especially their devices being sensors, providing date for large projects, such as reporting conditions simultaneously around the world, such as weather.

Digital Natives are Reporting Differently
Moblogs, digital photos

In contrast with their parents, who used to love to keep any information they had secret ("Knowledge is Power," was their motto) Digital Natives love to share and report information as soon as they receive it (perhaps "Sharing Knowledge is Power" is their new, unvoiced, motto.) As soon as the Web appeared, Digital Natives began using it as a reporting tool about their lives and their interests. With a free web site or a blog, any kid can be an online reporter on any topic. Digital Native web sites and blogs exist about every topic, from politics to entertainment. Extreme forms of reporting include the story of many kids who went to see the movie *The Hulk*, expecting it to be a big blockbuster,

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text-messaging their friends from the theater that the movie was a dud, before the movie had even ended.

Digital cameras and video cams, and particularly cell phone cameras and webcams, let natives report in completely new ways. Moblogging (mobile-blogging), for example is the phenomenon by which people enter data into their blog (via pictures, voice, or texting) from their cell phones while on-the-go.

Digital Natives are Programming Differently
Open systems, mods, search

Pretty much every Digital Native can program to some extent, even if it is only setting up and personalizing his or her cell phone, or using "and" or "or" in search engines. Many, of course, program to a far greater extent, even those that have not studied programming formally (though today more and more have.) Today, in fact, we have a situation similar to ancient times when only a few people (known as "scribes") could read and write. If you needed to send a letter, you went to a scribe, who created it for you. Today, if you need a program to do something, such as, for example collecting political contributions online, you would go to a Digital Native programmer, who would create whatever you need, from a website to a program often in a matter of hours.

In addition, programming is spreading quickly among Digital Natives in the form of graphical programming languages, particularly Macromedia's Flash. Many young people can program successfully in this language, and banks of free code modules are quickly being established to make it even easier. (A great example was the "This Land Is Your Land" clip that drew national attention during the U.S. presidential election, but that is just one non-interactive example of the many things Flash is capable of. All kinds of expressions and games are emerging (see www.socialimpactgames.com for lots of examples.) In a short time Flash players will be incorporated into all new cell phones, so that natives can share their programming on phones as well as on the Web.

Digital Natives are Socializing Differently
Learning social behavior, influence

Digital Natives are both socializing online and "being socialized," as the social scientists say. Their online contacts are as "real" to them as their face-to-face ones, albeit different in style. In a positive sense, online relationships are not affected by the "lookism" and status that is so important and frustrating in kids face-to-face social lives - online, you and other people are judged only by what you say and produce. Reputation and influence are earned, and not based on social caste. Yet as in the face-to-face world, group norms of behavior must be learned and followed, often on pain of ostracism - try "shouting" (i.e. typing in all caps) in an online forum. For older Natives, meeting new people to date and even your spouse online seems natural. It seems inevitable that this will soon filter down to finding friends at all ages.

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Digital Natives are Evolving Differently
Peripheral, emergent behaviors

One of the most intriguing things about the Digital Natives' e-life is that it is continually evolving, and the kids are continually creating new behaviors that facilitate their lives. Natives have learned to type messages with the keys on their cell phones, in their pockets, at quite reasonable rates of speed. They have learned to manage 20 conversations in 20 instant messaging windows simultaneously, while still doing their homework in their lap. ("I don't understand how she does it," says her mother. "She tells me 'It's easy.'") When instant messaging, the two letters "OK" take too long to type - believe it or not - so the Natives use just a "k." The sociologist Mimi Ito and others have observed new social behaviors emerging among Japanese Digital Natives, such as leaving home with no fixed meeting place, and arranging their meeting on-the-fly on their cell phones.

Digital Natives are Growing Up Differently
Exploring, transgressing

Finally, online (a term that has been already outmoded by wireless - we need, and the Digital Natives will no doubt invent - a new one) is one of the key places, in addition to home, school and physical meeting places, where the Digital Natives are growing up. Like all young people, they explore, transgress, and test the limits in each of their spaces. Yes, pornography is easier to find on line than under someone's bed, but what does that mean? We adults ought to be understanding and thinking about these coming-of-age behaviors on the web so we can help our kids navigate their new world.

Those are just some of the many changes going on today - what do they all signify? More than anything, I think, they signify that the Digital Native generation is moving ahead in its own direction. It's headed, inexorably, (although some of its members will move faster than others) to incorporating its birthright - digital technology - into its life in new, often unexpected, ways.

