

This book is a refreshing and practical instruction manual for parents, teachers and caregivers. It reminds us that parenting, like life, is an adventure that requires planning and organization while operating within the rules and guidelines of nature. Ronna clearly and effectively communicates the importance of self realization by developing and nourishing our own souls in order for us to become effective role models and parents for our children.

This soulful back to basics approach will surely be embraced by those who wish to be the best parents, teachers, and caregivers they can be by being truly present with their children, not only physically, but mentally, emotionally and spiritually as well. The insights and wisdom contained within *Enlightened Parenting* will benefit every parent, which in turn will benefit our most precious gifts of all, our children.

--Dr. Eric R. Hampton, NMD  
Naturopathic Medical Doctor  
Certified Hypnotherapist  
Source Integration Therapist  
[www.azprohealth.com](http://www.azprohealth.com)

\*\*\*\*\*

I was personally pleasantly surprised by all the common sense wisdom conveyed in *Enlightened Parenting*. Most parents have an uneasy feeling when they face the challenges and opportunities that parenting presents. How often do young and even experienced parents ask themselves: "How do I handle this problem? What is the best way to help my child mature and become the best that he/she can be?"

This book contains the type of answers they want to know. Most parents routinely strive to do their best but quickly find there is a plethora of gray and a paucity of black and white. The answers are not always easy or obvious and the unanticipated seems to be rather routine.

Parents will be thankful for all the immensely practical tips and suggestions that are discussed. Many adults will wish they had a parent with the type of wisdom expressed in this book when they were a child. As parents they will be grateful for the comprehensive guidance and recommendations to help make their children the very best they can possibly be.

Ronna McEldowney has managed to walk a fine line. Her suggestions enable parents to carefully and skillfully blend a combination of physical, mental and spiritual values in their approaches to real life situations. Her practical approaches will enhance the ability of parents to help their children become caring, loving, sharing mature adults.

This is one book every single parent not only needs but they will surely appreciate all of Ronna's expertise, experience and sharing.

--Doris J Rapp, MD ([drrapp.com](http://drrapp.com))  
Author of *Is This Your Child's World? & Our Toxic World, A Wake Up Call*

Ronna McEldowney is a master teacher and educational consultant, whose work within the Waldorf School Community is legendary. *Enlightened Parenting* contains valuable insights and practical wisdom. There is simplicity to Ronna's approach that makes her recommendations both inspiring and accessible and helps take the anxiety out of parenting. This is a must-read for every parent striving to raise healthy children in this world of ever increasing complexity.

--Janis Williams, Curriculum Specialist  
Golden Valley Charter School, Orangevale, CA

\*\*\*\*\*

I greatly appreciate Ronna's unique and practical perspective on parenting and childcare. I cannot imagine a single parent, teacher, or other childcare provider who would not benefit significantly from reading *Enlightened Parenting*. I keep it readily at hand as a useful reference tool.

—Debbie Hallof, Professor, Chaminade University  
President, Business Advisory Group, Inc.

\*\*\*\*\*

Ronna has provided both a reminder of the 'big picture' and practical suggestions for meeting the challenges of everyday life with children. Her years of experience and practical wisdom shine through in a way that engages both parents and teachers. I will be recommending it to all the parents in my program!"

--Rahima Baldwin Dancy, early childhood and parent educator &  
Author of *You Are Your Child's First Teacher*

\*\*\*\*\*

Three cheers for *Enlightened Parenting*. Ronna McEldowney has hit a grand slam. This is a must read for every parent or parent to be. This book goes beyond the ABC's of parenting. It is about becoming *the best you that you can become*.

--Dan Callahan, LMSW  
Director, The Last Resort Panama  
Panama's Premiere Recovery Center  
[www.thelastresortpa.com](http://www.thelastresortpa.com)

# ENLIGHTENED PARENTING

*What Every Child Wishes For &  
What Every Parent Wants to Give*

Copyright 2008 by Ronna McEldowney

All rights exclusively reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or translated into any language or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

A Dandelion Books Publication  
Dandelion Books, LLC Tempe,  
Arizona

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

McEldowney, Ronna

*Enlightened Parenting: What every child wishes for & what every parent wants to give*

ISBN 978-1-934280-70-6

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number 2008941595

Cover art by Bronson Dunbar, [www.bronsondunbar.com](http://www.bronsondunbar.com)

Cover and book design by Bud Jillett

#### Disclaimer and Reader Agreement

Under no circumstances will the publisher, Dandelion Books, LLC, or author be liable to any person or business entity for any direct, indirect, special, incidental, consequential, or other damages based on any use of this book or any other source to which it refers, including, without limitation, any lost profits, business interruption, or loss of programs or information.

Though due diligence has been used in researching and authenticating the information contained in this book, Dandelion Books, LLC and the author make no representations as to accuracy, completeness, currentness, suitability, or validity of any opinions expressed in this book. Neither Dandelion Books, LLC nor the author shall be liable for any accuracy, errors, adequacy or timeliness in the content, or for any actions taken in reliance thereon.

*Disclaimer:* To protect the identities and confidentiality of the individuals and families with whom the author has worked, she has changed their names. Any resemblance to actual persons with the names that are used in this book is purely coincidental.

#### Reader Agreement for Accessing This Book

By reading this book, you, the reader, consent to bear sole responsibility for your own decisions to use or read any of this book's material. Partners in Parenting Press and the author shall not be liable for any damages or costs of any type arising out of any action taken by you or others based upon reliance on any materials in this book.



Printed in the United States of America  
Dandelion Books, LLC  
[www.dandelion-books.com](http://www.dandelion-books.com)

**This book is dedicated to the preservation of childhood.**



# ENLIGHTENED ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

All of you beautiful people with whom I have crossed paths in this life I give heartfelt thanks for the cherished help and insights that I have received through knowing you.

I am thankful for the many colleagues, teachers, parents, and children in my life, for their many offerings and challenges to consciousness.

I want to especially thank all the many friends whose expression of life has embraced the meaning of LOVE.

I want to honor Grandpa Hansen for his devotion to Grandma Hansen when, in our presence, he asked her with tears in his eyes, to marry him in the next lifetime.

I give thanks to my darling husband, Robert David, who has chosen the bumper car approach to life yet who chooses to face himself and strive for the highest. Our love keeps taking us to higher and higher places even after twenty-two years of shoveling our own manure. He has given his undivided time to help edit this book.

Many thanks to Carol Adler, the ghost-ess with the most-ess (ghost writer). I would like to thank her for her confidence, support, and professionalism throughout this process.

My deep appreciation goes to:

- All of my Waldorf Mentors who loved unconditionally and graciously shared all of their loving wisdom.

- My parents whose love embraced and held us all.
- My sisters, relatives, including the Meachums, and friends, whom I am thrilled and honored to know.
- Myself for persevering with writing the book when financially it did not make sense.
- My mollies (animals) who bring out the best in me!
- My spirit friends whose wisdom help inspired these pages.
- Parents who nurture childhood and parenting as a top priority in our world!
- The Hawaiian friends who opened my heart to the mana in life.

# CONTENTS

PREFACE .....

## CHAPTER

1. Mirror-Call of Miracles:  
Our Children Reflect Who We Are .....
2. Heart-a-Culture: Creating a Safe and Loving Home  
and School Environment .....
3. Collide-a-Scope: Our Children’s Behaviors and Habits.....
4. SuperVision: Who’s in Charge?.....
5. Conversations with Children: Effective Parent-Child  
Communication .....
6. The (K)Night in Shining Armor: Bedtime and Other  
Rhythms and Rituals.....
7. Love & Laughter: Two Basics for Healthy Parenting .....
8. Interior Home Designer .....
9. Partners in Parenting: “I Make House Calls” .....