And while some Digital Immigrants are afraid of the new technology, and others may question its value, the Natives are never going back, en masse, to the old ways.

Yes, there will be some Digital Natives who still hand-write letters, just as there are musicians who play 16th century music on old instruments. But letter writing in longhand is a thing of the past, like it or not. So are things like holding only one conversation at a time, looking people in the eye to know if you trust them, shaking hands as the final rite of a deal, hiding porn under the mattress, keeping information to oneself for personal status, paying for music, buying without easy comparison shopping, games where you don't create parts yourself, dating that isn't technology-mediated, reputations based on status rather than performance, excuses for not having information, and many, many other things. Get used to it.

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In a very short time technology has changed an entire generation's behavior radically, and it behooves all of us who are not from that generation but whose daily life involves interaction with them, such as parents and teachers, to learn as much as we can about the new behaviors.

(If you are someone who doesn't think behavior *can* change that fast around technology, try to think back to how quickly, when telephone answering machines first appeared, the norm went from "It's rude to have an answering machine" to "It's rude NOT to have an answering machine.)

Today norms and behaviors are changing *much* faster than in the past, because the technology changes rapidly and the Digital Natives are programmed to - and want to - keep up with it. For adults, some new Digital Native behaviors may be worth immediately imitating and adopting (blogging, for example), others will seem really strange (online dating, perhaps), and others will forever be out of reach and impossible to adopt given their pre-digital "accents" (e.g. one handed typing on a cell phone in your pocket.)

But there is a new, emerging, *different* form of life out there, that the Digital Natives are creating for themselves. If you are a parent or educator, the one thing you can be absolutely sure of is that you ignore it at your peril!

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More of Marc Prensky's writings can be found at www.marcprensky.com where you can also download a pdf version of this article and find out more about his latest book *Don't Bother Me, Mom – I'm Learning! How Computer and Video Games Are Preparing Your Kids For 21st Century Success - and How You Can Help!*

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Digital Immigrant Remedial Vocabulary – How Many Do You Know?



Kali Wendorf

Kali Wendorf, BFA (hons) is the founder, editor and publisher of *Kindred* (formerly *byronchild* magazine), a magazine that addresses the social, cultural and political aspects of parenting and its larger effects to the planet and human evolution. *Kindred* is used as well as a platform to initiate social change and political reform. She is also the founding president of the Tyagarah Sustainable Community Alliance and sits on the network board of Community Learning and Innovation Centre Inc. (CLIC). Since 1990 she has had an avid interest in spiritual awakening and the functioning of consciousness. She spent years with various masters in the East and also associated and worked with many post-modern teachers in the field of consciousness and transcendence. This work opened into the facilitation of workshops and retreats around the world for several years before immigrating to Australia. Born and raised in New Mexico, USA, she has been a passionate environmentalist, human rights and animal rights activist since childhood. Along with her publishing business, Kali facilitates workshops and lectures around the world on the social implications of raising a peaceful society. She lives in Mullumbimby, Northern New South Wales, Australia, with her husband and two children.

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Kindred

Kindred magazine is created to support and give voice to the embryonic but powerfully essential movement towards conscious parenting and conscious living happening all around the world. It is in honour of that revolutionary movement everywhere, be it large or small, public or personal, that Kindred addresses issues ahead of mainstream media. It brings cutting edge research and information from pioneers in all fields relating to the well being of our human family and the world we live in. Courageously exploring social, political, spiritual, global and environmental issues, it is the first and only such magazine in Australia and one of only a few in the world.

Kindred recognizes the inherent importance and worth of our shared custodianship of the future of our world through our children not only as parents but also as members of the human community. We support the task of conscious parenting through considering the needs of children and parents within a world that is rapidly changing. Understanding that there are immense forces through which we direct our lives and make our own choices for ourselves and our children, Kindred respects each parent's unique journey and the choices made along the way. We understand that there is no formula for meeting each person's individual challenges and therefore trust each parent's innate ability to know and intuit what is right for their child.

Through a wide and varied perspective, we explore the realms of parenthood free of sentimentality and cliché and into the arena of increased conscious understanding of our relationship with life, each other, ourselves and our children. Kindred endeavours to provide helpful and uncommon material upon which parents, practitioners, professionals and friends can make informed choices for the well being of the children, themselves and ultimately the world.