About the Author – “God Dropped by to Water My Garden” .....

Notes .....

Additional Comments & Information.....

Environmental Issues.....

Health Issues .....  
Safety Issues.....  
Miscellaneous Information .....

More Reading Material & Selected Websites .....

## PREFACE

Our children are often our best teachers. Often they lead us to a confrontation with our unresolved issues and give us an ideal opportunity to address those issues from a fresh perspective.

This book is for parents, teachers and other caregivers who are eager and ready to allow our children to be reflections of where *we* need to grow. Are *we* ready to go to the next step? *Are we ready to become leaders for our own children?*

One way to begin is to acknowledge the existence of spiritual guidance that is available for each of us and that reveals a picture of what the child needs us to understand. As we enliven our connection to the spiritual world, we are blessed with insights that lead to more intuitive ways of seeing, and being. Some of the virtues are: expanded awareness, renewed vitality, more patience, understanding, compassion, and forgiveness of self and others.

Ascending to an altitude of gratitude and relinquishing mundane thoughts, soon we discover that those “issues” we once considered problems have either dissipated or been accepted. These choices bring transformation; the goal is to gain a spiritual understanding of ourselves and others.

If you are new parents or teachers who have just accepted your first position, I know well the seriousness and intensity of your concerns: am I worthy of this task ahead? Do I have what it takes?

How do I answer the child who asks: “Why are people killing each other?” How do we resolve controversial issues with a neighbor, such as one parent allowing gun play while the other parent detests it; or, another parent who thinks it’s all right to let her child be rude and disruptive and use language that others consider inappropriate?

How do we get along with our neighbor when their world view opposes ours? What if my boy child wants to wear skirts and dance like a ballerina? What if I have a horrible migraine headache, my husband is unavailable, my three children are all making demands on me, I just came home from work, I have to do the laundry, prepare dinner, get everyone to bed, clean up the mess made by the dog, and call my mother-in-law, who has to go into the hospital tomorrow for a biopsy? What do I do and say if they can’t drink the water that comes out of our faucets because it is not safe?

We ask the spiritual world to help us. This collaboration opens our perspective, allowing finer impulses to shed light in stuck places. With spiritual guidance we can illuminate whatever stands before us and meet our children with conscious intentions providing for the good of all! The power of prayer and a positive outlook support children’s true nature. When we are in a loving space, we are better able to meet every challenge exactly where and when they present themselves.

Each of us is a vessel. When we fill that vessel with spiritual substance, it feeds our soul and nourishes the life of our family.

After 30 years as a caregiver and teacher of children from wee ones through seven years old, I would venture to say that every child wishes for love, including nurturing, security and guidance. We want to give our children tools so they will be fully prepared to meet their own adulthood with self-confidence and practical skills.

Although some may declare that it's more difficult than ever to be a parent today, I can almost hear our parents, grandparents and great-grandparents expressing the same sentiment! Is life ever without challenges—is it not those very challenges that motivate us to rise and do what it takes to create a quality life for both our children *and ourselves*? After all, doesn't it all begin with us?

This book is divided into nine chapters. In the first chapter, “Mirror-Call of Miracles: Our Children Reflect Who We Are,” I will discuss in depth what I mean when I suggest to a parent or teacher to “go inside and do the inner work” in order to provide the necessary guidelines for teaching and nurturing our children. I will also demonstrate how to do this.

In Chapter Two, “Heart-a-Culture: Creating a Safe and Loving Home and School Environment,” we will become more specific. I will discuss the ideal home and school environment for our children and basic requirements for healthy, wholesome early childhood development, based on the enlightened parenting model.

In Chapter Three, “Collide-a-Scope,” I provide examples of specific behavior challenges that occur during those early years. I also share some of my own stories and anecdotes about issues that parents and children have brought me and that I have worked through with them.

Chapter Four, “SuperVision: Who's in Charge?” will further explore issues of authority, the parent-child relationship at different stages of development, and specific instances pertaining to family lifestyles that require thoughtful preparation and consideration.

Chapter Five, “Conversations with Children: Effective Parent-Child Communication,” offers suggestions and examples for outwardly and

inwardly communicating with your children in order to demonstrate your love and understanding at the same time you convey to them that you are responsible for their well being.

In Chapter Six, “The (K)Night in Shining Armor: Bedtime and Other Rhythms and Rituals,” using examples from my past teaching and caregiving experiences, I show you how to transform mundane chores and necessary rituals into memorable events, and how to create transitions for your child, such as bath time and bed time, that both you and they will anticipate and enjoy. I will also discuss birthdays, holidays and other special occasions.

In Chapter Seven, “Love and Laughter: Two Basics for Healthy Parenting,” I further pursue the meaning of enlightened parenting and its connection to The Source by encouraging you to let nature nurture your children. Let them use nature as their playground. Keep things as natural and simple as possible... and whatever you do, keep it light, with lots of laughter and love.

Chapter Eight, “Interior Home Designer,” offers some basic suggestions for creating a child’s bedroom that is conducive for sleep, a playroom that invites creative play and constructive activities, and private spaces for you and your partner. It also offers suggestions for making all other areas in the house completely child-safe.

In addition to teaching kindergarten, over the years at the request of parents, I have been asked to be in residence at their homes for a short time, in order to help them with specifically identified parenting and family challenges. In Chapter Nine, “Partners in Parenting: ‘I Make House Calls,’” I relate some of my success stories. This chapter also includes important caregiving tips and suggestions for addressing specific child development issues with the goal of achieving and maintaining a healthy, nurturing family environment.

**Ronna McEldowney**

At the back of the book, in addition to a Selected Reading list, I have included another resource section, “Additional Comments & Information,” for a more detailed discussion of specific environmental, health and safety issues, etc.



## CHAPTER ONE

### **Mirror-Call of Miracles: Our Children Reflect Who We Are**

*Before meeting children, I make a conscious effort to leave behind my personal adult concerns. However, one day I was unaware that I carried sadness with me into the children's play time. As I was moving among the children, I reached down and one of the boys gave me a hug from behind and hung onto my waist. This usually shy boy sensed my need to lighten up. The other children spontaneously joined in, forming a train winding through the room like a giant caterpillar. Waddling in step together was so sweet and fun, we roared with laughter as we rolled to the ground. This sweet caring gesture touched my heart and was healing to my soul. Joyous laughter was the cure.*

A mirror is one of the best metaphors we have for describing the process of parenting and teaching. If we look in the mirror, what do we see?

We are looking at the person our children need. Whether or not we want to admit it, our children reflect who we are; we are their role models. Whatever energy we send out, they pick up and send back to us—and to the rest of the world. Therefore it follows that if we want to provide optimal mental, emotional and spiritual nourishment for our children, we must be well-nourished ourselves.

## ENLIGHTENED PARENTING

Although many believe space is our 21<sup>st</sup> century frontier, I would like to suggest that for most people another unexplored area is even more important.

Instead of outer conquest, a large segment of today's population has made a commitment to the exploration of our "inner self" or inner life. This inner work is a "quest" rather than a conquest, to re-connect with who we really are.

Our inner quest has taken us in a full circle back to a much earlier time when life was guided by the inner self and its strong connection to the cosmos. We observe that these earlier cultures possessed wisdom that was divinely inspired.

Accompanying our new millennium quest is a spiritual awakening. We are continually discovering that "we are one," unified by universal truths that come alive when we ask why we are here, i.e., what is our life purpose.

We are growing up. Openly and proudly, we are acknowledging that we are spiritual beings. Our mission is to support and guide our children in making a spiritual connection to their innate divine wisdom.

At the time a soul begins to experience life as an independent entity, it creates a field of energy that records every thought, word, intent, emotion and deed that it generates. This field of energy is known as the "Akashic Field," and the records are called the "Akashic Records" or "Book of Life."<sup>1</sup>

How does this information about the Akashic record relate to parenting and teaching? As spiritual beings who acknowledge our universal connection with all that is, we can say it is not *my* truth or *your* truth,

but *our* truth: a unified cosmic “beingness” in which we all participate. Our own passion is our sense of who we are and what we are here to bring as a gift—the present—to those who come after us. When you do your best, you’re giving your best to others. They will model you and consequently hand down their best to their descendents.

I call this method of teaching and caretaking “Enlightened Parenting”: bringing light and awareness to our children. It is based on the understanding that we can nurture and guide our children best when we are balanced, centered, healthy, and fully functioning. In order to come to that state of wholeness, we make a commitment to do our inner work—to keep doing that work, and learn from our mistakes. Growth is an ongoing process. We no longer transmit our lessons to our children through judgment, blame or criticism. Instead, we set an example ourselves. We model for them the behaviors and attitudes that we practice.

*Live life to benefit others, with a love for life and all beings.*

## **THE WORLD INSIDE**

### **A Precious Human Life**

“Every day, think as you wake up,  
Today I am fortunate to have woken up,  
I am alive, I have a precious human life,  
I am not going to waste it.  
I am going to use  
All my energies to develop myself,  
To expand my heart out to others,  
To achieve enlightenment for  
The benefit of all beings.  
I am going to have kind

Thoughts towards others.  
I am not going to get angry,  
Or think badly about others,  
I am going to benefit others  
As much as I can.”

--H.H. The XIV Dalai Lama

Each of us has an opportunity to fulfill our life purpose, to love our differences and meet our inner needs so we can be truly present for others. Since this can be very demanding, it is crucial that we make friends with ourselves and become our own most loyal and compassionate allies.

Within ourselves is a place of refuge where we co-create the life that has deep inner meaning and that is full of spiritual insights.

Life for so many can feel shallow and senseless until we reach our “breaking point.” With no new direction, many of the situations and circumstances we meet every day can feel hopeless, uncertain and frightening.

At the time of my mother’s death in Detroit, my two sisters and I were discussing my mother’s life. Vicki complained, “Cheryl (my younger sister) always lived at home and was too dependent on our parents” (even though she helped care for them).

Vicki continued, “You were never around to help, Ronna. You lived far away in Hawaii.”

I looked at her in amazement yet not without humor, and responded, “My younger sister lived too close and I lived too far away. And you? You lived just right!” Vicki laughed; she got it!

For the first time I decided not to judge the situation. Instead I asked

myself, “What is it that I need to learn?” Before this time I was always seeing what was wrong with Cheryl and Vicki and everyone else.

On the return flight to Hawaii after the funeral, I opened the book I’d carried with me, *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds & Its Attainment*, by Rudolf Steiner. Instantly the words jumped off the page as I read, “If I judge or criticize my brothers, I rob myself of my own spiritual power. If I enter lovingly...”

We can release our negative mindset that keeps us from connecting with others. Manifesting thoughts and words into good deeds starts by embracing our own life, regardless of the challenges or circumstances.

Wallowing in negative emotions immobilizes and dehumanizes us. By cultivating an empathic, objective compassionate voice we can achieve wisdom by learning from our actions. I choose not to see children and people as “bad” or “good”; only the personal judge sees them as such. Counting the many blessings in a day instead of its perceived imperfections allows us to experience the empowerment that comes from this change of focus.

## **INTERNAL STATE OF AFFAIRS – WHERE ARE WE?**

Acceptance plays a major role in meeting ourselves—and others. If we have not yet fully embraced who we are to ourselves, this incomplete act may be revealed to us through others. Often it is our children who point out the work we need to do in these areas.

Our *intellectual* consciousness can be elevated to new levels of awareness, but our *social* consciousness may still be stuck in the two-year-old “I want—me, me, me—mine—give me” phase. Self-gratification, instant gratification and underdeveloped, immature social skills—“does not

play well with others” —would be an accurate description of someone whose children would give them dramatic social feedback. Cooperation, caring and listening respectfully—the basic virtues for getting along with others—may need attention.

Everything has meaning when we are grateful for every person, thing and opportunity; when we recognize that life’s lessons, no matter how difficult, are truly a gift.

## **MIRROR, MIRROR!!**

We have a choice. When “the mirror calls,” we can either smile at what we see and be grateful for the miracle of who and what we are, or frown at all the scars, blemishes, wrinkles and lines that are part of our maturing process. We can spend our days trying to turn back the clock, or instead, devote our time, energy and money to creating multitudes of joyous and enriching experiences for our loved ones, and ourselves.

Maturity is among the greatest rewards we can receive. It means we have chosen to accept who we are and that we meet ourselves with gratitude at every stage of life.

In the past, children used to look to their elders for wisdom and guidance; the elders were present for them. If *we* don’t accept our role as primary authority figures for our children, they won’t view us in that light either. They will look elsewhere, toward the culture or their peers to satisfy this need.

When we ask too many questions, children get a false sense that they are in charge and will begin to “tune out” adults. Also, too many questions from parents may deliver the message that “mommy and daddy don’t know, so they’re asking me.”

“What do you think?” or, “What should we do?” the parent asks the child, assuming adult reasoning is good for them.

When we over-question a young child, we draw on their vital life forces needed for growth and physical strength.

Children really want to be guided. Few problems occur when we listen to, respect, honor and discipline our children. They are very intelligent beings. By not forcing them to be self-conscious, we give them a chance to live in their world of wonder.

## **TEACHING & PARENTING START WITH INNER WORK**

Experience has taught me that my commitment to do the inner work has given me greater sensitivity and awareness as a teacher, and has also allowed me to communicate more effectively with the children. When I have questions about various issues or if I don't know how to respond to a current situation, I go inside and ask. In time, the answers come.

Most of us are familiar with the quote, “Ask and it shall be given.” It works.

Although I don't call attention to many of the children's social interactions unless they need redirection, my goal is to see everything that's happening. Instead, I watch a child's process in order to get to know them better. I step in before a situation gets stuck, and help them to transform their play. Although many times I deliberately hold back so they can learn how to help themselves without my interrupting them, I'm always there for them with my consciousness.

I have learned how to sense who's in my space and I can also sense what's going on at a distance when the children are not within range of my immediate eyesight. However, having the younger children play within eyesight or hearing range is reassuring for both parent and child.

## **OUR INNER WORK IS OUR GREATEST GUIDE AND TEACHER**

The heart is an organ that senses what we truly need. It signals when we are in trouble and connects us to our feelings. It is a door through which we can understand other people without knowing their language, and it can take us to levels that thinking alone cannot begin to accomplish.

We are what we think and feel. When we do our inner work, we become more sensitive to what is happening around us. We have the spiritual world helping us; our senses are more attuned. We are asking the angels of guidance for help. We request or seek help from spiritual friends in the heavenly garden ("heavenly garden" is the term I use with the children when referring to the spiritual world). We gather strength from the Other Side.

When we go inside, we are really picturing the future. It is no longer a past thing; we've already moved forward in time. Once we are "turned in," the higher resources can pour into that vessel we've created.

Everyone has a different way of receiving this higher knowledge. One of those ways is extreme clarity. For example, I receive a vivid picture of an event that was previously unknown to me.

These "connecting" experiences can be for two minutes or for as long as

I wish. They don't need a time frame. They are just a "hello" and a way of being objective, sometimes asking myself how I'm doing.