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Kali Wendorf
Publisher / Editor

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The New Mythology: Community Family
by Kali Wendorf

[Editorial from the inaugural issue of *byronchild* (now *Kindred*) magazine, March 2002]

I am not your typical model mother. This was my first hurdle to jump along with a string of many other confrontations when I knew I was going to produce *Byronchild* magazine. What is someone like me doing producing such a thing? I am, after all, a product of my time and circumstance when it comes to mothering which includes a mixed bag of love, wisdom, selflessness, selfishness, ignorance and ambivalence, with some good luck thrown in too. As a single mum, I have been too busy to spend hours of time reading the latest books on child development and attachment parenting and I have seen myself behave in ways toward my children of which I have never been proud.

I was asked once if I were to do it all over again, would I choose to be a mother? Hastily, I of course wanted to reply with a loud and clear, "Yes!" But given the sincerity with which the question was asked, it provoked me to pause and really look. I told her that it took me four years to finally decide I was a mother (my son was 5 when she asked me). Until then, I was much like a rider with only one foot in the stirrup, being dragged along by a wild galloping force called mothering, me protesting loudly as the thundering hoofs pounded in my ears throwing dust in my face. Of course, it never looked like that from the outside. Often people would comment to me what a wonderful mother I was. But it wasn't until the "yes" to being a mother mysteriously appeared inside four years after my first son was born, that I looked back and could see in the light of that "yes," how much of a "no" I had been living until then. It was a bittersweet reckoning.

One of the reasons that "no" was there was because of a unique lifestyle I had chosen for my children and myself during my first five years of being a mum. I was travelling with my then husband who worked in several cities overseas. Having no home base, I raised our family from city to city often with only a two-week stay in each town. We stayed in homes of friends or acquaintances that had very little knowledge of children and almost always in a country that was not English speaking. The result was that I was completely isolated as a mother and as a woman. It wasn't until I moved to Byron Bay, Australia, and created a home that I began to learn what community was and its importance in raising children and supporting our own well-being. The lack of that support for years taught me what can happen without it. Depression, anger, frustration, disempowerment are all by products of mothering without community. Our present nuclear family system (and even now only half a nuclear family is the norm) does a similar injustice to children and parents as the model typically isolates itself from the larger whole.

It is said that it takes 10 people to raise one child. We can birth our children at home and choose the best school for them, but in the end if we continue living in the nuclear isolation, only a portion of our children's needs are being met. In addition, as parents, we continue to place ourselves under extreme stress in the attempt to meet those needs. It is for this reason that I started a "community parenting" magazine and began an amazing journey of creating a forum for a new paradigm, the communal family.

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Joseph Campbell said during his last years that we were now in the age of the creation of a new mythology. This is seen most clearly within the realm of family as we all struggle to create a new system that works for us as parents and works for our children in a society that is rapidly moving away from traditional family values. We cannot rely on past models, nor romanticize the past tribal cultures in an attempt to find who we are as "family," as those concepts cannot adequately function within the complexities of today's world. My feeling is that the new family "mythology" is opening into a modern day tribe, which indicates not so much a social structural change but rather a change in our state of mind. Community parenting breaks the boundaries of traditional familial concepts and opens into a recognition that we are all custodians of the children and our responsibility to them is not determined by our blood relationship but rather by our simple belonging to the human race.

Failure to see the evolutionary continuum of a new mythology results in a society in crisis. We attempt to cling to the known models of education, healthcare and family rather than leap into the abyss of the unknown even though it is proven again and again that those old models don't work for us anymore. In our fear we also hand our power over to outside authority. Nowhere is this more evident than in the case of the Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder phenomenon whereby millions of children are medically controlled rather than the education system finding a more effective way to entice children to learn. We are fitting round pegs into square holes because the authorities tell us to even though it is clear to us the square holes are outdated. I find it interesting that we stay more loyal to our inert systems than to our own vital and ever-evolving children.

But I know and have compassion for this fear of the unknown because our leap into it is done alone. We must stand as individuals with our own experience of a new perspective and risk the criticism of all. Like this, even immense social change starts inside the mind and heart of one person at a time. So how do we create a community that can support the individual? Often a new myth can emerge only to become the next dogma alienating anyone who stands outside of that ideology. This creates more inertia and social inertia creates social disease. Therefore the honouring of the individual and their innate capacity to make choices and decisions that are best for their lives and their children's lives is paramount within community. But how do we as individuals open ourselves to the community family? We must first, parents and non-parents, admit that these labels limit our experience. Can I have the same concern for the child next door as I do for my own? Can I care about their lives as much as mine? Then we must open ourselves to two important catalysts: exposure and vulnerability. Look in your own experience and notice what happens when someone exposes himself to another, the same with vulnerability. A connection happens.