We may make that connection through the reciting of a favorite poem or listening to certain music that has special meaning. However we respond to this connectivity, we do know that it momentarily transports us to another realm where we feel calm, centered and at peace. All is well, and nothing at that moment is as important as being there wholly with that feeling. We simply *know that we know*.

Prayer and meditation are two of the most common ways people use to activate their inner life. Any activity or expression that turns off the mundane and takes us to a higher level of sensitivity will help us make that inner connection.

A few times every day I ask the spiritual world to be part of my life, and this activates the help that comes forth. I also ask to have others benefit from this guidance as well—to be not just self-serving but to wish for all of humanity to experience this freedom, abundance, joy and personal growth.

I focus on forgiveness of myself and others. This is often difficult, especially when we're not happy with what is going on in the world or with the current trends in education. I remind myself that whatever we're experiencing is our own creation; it is part of us.

If we want to change something, we need to change ourselves first. We bring the issue to our consciousness. Instead of being upset with ourselves, we say, "This is what I really wanted to do!" It's not the problem that we focus on, but where we want to go. The goal is to be

objective, to practice how we want our life to be without judging how things are now, or focusing on mistakes we may have made.

## CONTEMPLATIVE CENTERING

Following is a set of guidelines for doing your inner work:

1. Start and end the day with at least 10 minute prayer, contemplation, or meditation.
2. Change myself, rather than others.
3. Practice being positive.
4. Ask for help; be specific.
5. Listen and receive the answer.
6. Be in service to others.

*Begin your day with:*

1. A glass of water.
2. Sitting in silence.
3. Expressing thankfulness.
4. Aligning yourself with your goals for the day.

*Before going to bed:*

1. Write down the essential goals to accomplish for the next day.
2. Feel gratitude.
3. Ask for spiritual guidance.

*Questions:*

1. Is my focus on what I need?
2. Can I meet my partner with true interest in the wisdom they bring to parenting?
3. Is my need to control greater than what is helpful?
4. Am I too smothering, so my children feel they cannot do for themselves?
5. Do I burden them with a lot of questions and choices?

We meditate on the solution and *not* on the problem!!

When we are connected to ourselves inwardly—when we're tuned in—we're not threatened by or afraid of other people. Also, when our intentions are clear, we keep the communication lines open for a joyous, productive life.

## **TRUST YOUR INTUITION**

One day when I was nine years old and riding on the bus with my mother, she began telling stories about how intuitive my grandmother was. She said on several occasions my grandmother warned my mother not to do something; her intuitions were always correct. My mother's story left me with the impression that it is helpful to use one's intuition.

Consider your intuition as one of your most important guides. Often we are surprised by the gifts of knowledge we wouldn't otherwise have obtained if not through this supersensible realm. This connectedness with the spiritual world is a blessing. The more we communicate, the stronger and more frequently wisdom messages will come to us through pictures, dreams, thoughts or words. Ask for answers to a specific issue or challenge and allow time and space to listen. Enjoy the unique form that presents itself.

Life's blessings can be likened to a moonbow which appears magically across the sky from the moon at night, in silver or in full color spectrum. This phenomenon that occurs under certain conditions in Hawaii was known and experienced by the Hawaiian people as a blessing from the spiritual world. Blessings surround us every moment. All we have to do is open our eyes and ears to see and hear.

We can renew our life each day and go deeper into its meaning by becoming more objective about our thinking and feeling. As the ancient Greek inscription on the temple at Delphi advises, “Know thyself.”

Acknowledge the beauty of others. We reflect or drink in the other through our eyes and through the wholeness of our being. Create your own attitude of gratitude for differences among people, and celebrate those differences!

Each of us is the ultimate person we have been waiting for. Get ready to be just that!

## CHAPTER TWO

### **Heart-a-Culture: Our Children's Personal, Home and School Environment**

I grew up with a well-defined family rhythm. Dinner was at 5, bedtime was at 7, every night. I never questioned it much, as that was the way it was. I had a lot of energy and enthusiasm for life, which I now attribute to being well rested. I was allowed a lot of freedom within those parameters. My days felt so complete. It was a relief to me that I did not need to choose or haggle for what was going to happen next, because I already knew.

The holidays meant getting together with 20 relatives; cousins, aunts, and uncles. We did this several times a year and we were allowed to play endlessly. The religious celebrations seemed hours long yet captured my interest; the memory feels like a baby's breath. I would make up games using unshelled almonds, walnuts, pecans, and hazelnuts. I would find a wall and have everyone line up. Then we would roll the nuts toward the wall and whoever's nut landed closest to the wall got to have everyone else's. How I loved fresh nuts! Only much later did I realize that the raw nuts were about the healthiest food provided to me.

When I was three years old, I loved to ride my 2-wheel 20-inch bike and I also loved to roller skate up and down the sidewalks. I tried out everything physical that was available: stilts, pogo sticks, trees for climbing, and hula hoops. This daily vigorous outdoor play and rhythm interwoven with extended family ceremonies and the good intentions of my parents helped me grow strong.

The first years for a young child have a great deal to do with the forces of growth. It is imperative that their “daily rhythm has breathing,” that they are allowed to have an ebb and flow. In nature we can observe the life-giving qualities of rhythms. Nature is dependent on these flowing cycles for sustenance. We depend on earth’s rhythms as the child depends on their parents to provide contracting and expanding experiences in their daily life. Varying the active and receptive activities has a hygienic balancing effect.

Let us consider a breathing-in time as a creative focused concentrated time such as storytelling or any artistic or guided learning activity. An out-breath is a social time for play, meals and chores. No breathing happens when a child’s day is compacted with one activity after another or when a child has no consistent regularly scheduled meals or bedtimes. When you provide a rhythmical day, children are supported and held in a space that is breathing.

Following are instances of “not breathing”: Annie barely ate lunch and is now eating snack food; Jonathan has just played outside running games and is about to go on a long hike. Mary is extremely tired but is insisting on another story before bedtime; Mark wants you to play with him outside in the yard after his evening bath. If your child always wants more and pushes the envelope, close the envelope when it is getting full before it tears.

More often these days, the rhythm can be too sedentary and not physically stimulating enough to provide bodily movements needed to develop properly. Riding in a car, watching a movie, being on the computer, playing video games or watching TV back to back, are non-breathing rhythms.

A breathing rhythm for Jonathan would look like: running outdoors with fun challenges (rolling down a hill, jumping through a hoop, bending low and walking, stepping over stepping stones, running in a swing on the tummy, etc.); then, coming inside for more calming activities, such as coloring or painting on blank sheets of paper. Lunch could be followed by having a rest with a story and orchestrating soothing music together with a children’s harp, tone bars or xylophone.

We can follow this with outside play: games, gardening, water play, tree climbing, house building, carpentry, and then finishing each fun activity with a clean-up time for the care of toys and tools.

*The kindergarten weekly activity, snack, and rhythm might look like this:*

*(These rhythms can be adapted for home use)*

<b>Day</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Snack</b>
Monday	Make Bread	Rice
Tuesday	Painting	Bread, butter & herbs
Wednesday	Japanese / Rolling Oats	Soup or fruit salad (depending on the season) Oats
Thursday	Grinding grains	Millet
Friday	Sewing or other repairs	Quinoa

***Daily Rhythm:***

8:30-9:00 AM	Outside Movement, Adventure or Walk
9:00-9:15 AM	Story or Puppet Play
9:15-10:15 AM	Playtime
10:15-10:30 AM	Clean-up time, Bathroom
10:30-11:00 AM	Snack
11:00-11:30 AM	Music and Singing (Circle Games)
11:30 AM- 12:30 PM	Bathroom, Outside Play

Let your being spread over the children and embrace them from the inside out. I encompass them with my whole being and hold them. They feel this energy and are nurtured by it. Here in this etheric space with me, they have all the guidance, support and security they need in order to go to the next step in their development.