People who are not parents must begin to turn their attention to children. This is beginning to happen, as we can see with efforts such as the local *Uncle* and *Auntie* Projects. But even in simpler ways we can begin to extend ourselves to the children around us, gifting them with time and attention and the possibility to have another model. It is a movement towards exposure and vulnerability, as we often can feel extremely helpless or insecure in the company of children.

As parents comes the most important movement, away from self-reliance and nuclear circles and into the vulnerable position of being open to help and support from outside.

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This requires exposure too as we begin to tell the truth about our lives, how we lose it sometimes, how confused we can become, how scary it is.

Exposure, though challenging to do, can make us relax and take a more objective look at our issues. In addition, the ones we expose ourselves to, almost always feel a sense of relief as they recognize themselves in similar situations. Mothers and fathers in particular need to come out and speak as we put ourselves under tremendous pressure to be perfect. Our stories of our triumphs and losses are jewels within a community, something lost along with the extended families we once had. Like this, exposure brings us together and these are the foundations of community and raising the children together.

The inappropriate dependency of external authority cannot hold up to exposure and vulnerability either as people begin to validate their own and other's experience and wisdom. For example, if a mother begins to tell other mothers about her experiences around spanking her children and how it has become counter-productive, then these women will be less convinced by the experts who say, 'to spare the rod is to spoil the child.' This makes the family community an empowered place to reside rather than a breeding ground for conformity. It is a paradox that while we might expose our weakest weakness, we gain the greatest strength.

This is what these pages seek to do, to serve as a place where we can expose ourselves, be vulnerable, be naked, and be courageous with our insights and visions. While *Byronchild* will nurture and support where we are as a people and as parents, it will also confront our beliefs and places where we've agreed to divert our eyes.

In an attempt to create a seed of a community family, I have gathered our own tribe of local visionaries, wise-women and wise men within the magazine in recognition of the talent and knowledge that is right here in our own town. Many of them have their own departments, like Peter Keil of the *Uncle Project* who is doing the Men's section, or Jacinta and Elvian of *Mullumbimby Herbals* who are doing the Health section. They will be using their expertise, contacts and scope of knowledge to bring you the latest information in their field so that you can make your own informed choices.

Coupled with our locally hosted departments are writers from around the world whom I am most honoured to be featuring. Like this, *Byronchild* is both a local and a worldwide journal so that we not only receive information from around the world, but the world receives us too. For Byron Bay and all the gifts she bears to expose herself to the world would be a healing prospect indeed.

It is now two years since my friend asked me if I would be a mother if given the choice to do it all over. Since doing this magazine, mysteriously I have more time for my children and enjoy them more than ever. Another deeper surrender to motherhood has happened and in its wake recognition of how unsurrendered I have been in the past. It is like this, life inviting us into ever-continuing "Yes's."

So together we can walk on this tremendous adventure of belonging to humanity, letting the children show us the way.

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Read a little something about Byron Bay at the Tropical NSW website.



Jan Fortune-Wood

Jan Fortune-Wood grew up in the North East of England, read theology at Selwyn College, Cambridge and did a PhD in feminist Christology. She trained and worked as a teacher and later worked for fourteen years as a deacon and priest in the Church of England, before leaving after a series of work place assaults and some major changes of philosophy. She now lives in North Wales with her husband Mike (who runs home education support websites and is engaged in home education research - see www.home-education.org.uk) and her four children.

Jan divides her time between home education and writing. She is the author of five books on home education and autonomous parenting, the latest being *Winning Parent, Winning Child*, available from her website (www.autonomouschild.co.uk) or from the publisher Cinnamon Press (www.cinnamonpress.com) She is also a poet and novelist with a first collection and novel recently out with bluechrome publishing (http://www.bluechrome.co.uk)

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Winning Parent, Winning Child

Introduction

This book is not like most parenting books you will ever read. In parenting, as in any other arena of life everyone wants to win. Parents want to win, children want to win and what usually ensues is anything from a battle to an uneasy compromise, but it doesn't have to be that way. There is no magic way of changing things, but there is a way: clear your mind, suspend disbelief and imagine an environment where adults and children alike are winners. This book is not about getting children to do what you want. On the contrary, I am actually suggesting that children should get what they want. On the other hand, I'm also suggesting that, far from producing spoiled brats who will exhaust you with their demands, rob you of any life of your own and then want more, helping your children to get what they want in life should not be the opposite of you, the parent, getting what you want out of life too. We can all live together well in ways that parents and children consent to and prefer.