We adults set the mood for our children. We are their loving authorities during those first seven years of their life and they look to us as their decision makers. We guide them to learn good judgment so they can later make their own decisions wisely.

We surround our children with positive energy and make sure their play has parameters so it doesn't lead to tantrums or destruction and doesn't become a form of anxiety for them or for you. Parameters serve as a safety net and are as basic as some of these guided sayings that I have found are so effective: "this is outside play"; "these writing tools are for paper,"; "we work with our sticky stuff on our work table,"; "we walk inside"; or, "walk walkety-walk"; "we use our inside voices here." Knowing these boundaries, the children can play comfortably. It is important to give children time and space to dream into their beingness and receive nurturing from the essence of who we are.

Adults set the guidelines, make the schedule and show their children

how things are to be done. When we are their teacher, the children will feel our confidence and know we are in charge. They will sense the living movement of rhythm in our home or classroom and it will serve as a powerful guidance.

## **THE FINISH LINE IS NOT THE GOAL**

Childhood is a journey that has a starting point and a destination, yet we who have lived past that period in our life and are well into our adult years can attest to the fact that the finish line is not the goal after all. It is what happens along the way that gives substance and meaning to life.

We want our children to be happy; we want to make sure they will not experience any troublesome times in their lives. “Let them not suffer as we did,” we often say. Many of us who experienced hardship during earlier years are determined to prevent our children from having a similar childhood.

Parents certainly have their child’s best interest in mind. It may not occur to us that our desire to be protective could backfire and end up being another form of deprivation as potentially damaging to our children as our own version of hardship and suffering.

A child needs to test their wings and learn how to make their own way; this is their natural flight. Overprotection frequently leads to enabling. “I want!” is this child’s litany, and their wishes are granted. “Give me!” they cry, oblivious to the fact that demanding one’s desires is socially immature. “I need!” they shout to the world, convinced by their parents’ generosity that teachers, classmates and others are supposed to give in to their every whim and desire.

We allow wild and willful behaviors because we are afraid of damaging our children’s spirit. *What we need to remember is that by helping them*

*harness their will, we are helping them discipline themselves. This allows them to be in control of their actions.*

It is human nature to want to protect our children from any type of struggle; we just want them to be happy, right?! Yet we are actually blocking them from having an authentic human experience because we do not let them embark on their own life journey where inevitably they will encounter certain basic and necessary challenges.

If we don't allow our children to experience life's polarities, if we try to remove all friction, what can they rub up against in order to smooth their rough edges? How can they grow and learn? Changing the endings to children's stories, for example, so that everyone lives happily ever after, is unrealistic. Yet that is what is being done today. Giving children everything they ask for is also unrealistic. Challenges and struggles are human realities.

We want to model healthy parenting, but in fact we may not have a picture of what this is. Let us begin by acknowledging that none of us is perfect.

We start at the starting point—exactly where we are. That place is just right, as long as we're willing to make learning a life-long process, and just as willing to make changes when necessary. It is only when we keep repeating the same mistakes that we become stuck.

## **A DREAM COME TRUE**

Could it be that children choose their parents because they know those adults have growth lessons to offer them? It has been the experience of many that the unborn child makes an announcement to a mother or father during pregnancy. Many mothers can tell you about this personally. One mother related to me a story about a mother and father on the same night dreaming

about their unborn child. In their dreams they each received a phone call. When they picked up the phone, a voice on the other end announced, “Hello, this is Robert!” When the baby was born, they knew it was Robert.

## **INSURING OUR CHILDREN’S HEALTH AND WELL-BEING**

When we guide our children into life, we give them security, trust and a peaceful heart. We want the very best for them, yet in today’s world we find ourselves struggling to maintain the most basic requirements for insuring our children’s health and well-being with unpolluted air, water and soil.

An expectant mother who is health conscious during pregnancy will be giving her baby the best gift possible. Her body is a holy temple where a special spirit being resides. It is *important* at all times for her to eat nourishing foods and take time for exercise, sleep, rest and relaxation. This qualitative lifestyle is a goal for every one of us.

Working with the community to improve the quality of the environment demonstrates to our children our proactive stance concerning environmental issues. It also bonds us to the community as a valued member and assures that as leaders for positive change, we are part of the solution.

## **HEALTHY CHILDREN**

A healthy child has rosy cheeks and the sun shines through them. Their little bodies are padded and when they laugh and move, they’re joyous. A child at play is an artist. With healthy play you can always hear a pleasant humming sound, like busy bees in the space. You know they’re happy to be alive!

Like the weather, however, dark clouds can roll in and from one minute

to the next they can be willful and demanding, cranky, nagging and insistent. It would be idealistic to think these behaviors are not a natural part of refining our human development. If not for darkness we would be unable to see the light!

We meet our children's basic needs with warmth, food, toileting and rest. If they are made to wait a few minutes before they get fed or before someone can pick up a toy they dropped out of the crib, they develop patience. If you tell them to wash their hands before they eat and they shout "NO!" it's helpful to pleasantly say, "Oh, I didn't ask you; this is what we do"; or, "this is what we're doing."

Focusing our attention on health is an essential tool for parenting. Know that what we focus on manifests. Our medical culture categorizes our children as ill, dysfunctional, allergic, hyper- this and hypo- that. If they kick and yell and scream, talk non-stop or seem to be over-stimulated most of the time, it would be good to ask some simple questions before taking them to a doctor and a long string of specialists. What did they eat that day? Did you listen to them when they spoke to you, or did they need to repeat themselves over and over before they received a response? *Are you there for them*, really paying attention to their stories and questions? Did they just spend several hours in a shopping mall, amusement park or recreation place with numerous strangers and lots of excitement? Is something really physically wrong with them, or are they just over-stimulated and over-stressed? Make sure your child is not experiencing any type of physical or emotional stress.

## **WARM HEART, WARM HANDS**

Warmth is so important. During those early years the child functions best when they are kept warm. The mom or dad decides the layering of clothes for their child. If they are not kept warm enough, the forces that are needed for digestion will be used to warm the body, causing

digestive problems. In general if a child's hands or feet are cold to the touch, then they need more layers of clothing.

Children need to have their eyes and ears checked regularly. Ear infections are rampant today and doctors are using drugs and inserting tubes to combat recurrence. Although I do not pretend to be a physician, I would like to suggest that before choosing any medical or artificial/chemical procedure, you consider the available natural options. Many people have found antibiotics and tubes are not the first solution.

Proper physical movement is another important part of healthy development. Observe how your child takes hold of their body. Do they walk with confidence? How is their gait? Is there a bounce to their walk; do they walk on their heels or do they walk on the sides of their feet? Check out their shoes and note the places that receive the most wear. Is there more gravity or levity (anti-gravity) in their steps? Do they scrape their feet across the floor; is there a swing in their movements; do they step softly or as they take a few steps, does the room feel shaken up like an earthquake? Are we aware of our own movements and gestures, which will be imitated by our children?

## **HEALTHY FOOD**

I never knew why I didn't like oatmeal; it tasted rancid to me until I ate it freshly ground from whole oat groats. I have my own oat roller and regularly buy organic oat groats. Kindergarteners love to make oatmeal, first grinding the groats and then placing them in a pot, letting them simmer slowly.

Home grown food is the very best because you have control over the conditions under which it is grown. Rich quality soil is the key to producing quality food. Have you ever picked up a carrot in a supermarket and smelled it? Probably it has no smell. A carrot just pulled from a

biodynamic or organic garden has a fragrant aroma. Its life forces are still intact, so when you eat it you will be ingesting life forces. In working with the biodynamic method, you're also working with the cosmic forces.

By eating organically, we give our children the greatest nourishment possible. Genetically modified or engineered foods (GMO) have not been tested to be safe for human consumption. In the US there are no requirements for labeling a GMO food. A large percentage of soybeans and corn in America is genetically engineered. We have not yet seen the repercussions of eating or growing GMO food.

Some foods can be addictive or self-medicating. Refined sugar is one of those foods. During their first years, it is helpful if children do not have any type of sugar or sweetening in their foods because it is too potent for their sensitive system. This includes honey, molasses, fructose or too much fruit, and all varieties of brown and white sugar.

Those who have witnessed what is called "sugar high" in children who attend parties where they eat birthday cake with frosting, candy, ice cream, cookies, soda, etc., know it can become an insatiable craving. It can also be disruptive to the digestion and cause intense, explosive mood swings.

Why would we want to hype up our children or place them in a position where they crave a food or seasoning that isn't good for them? I use an alternative to cake and ice cream. I offer frozen fruit placed in a blender or the Champion Juicer to create fruit sorbets, or I make a fruit pie with a raw crust using dates and oats. I use sea gelatin to solidify the fruit. You can add whipped cream as a topping. The children love to whip the cream by hand and observe the cream thicken.

It is a good idea to limit fruit juices, although banana is a good fruit to introduce to babies.

Try to determine your child's needs before choosing their diet. A simple diet is always the best way to start. If your child is eating a certain way, add a new food by placing it on the table and letting the children explore it by themselves. If they don't want to taste it, that's fine. Don't get into the food battle; you will not win and this conflict could harm both your children's and your own digestive systems.

Listen to your body and teach your children how to do this as well. Through observation, soon enough we can see how a certain food affects the children, making them sleepy, hyper-active, anxious, sick-feeling, etc. When they're old enough, teach them about the impact of healthy food on the body systems and how food influences our levels of energy and performance. It's never going to be enough to simply tell a child they need to eat vegetables because vegetables are a healthy food.

Meals can be nutritious, easy and fun to prepare, once we allow our creative side to express itself. Children love to help with the preparation of meals. When a meal is made "from scratch," it's fresher, and when cooked on a low heat retains more nutrients. Recently I started using clay pots and bamboo steamers. The food cooked in these earthenware and natural fiber vessels rather than metal cookware is so much more flavorful because it retains all the nutrients and does not have a metallic after-taste.

I love trying new recipes and customizing them to benefit different families. I also enjoy growing different herbs and spices to flavor foods. Herbs are strengthening to our body organs. Have you noticed how children will gravitate to herbs in a garden; chives, dill, basil, and mint... and they love rosemary cooked in rice or other grains. Rosemary also makes beautiful crowns to celebrate the earth's seasons and the children's birthdays. I cut branches long enough to circle a child's head and then make a wreath, tying the ends together with a ribbon.

Every child's needs and tastes are different. Depending on their constitutional type, some children (stout, confident, fiery) need spicier foods and others (medium build, joyous, airy) more sour-salty, still others (thin, lithe, deep, watery) more sweet, and a fourth type of constitution (round, steadfast, slower paced, earthy) can especially benefit from root foods.

To determine if children have an allergy to certain foods, you may wish to exclude those foods for awhile and then reintroduce them, one at a time. If a strong reaction recurs, you will have obtained your answer. Steiner describes the four temperaments in more detail.

## **BOTTOM LINE: KEEP IT SIMPLE**

To summarize: eat fresh vegetables, fruits, grains and proteins. Enjoy learning how to grow plants and herbs and prepare them as nourishing and tasty foods. Next best to growing our own produce is to support local farmers, and if this is not possible, buy and eat certified organic, whole, unprocessed foods from local, regional or online natural food stores or co-ops.

I do not favor vegetarianism for everyone, since I believe many of us do need denser protein from eggs, fresh fish and fowl, and red meat as well. Foods that are hormone- and chemical-free deliver quality nutrients to the body systems. This means that the food given to these animals are organic whole grains, and the grasses are from uncontaminated pastures.

It is hard on the liver to break down pills and capsules; vitamins and minerals delivered in this form may not be the answer we're looking for in order to keep our systems properly nourished.

Also, I find it best not to drink water and other beverages at meals. This allows the enzymes needed for digestion to do their job without being diluted.

Find a balance. Changing habits and making beneficial substitutes is certainly the best option, if we realize we're harming ourselves by eating certain foods. This makes good sense—although it may require a rational *and* emotional commitment in order to follow through.

## **FAMILY MEALTIME CONSIDERATIONS**

What are the goals? High energy. Optimal function. How can you do your best to maintain the highest levels of energy for yourself and every member of your family?

The most important factor concerning food choices and dietary lifestyles is to remain positive.

- Give thanks before each meal
- Do not judge others.
- Enjoy your meal. Eat slowly and practice chewing your food to liquid, with a closed mouth.
- Guide children to eat over their bowl or plate, as needed.
- During the meal, everyone is seated at the table.
- It's good to eat substantially at meal times and not snack in-between so the liver doesn't have to be constantly digesting food.

## **BLESS YOUR FOOD**

Our home is our sacred temple where we serve only the highest quality and most nourishing food. Let these occasions be joyous ones that are filled with gratitude for the food that is placed on the table and for those who prepare and serve it.

I believe food that has been blessed and for which we are grateful, is digested easier and better. This offering of gratitude breathes soul nourishment into our food; our spirit is nourished by the blessing. It also

sets the mood for harmony and well-being, especially when accompanied by a lovely table setting and whenever possible, seasonal decorations hand made by the children.

## **FOODS, MOODS AND ATTITUDES**

Stress of any kind will cause havoc on the body systems. Fear and anxiety must never become part of our meal. Meal times are social events. It is a wonderful opportunity to share life stories, and children love to eat when the mood is celebratory. Let these times be free-flowing and joyous.

When invited to eat at friends' or relatives' homes, you may be able to tell the host in advance that your family is currently on a restricted diet and you haven't yet introduced sweets, meats or processed foods into their diets. Describe your child's reaction to these foods; be clear, loving, tactful and full of gratitude for whatever they have to offer. Bring a substitute food if there could be a serious reaction.

As another option, you may wish to let the children eat whatever is served. The joyous, grateful atmosphere may neutralize any negative reaction.

## **FOOD ALLERGIES AND SENSITIVITIES**

Many children are allergic to cow's milk, in fact all dairy products. A reason why many children get a reaction from drinking cow's milk may have little to do with the food itself and more to do with the fact that the milk has been pasteurized and homogenized, making it difficult to digest. I have observed that children who drink whole raw milk fresh from the cow are healthy.

I understand the reasons for pasteurizing milk, just as I understand the reasons for allergic responses to over-processed food. It all comes back

to the same solution: keep it simple and natural. If you can get milk fresh from a cow or a goat, you're not only lucky, but blessed!

(For more information, see <http://www.realmilk.com/>, <http://www.raw-milk-facts.com/>, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raw\\_milk](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raw_milk).)

Often if a child's diet is one-sided or mostly carbohydrates (pasta, pizza, French fries, etc.) they develop digestive problems... and so do adults! These processed carbohydrates have an effect similar to ingesting sugars.

If you are eating the same foods as your children and if this is the food the child is expected to eat, why would they not eat it, unless you've started to give them the option to say no to whatever they choose not to eat? Parents often are amazed at how their child will eat whole grains, such as millet and quinoa, or vegetable soup (with fresh spinach, broccoli and kale) served at school, that they would make a fuss over at home. This acceptance happens naturally in a warm social setting.

When children are involved in the meal preparation, they take a greater interest in the meal. I have a saying, "You get what you get in the kindergarten" and the children have fun repeating it. When the children watch you prepare the food or can help in that preparation, this connects them to the process and adds curiosity to try new foods. It also stimulates their interest.