What parent hasn't longed to improve his or her relationship with children? What parent hasn't thought to herself 'Surely, there must be a better way than this', but felt defeated and trapped by old ways of relating? This book is about that better way. It's not magic; relationships are demanding, complex things, but imagine that all of the energy you've ever used on fighting your children, cajoling your children, begging your children, compelling your children, even hurting your children could go instead into finding solutions with them; solutions that they want, solutions that you want; solutions in which everyone is a winner.

The radical parenting ideas that you are about to consider propose that in place of compulsion we can find mutual solutions with children, in other words win-win situations that respect children, and assist them to grow as independent people. In this book I want us to consider the idea that when we use compulsion on another human being we risk damaging that person's ability to think clearly. Moreover, people who can't think clearly are cut off from a basic human learning resource, namely their personal, built in driving forces that make them the unique individuals they are, what I will call 'intrinsic motivation'.

Like any book about relationships this book makes some assumptions and the most basic assumption of this book is that people are not born messed up, but as resourceful beings with reasoning brains, instincts for self preservation and with intact personal driving forces that are healthy. If we assume this then it seems to me reasonable to think that if children are given information, encouraged to learn through making guesses about the world and finding which guesses fit and which fail, then they will develop and flourish. On the other hand we can also suppose that when children's experiments are interrupted by force, however subtle, a line of thought is sabotaged in its tracks. In such cases, children are left in a state of turmoil with the painful feeling of being thwarted.

Parenting is an enormous undertaking. The last thing parents need is to be judged or made to feel guilty for every little error they make with their children. None of us wants

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to be put on the defensive, feeling that we have to justify every action against some impossible, perfect standard of ideal parenting. We all make mistakes, but we can improve on them. We can build relationships in which mutual problem solving, optimism and improvement dominate. Consent based parenting is about doing our limited best now, learning all the time. We can all get our own way, parents and children alike, and be better people for it. How? That's what this book will seek to answer.

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Learn more about *Winning Parent, Winning Child*.

Helping Our Children With Observations Rather Than Theorising About Them by Jan Fortune-Wood

The tendency to make theories about our children is one of the easiest errors to fall into. Many casual conversations expect that we will be able to rattle off a list of our children's defining attributes in order to fix them in the mind of a distant aunt or enquiring stranger. 'Jane is a tomboy', 'Alan is rather hyperactive', 'Joe has reading difficulties', 'Louise is a maths genius'. The trouble with these theories is that they fix the child as a static product, they imply that this is what or who the child is and ever shall be. Furthermore, they fix the child according to someone else's outside observations and subjective perceptions. The person, often a parent, may spend a lot of time with the child, be very engaged with the child and know the child well by any conventional measure. Yet even then there is still an overlay of theory that is always external and open to being faulty.

The problem for parents is that if we want to help our children get what they want doesn't it help us if we know what kind of person it is that we are helping? Doesn't it make us more efficient helpers if we know what kind of personality we are dealing with? Aren't we more likely to make appropriate suggestions that our children will prefer if we have a handy thumb nail picture of John, who is an outgoing extrovert who loves to be always on the move, has lots of energy, is not very patient etc etc?

Conventional liberal parenting would say 'yes'. You will be a more helpful parent if you know your child's personality type, know what makes him tick, have the right labels for any disabilities or learning problems and so forth. This, however, fails to treat the child as a unique individual. If we begin to treat someone according to a packaged personality type then we are treating them with the gross disrespect of someone who really can't be bothered to attend to them in the moment. So am I saying that we can know nothing about our children and that we must begin every engagement as though we were starting from scratch? Of course not. That would waste time and knowledge. What we must be aware of, though, is the kind of knowledge we have and how best to use it.