Obviously, if a child does in fact have a food sensitivity, we would not offer that food again until the problem is resolved. I always encourage them to try a fairy bite, a tiny morsel. As intuitive, caring parents, we learn to know the difference between a child refusing food because it really does disagree with them and a child who has been given license to eat whatever, whenever and wherever they choose—possibly gravitating toward sugar, over-salted, fried and processed foods.

Often a child develops allergic symptoms related to a food even if they are, in fact, not allergic to it. This is an interesting and important issue that every parent should be aware of. Food and emotions are integrally linked and every human being has the ability to develop symptoms if they are feeling rejected or needy of love and attention. A good coach can easily address these issues and also offer many ways to support that child's personal need to be "special." Here are some ideas for snacks: jicama and other juicy crunchy vegetables or fruits, sliced thin and served with nut butters; nori rolls, plain or with rice; and sunflower sprouts.

## **STRESS AND "OVERWHELM"**

Often we don't realize that today's urban-suburban environment is constantly bombarded with flashing signs and multiple sounds, strange smells... crowds of people all talking at once, and things things things... everywhere, there's so much to look at, listen to and absorb! Children's minds and senses are often on overload. If it's difficult and stressful for us adults at times, what must it be like for our little ones?

Stores and heavily trafficked shopping malls are filled with the energies and noise of hundreds of shoppers, especially during holidays, bargain days and special events. Even the drive to the mall can be stressful. Children may witness a car accident with blasting sirens and glaring lights, fumes, angry drivers... road rage is common these days.

Every time we embark on one of these expeditions, all of our sense organs are assaulted simultaneously. Where can children escape from such bombardment? Certainly not in buildings where they are exposed to glaring lights, blaring loud speakers, poor air quality, etc. Be courageous. Create outdoor spaces with covered open-air connections. Weave green spaces in and around buildings to enhance the sense of living in harmony with nature.

Living spaces are optimal when they ensoul our life. In the home the kitchen often reflects the heart space, and the library and office, the head space. Each room of a building can be designed beautifully and functionally to serve the purpose of that space.

Every child deserves a healthy space to live and grow in. When a space is well-kept, it is hygienic and enables us to breathe more easily. It contains our imprint, builds strength and supports our inner sense of well-being. Let us acknowledge that every space we create for ourselves is sacred because life itself is sacred.

## **PARENTS CAN NO LONGER HIDE ABUSE**

Parents who are alcoholics or drug users are not only abusing themselves; they are also harming their family. Addiction makes an unreliable environment for the children. It is an insult to a child's sensitivity and intelligence to be subjected to foul language and sarcasm. A dysfunctional person is having serious self-esteem issues. The emotions that accompany this dysfunction can lead to destructive behaviors. This places the children at risk. The best solution in cases of dysfunction is for parents to seek professional help. This step usually is not taken until a crisis occurs and the situation is placed under institutional or legal jurisdiction. A person's addiction takes away from the quality of their family life.

Childhood is a time of innocence. A child lives in a state of pure divine bliss. They are born religious in the highest sense of the word. What is most important is a sense for when to introduce innocence robbing activities, such as TV, movies and video games. Know what your children are taking in. Be conscious of the images your children are feeding on and watch out for a feeding frenzy. Having a circle of friends in close proximity to help raise your children creates a safety net.

When my nephew was younger he said, "Auntie Ronna, we are going

to watch a movie and you are not going to like it. It is violent.” I chose to stay upstairs during that time. I think because everyone watched it together as a family and as a conscious choice, it worked better.

One reason for sharing community with others is that you have built-in support and do not have to do it all alone, yet still have privacy whenever wished for. One can find many co-housing, intentional and self-sustaining communities such as Sekem in Egypt and the Camphill villages around the world.

## **ENCOURAGE INDEPENDENCE**

Encourage children to become independent: to do for themselves, e.g., put on their own shoes and clothing—whatever needs to be done. The more they can do for themselves, the more independent they will become. I always tell children I’ll help them if necessary, but I suggest they try first before asking. This builds security and confidence at the same time.

Instead of telling a child you’ll do it for them, even if they’re too young to do it by themselves, let them make an effort first. For example, if you’re doing handwork or sewing and they want to sew too, have a basket prepared for them with needles already threaded. Five-year-olds can thread their own needle; sometimes even younger children can do this. They’re so happy to practice coordination! After the needle is threaded, they can learn how to tie a knot; you can create a little rhyming verse to accompany each of these activities.

## **TOILET TRAINING IS AN INDIVIDUAL MATTER**

Around two years old, which is generally considered an appropriate time to start toilet training your child, set a rhythm for them. Make it into an activity. Every half hour, take them to the toilet and say, “Give it a try.” The dreamier children may take longer to catch on; also, some

children may not have bladder control until later than usual. They may be drinking too much water before bedtime, so they will wet the bed even after they start to use the toilet during the day. To add interest, I have placed nature scenes and fairy pictures in the bathroom.

Those who are more alert will start to tell you when they need to go to the potty. Maintain awareness for this activity and set the pattern for them. Avoid shaming your child, ever, for doing anything that you consider wrong or inappropriate. Always be willing and ready to support their next step.

## **SIBLING STEPS**

As families grow larger, the youngest children benefit from having playmates, helpers and teachers. Siblings have deep bonds, even though they may sometimes be competitive and their relationships rocky. Adults can guide their play to be more cooperative. We all know that siblings can tease and torture each other if a pecking order is allowed. When each family member is valued for who they are, it eliminates the effort needed to compete. A true test of love comes with growing up with brothers and sisters. I have a dear friend, the mother of five children, who once told me that love can be strenuous, just as one of the girls had her arms squeezed tightly around her sister's neck.

The younger children look up to their elders yet must learn to stand their own ground, and the older ones, seeing where they have come from, learn skills to navigate their own way. At home they are practicing social life before entering the larger world.

Consider giving age and skill level appropriate responses so the children see there is something to grow into. Suzie is six years old and she gets her own glass tea party set that she will learn to care for, or jacks that need to be kept away from baby. Gabriel, age seven, might receive

special rocks that he collects, or ropes to build a pulley.

Often children act differently at home from the way they act at school. Whenever I have had siblings in my classroom, they demonstrate an uncanny protectiveness for each other. Sometimes they do not associate with each other until or unless help is needed. Other siblings play side by side in school but rarely spend play time together at home.

One parent experienced that the youngest sibling was holding the family hostage. I was invited in to assess the situation and as the mom had predicted might happen, the child's behavior was angelic. I soon realized that the marriage was unstable, thus unsettling for the children, so I found myself doing relationship counseling as the best way to help these children.

Children are supersensitive to the emotions of their parents and if those emotions are out of balance, the children will react ungraciously. Parents who are striving to improve their personal relationships are strengthening their family culture with supportive interactions. Thus we commit to working on ourselves and being an example of a loving authority.

## **BUILDING OUR HOME**

Love is the spiritual foundation of our family. This foundation is supported by thankfulness, positivity and rhythm, and I would build on that foundation with devotion and appreciation. When these values are the model for your family structure, siblings learn to respect and care for each other's belongings, space, and wishes. When mistakes occur, as they will, replace upset with an inner knowing that "this happens and we repair what has happened in the moment; then we move forward." This positive, immediate adjustment approach has always worked for me. "If something is not right, let's turn it around; no big deal." If we become hysterical over spilt milk or make mountains out of smashed potatoes on the floor, we are creating even bigger messes. All of these problems

can be changed by our attitude and experienced as life's invitation to continue improving and developing a good sense of humor.