We constantly make observations about one another. 'Each time we go to town Jane wants to visit the Barbie section of the toy shop', 'Jane spends a lot of time drawing figures of girls', 'Jane likes experimenting with make up and jewelry.' These are observations and they are fine as observations so long as we do not fall into various traps: so long as we do not have a fixed idea about what Jane will do or want on every future occasion, so long as we do not start channeling Jane down pre-set routes that fit in with our perceptions of these observations, so long as we are tentative about the suggestions we make based on our observations. In short, so long as we do not let our observations become fixed theories. We may observe Jane very often and spend a lot of time with Jane, but we are still not Jane. No matter how much time we spend together we never know what is going on inside someone else's head. Our observations can only ever be of a tiny portion of the learning and thinking and developing within Jane. So by all means suggest more visits to the shops with Barbies, suggest buying Barbies, provide access to lots of make up and jewelry and paper and drawing mediums, think of lots of

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creative ways to add to the delight Jane takes in all these things. Yet at the same time be open to the loves of today being dropped the next day or going off in new and previously unthought of directions. Above all don't conclude that Jane is 'a very feminine little girl', 'into all the girly things', 'bound to grow up to be a model or a make up artist', 'rather empty headed', 'a bit on the frivolous side', 'too obsessed with the trivial', 'in danger of developing warped views of women's bodies', 'in need of more balanced interests' or any one of a hundred other theories that fix a child according to someone else's agenda and are likely to interfere with the intrinsic learning which is taking place.

Once we step back and admit that we are all subjective observers who are fallible and liable to employ our own overlay of perceptions then we can become rather more tentative about how we employ our observations and rather less likely to do damage with them. Consider Peter. Peter is an eleven-year-old who doesn't exhibit fluent literacy to the observing world. His parents observe that in addition Peter has a lot of energy and appears (to them) to be often frustrated and destructive. In many conventional homes Peter would be only a hair's breadth away from being diagnosed with ADHD, medicated with ritalin, labeled as having a specific learning difficulty and plugged into a remedial reading programme. Theorising about Peter leads to seeing him not as a unique person, but as a certain category of child for whom a certain package of solutions can be prescribed. These labels will fix Peter and this fixing will derail his own intrinsic learning processes.

What is the alternative? Firstly, instead of running away with ourselves and forming theories about our children, we can take a breath and stop at our observations. If we admit that what we have are tentative, subjective observations which are open to refutation or revision then we are much less likely to do any damage. 'I observe that Peter is not reading fluently at the moment.' 'I observe that Peter has broken several things around the home this week when he has appeared angry.' 'I observe that Peter is frustrated by being woken up in the mornings/told to brush his teeth...'. These are our observations, but that does not entitle us to impose a formula on them.

Secondly, don't waste time and energy trying to get inside Peter's mind. The route of psychobabble is not one which is concerned with negotiating the present, but one which is likely to add more confusing overlays to the given moment.

Thirdly, concentrate on what Peter wants. 'I might be wrong, but I got the idea you wanted to get into that book and had a bit of difficulty. Can I help?' 'You seem to be angry. What can I do about that?' 'You don't seem to like being woken up in the mornings, can we find a better way of starting the day that works for you?'

Your offers and ideas may be way off the mark, but as long as they are made tentatively and your child knows that you are only putting forward conjectures for refutation, opening gambits which can be taken or left in the melting pot of ideas, then even the most mistaken observations are going to do no harm because they don't come as fixed theories which are likely to derail the whole intrinsic process of learning. Most fundamentally we do not risk defining the child and setting up a static problem label or a static self image that closes down whole areas of thinking and learning. In the case of Peter, for example, his internal breakthrough into fluent and sophisticated literacy might only have been a few days away, but the label 'late reader' or 'having a learning problem' could curtail that development and become self fulfilling. On the other hand a tentative

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observation and offer of assistance could speed up that final leap or be turned down as unnecessary.

We don't need labels for our children in order to help them. We don't need to get right inside their minds in order to help them. We only need to be available, observant, but aware of our own limitations and committed to discovering what Jane or Peter most prefer by their own lights at this moment.

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What's the Big Idea?
How changing our ideas helps us to be more effective autonomous parents and educators
by Jan Fortune-Wood

When many people think about living lives of consent, they assume that the obstacles to always finding solutions and everyone, children and adults, getting what they want will be practical ones. We don't have enough time to think through every issue innovatively or we don't have enough money to satisfy our children's wishes, or we're simply not that good at problem solving. It is easy to rationalize further and tell ourselves that our children are too young to be reasonable or that they have sugar allergies or soft teeth that mean that we can't just let go of the controls on their diet. Yet the truth is that all of these practical problems are soluble. It is not practical difficulties that block our way so much as our own ideas and assumptions. Let's be clear: practical problems do not stop us from helping our children to get what they want. The problem is the way we think; our resourcefulness, our ideas.

Imagine Paula. She is at the airport with her five-year-old daughter, Zoë, half an hour away from boarding her flight from London, where her parents live, to Texas, where she lives. Suddenly, Zoë announces that she has left her favorite teddy bear at Grandma's house and she wants to go back to fetch it. Most of us in this situation think that the problem is one of time: we can't retrieve the bear and board the plane and it's obvious to any adult which of those things has to happen. If Paula is a conventional parent then she is probably willing to offer comfort to Zoë, as long as Zoë doesn't make too much noise in a public place, but Paula will also believe, like most parents, that Zoë has to learn that some things just can't be changed; some things just have to be done whether we like them or not; some things are simply not negotiable.

The real problem though is not the conjunction of practical factors; an airplane departure at 8.30a.m; a bear that is a forty minute round trip away and a distressed child do not add up to an impossible situation in which someone has to lose. The real problem is Paula's inability or unwillingness to think that there is a solution. The solution might very well involve a later flight. It is not actually an immutable law of nature that Paula and Zoë must get on this plane. Although, as parents, we often present our decisions as though there really were no choice, as though our doctor's appointment or need to do some grocery shopping was written into the universe, the truth is that there are choices - as many as our resourcefulness allows us to envisage. On the other hand the solution might include Paula's initial wish that she and Zoë board their flight on time. Perhaps there is a story that they could invent together to make the bear's absence an extra stay with Grandma so that she doesn't have to say good-bye to them all at once or a story to make the time it takes for the bear to be posted to Zoë an adventure. Perhaps a new toy from the airport shop would make all the difference. Perhaps a call to someone at Grandma's house or to a courier service could get the bear to the airport in time. Perhaps Zoë simply needs more information - information about how much extra new plane tickets would cost, using up money she might like for other things; information about how Daddy will be waiting at the airport in Texas and will be sad not to see them for another day - not information that is used to manipulate Zoë with guilt and

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sentimentality, but real information that she can choose to take into consideration, knowing that the final decision has not already been made.

If Paula wants to live by consent with her child she will tell Zoë that she really strongly prefers that they make this plane. She will tell Zoë why that is what she wants - things that she hopes to be able to do by being home at a particular time; people who are meeting them at the other end; extra expense and what that might mean to their family; effects on their tiredness and ability to enjoy an already long journey. She will make suggestions about alternatives - stories about the bear, a new toy, a trip to the ice-cream shop at the airport, the possibility of someone bringing the bear to the airport for them and how they will deal with it if the bear doesn't arrive on time. Zoë, knowing that her mother wants to find a mutual solution, a way in which both of them can win, will be able to listen and consider without feeling brow beaten, knowing that she doesn't have to sit on the airport floor and cry her heart out to get listened to.

Let's imagine that Paula wants to find a consensual solution. They decide to ring Grandma and ask her to post the bear, but they also ask Grandma to take some pictures of the bear at Grandma's house, the bear being packaged, the bear being handed in at the Post Office. Zoë and Paula take pictures together of their journey and decide to keep a scrapbook of things they do when they get home until the bear arrives so that they can make their own picture narrative of the days of the bear's adventure. In the meantime, an ice-cream, a large cuddly Dalmatian toy from the airport gift shop and the thought of Daddy waiting to meet them at the other end mean that Zoë happily decides that getting on the plane now is actually what she wants to do.

A couple of years later, Paula is at home with Zoë and her new baby, Jacob, when Jacob suddenly develops a high temperature and begins to convulse. The hospital is close to their home and Paula knows that she can drive there quicker than an ambulance would take to reach them and get back again. Zoë has just got a new play station game and Paula knows that Zoë really doesn't want to leave the house today, but neither is Zoë comfortable alone at home and Paula has noticed that both sets of friendly neighbors, who might otherwise sit with Zoë, have gone out today. Paula tells Zoë that this is an emergency, she doesn't have time to talk this through right now, and Jacob needs to get the hospital. This is a very rare moment for Zoë; she knows that her mother doesn't lie to her, that Paula doesn't decide outcomes before discussions, so, despite not otherwise wanting to go to the hospital, Zoë has no qualms about accepting the genuineness of her mother's fears for Jacob and leaves her game without a backward glance.

Ideas, not practical problems are the real building blocks to living by consent; solutions are out there, but we don't always find them because we don't always have ways of thinking about them. We all have inner voices that say 'you can't always win' or 'but teeth have to be brushed no matter what children want' or 'if Jimmie watches too much TV he'll become aggressive'. We all have areas in which our assumptions are poor, often because of the compulsion we have experienced ourselves or because the ideas which we learnt and imitated are in fact false. These ideas can become so strongly held that they are ingrained in us and no amount of reason seems to shake them.

These deeply rooted ideas are well recognized and the scientist Richard Dawkins has given them a name that conveys the way these ideas reproduce themselves from brain to

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brain. Dawkins calls such ideas memes and although these ideas are deeply embedded, we are not slaves to memes, we can work on them. So what is a meme?

Dawkins talks about memes as being ideas that, like genes, self-replicate.

Examples of memes are tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, clothes, fashions, ways of making pots or of building arches. Just as gene types propogate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperms or eggs, so memes propogate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via process, which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation. ...

Some memes, like genes, achieve brilliant short term success in spreading rapidly, but do not last in the meme pool. Popular songs and stiletto heels are examples. Others such as the Jewish religious laws, may continue to propagate themselves for thousands of years, usually because of the great potential permanence of written records. (From *Selfish Genes* by Richard Dawkins. Chapter 11)

So memes are simply the building blocks by which culture and ideas spread from one person to the next in learnt behavior or imitation. Dawkins uses the word memes to show how ideas re-produce in a similar way to genes. Memes exhibit the features of evolution. They are inherited in that they are copied; they vary in that the copying is not exact, but is subject to subtle and larger mutations through imperfect copying and there is a process of selection in which the memes that survive will tend to be those which are highly memorable, useful or provoke an emotional response. In the arena of socio-biology there is a lot of argument about what memes mean and whether or not the theory of memes could mean that we are not free, but Dawkins himself and many others insist that we are free people.

The human arena of parenting is full of memes. Most of us have sworn never to be the kind of parents that our own parents were to us and yet most of us soon acknowledge that many of our most deeply rooted parenting ideas come from the way we were treated as children. Whether against our better judgment or not, we will often discover that many of our deepest held parenting assumptions bear more than a passing resemblance to those of our families and to the dominant theories of our particular culture, but that doesn't mean that we have to remain stuck.

Once we begin to believe that practical problems are susceptible to solutions then we can begin to recognize, criticize and change our memes. In short we can rebel by using reason and analysis to weigh the memes by which we parent and educate. This is exactly what we do when we begin to question mainstream parenting and education and when we begin to put counter cultural ideas of education as fun and child-led or growing up as a process of having one's autonomy constantly nurtured into practice. The more we free up our ideas, the more our daily lives change and the results, as we know, can be breath-taking.

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Dr. Jan Fortune-Wood is a freelance writer & parenting adviser, who home educates her four children. Jan works as editor at Cinnamon Press and edits the poetry journal Coffee House Poetry. She is the author of five titles on home education, autonomous education and non-coercive parenting. Jan's new book *Winning Parent, Winning Child* was published on May 1st 2005 and is now available from www.home-education.org.uk or www.cinnamonpress.com (in US or Canadian dollars) She can be contacted at jan@autonomouschild.co.uk



About the Editor

Hi, I'm Bob Collier.

I come originally from London, England, but now live in Canberra, the beautiful capital city of Australia.

My wife, Mary, is from Belfast, Northern Ireland, and we've been married since 1976. We have two fabulous children and I love them with all my heart - Bronnie, who was born in Sydney in 1985, and Pat, who was born in London in 1995.

For all but three of my twenty plus years of parenthood so far, my primary occupation has been 'stay-at-home dad'; and for more than ten years of that, in total, it's been my 24/7 full-time occupation. As it is now and has been since my son quit school in favour of home education only a few months after I started publishing my newsletter, *Parental Intelligence*.

I've been publishing the *Parental Intelligence* newsletter since August 2002, initially as a weekly email newsletter, now monthly online. It doesn't cost you a cent to read it and never will.

Visit my website to read the current issue and browse the newsletter archive.

Subscribe to the Parental Intelligence newsletter here. I publish on or about the 14th of every month. You'll also receive information as it becomes available about future e-books in the *Guiding Stars of the New Parenting Movement* series.

Thank you for reading *Volume 1!*

With best wishes for your happiness and success,