If we lose focus on the children without anyone paying attention to them and don't keep an ear or an eye on them, the children begin to sense that their parents are preoccupied or that no one is caring for them inwardly. It feels like no one is home. These are pictures they experience but do not verbalize. In three differing years I had a class of 37 children. I held them all in my heart in a conscious way through my daily and nightly meditations. By the busy buzzing joy that filled the air, the parents could feel that the children were content and well cared for.

## **HEALTHY LEARNING**

Inspired learning is very different from pressured education. (You WILL learn the multiplication tables, "or else!" The "or else" may be related to a demotion in class or grade status or some type of punishment that will cause shame and remorse for the child.) This type of pressure is militant and forces the child to learn, rather than allowing the learning to emerge from life processes.

Learning is best inspired through curiosity and identification or relevance, or through some practical application. For example, one can teach a child arithmetic by having them help prepare a meal for a large number of guests. They can count the number of baked potatoes needed, or count the silverware that will be placed on the table. Or they may put on a carnival where they will make tickets and charge play money for each of the events. The children design the tickets and play money. Teaching numbers can be fun and easily integrated into games and play time. For young children, memorizing facts to pass a test is an insult to their humanity. We are not robots. Most children are highly intelligent; they have an innate sense of understanding the world with a fresh perspective.

The optimal environment in which learning takes place will reflect "higher

learning.” By that I mean that the content of children’s lessons provides practical or spiritual value so that consciousness of sacred knowledge is embedded in their bones. This learning is assimilated best by using artistic methods to enliven knowledge. Encourage artistic expressions at home such as landscaping a labyrinth with older children, sculpting, singing, clay modeling, creating butterfly or snail-shaped gardens, etc. (See Sharon Lovejoy’s book, *Sunflower Houses, Inspiration from the Garden: A Book for Children and Their Grownups*).

Read and tell stories of saintly people and heroes of humanity; seek out stories that speak to your soul. Learning with others, for example, is about cooperation rather than competition. Children need to experience doing what is best for everyone and not just acting for personal gain. They long to have opportunities for seeing a healthy, sustainable global future that will lead to learning about sustainable profit-sharing when they become young adults.

## **SWIMMING UPSTREAM**

Like many others who are deeply concerned about the state of global affairs and the type of future we are providing for our children, I am dedicated to keeping my inner muscles strong so I can continue to swim upstream against the tide of materialism and corporate consumerism that have spread their net over a large portion of the global population.

I believe that money is green energy to be used for the goodness and abundance of humanity. I know I am on track when I am serving the good of all through my actions and deeds.

I urge you to set an example for the world by continuing to live from your inner conviction. For example, I prefer not to take synthetic medicines unless I have no other choice as in the case of crisis care (a severe injury, unexpected organ or systemic failure, accidents such as bone breakage,

etc.). Instead, I “feel into” what’s wrong and take care of it either myself or with herbs and natural treatments and other guidance. I’ll also use herbs to balance a chemical drug during convalescing.

*(Disclaimer: It is wise at all times to consult a licensed medical doctor, naturopath or health professional for any type of health issue. The information presented here is not intended to be a prescription or substitute for professional health care. I have found allopathic doctors to be very helpful with diagnosis, emergency care and necessary surgery.)*

If I’m asked to do certain things that I do not believe to be truthful, then I know it is an opportunity for me to stand for my values. When I am in harmony with my values, life flows through me. A child needs their parents to protect them in the best way possible. In the USA in the ’50s it was a practice of local doctors to tell parents that the tonsils, god designed, were insignificant and could easily become infected. Medical insurance practically covered the cost of tonsil removal and the younger you were, the better. We now know that the tonsils and the appendix are filters for our immune system. Has anyone ever been held accountable for this delusion? I wonder who benefited from my tonsil removal.

Another area of concern that I have are school lunches. In my opinion much of the food that is offered to children in public school is unhealthy, yet meets the Federal Food and Drug Administration standard requirements. I don’t consider this “real food.” We have a friend who presently teaches in the public school system and once a week in their cafeteria, among other processed foods, appears what she calls “mystery meat,” the origin of which is unidentifiable.

It’s inspiring that some schools are improving the quality of their food due to the determined efforts of parents.

I sincerely believe that slowly we are lifting the veils and weaving an

inner culture that is helping humanity to develop and support those values and spiritual impulses upon which our country was founded. Also, we are well aware that we are receiving help from the spiritual realm, and for this guidance we are extremely grateful.

Many of us are experiencing the perceptiveness of the souls incarnating at this time. They are here with a healing energy as well as an intuitive sensitivity.

Children who have the gift to see into and beyond this physical world will greatly benefit from educators who recognize their abilities. These children's insights can lead us in wisdom and peace.

Working in the garden is one way of developing observation. Schools with farms and gardens are helping the children cultivate a connection with nature. Also, gardening becomes a therapy as well as a metaphor for sowing, nurturing and harvesting the fruit of our labors. It reflects personal growth lessons. For example, "weeding the garden" can be equated with "pulling out worries" or negative thoughts.

Working in the garden also helps children experience natural rhythms. It gives them sustainable living skills, teaches them how to care for tools, and how to tenderly nurture life.

## CHAPTER THREE

### **Collide-a-Scope: Behaviors & Habits**

A kaleidoscope is one of the most fascinating toys a child can have. Bits of colored gems are held loosely at one end of a tube and as the child whirls this tube around, to her delight she finds herself watching a display of constantly changing multi-colored geometric patterns. Then, as she twirls the tube or even just jiggles it a bit, she watches the forms shift and change as they continue to fall apart and come together again.

These changing symmetrical forms are caused by two or more mirrors set at angles that reflect their images back and forth to each other and to the viewer. What a revealing description of our experience of parenting and teaching: the image of colliding with a loved one whereby you have an opportunity to view the drama, “gain a scope” and then see the beauty of the relationship!

Much of what we come up against and often “collide with” in life may not seem helpful. However, if we were to have a grander “bird’s-eye” view of this perceived chaos in our relationships and could observe it objectively, we would discover that like the geometric shapes formed inside the kaleidoscope, everything we create is also within “divine order.” Only from a limited perspective is it perceived otherwise.

## WHO WE ARE

Our children reflect to us who we are. When we adults are in alignment with our Creator, we in turn are a reflection of love and goodness, truth and joy. We are sitting in the driver's seat, whirling and twirling that multitude of gems that constantly collide and fall together and apart in a variety of multi-colored experiences. Are we not multi-faceted beings always moving, always creating new shapes and forms for our inner selves to view and review?

It is we who guide the behavior and habits of our children. Even though they are individuals in their own right, we are the spiritual artisans of their still unformed earth experience. For the first seven years of their lives, it is we who speak to them, guiding them through that early period of exploration and development.

## CHILDREN ARE NOT “BAD”

As a child, I was a terror. I remember chasing neighbors with worms, and at three years old I climbed onto a high table and swallowed two goldfish. No one could figure out what happened to them! Later that year while playing house with two neighboring children, the six-year-old girl wanted me to be the baby. Not me! I wanted to be the mom, so I jumped up and took a big bite out of her back. The girl and her friend marched me over to my house and showed my mother the teeth marks. My mother couldn't believe I had done such a thing!

I had a dog named Chipper that I swung around by the tail. He was never the same after that; he turned wild and would jump over high fences, so we had to give him away to a farm. These situations that I did not handle well provided me with opportunities for learning what is appropriate. Many of us have an experience whereby morality is sensed through a wrong doing and the lesson stays with us for life.

I have always been able to appreciate and relate to the energetic children in my care. They are often the ones who bring about great changes in our society. In order to help them advance it's very important not to bring blame and guilt to them concerning what's not working. If something is amiss, I guide them to what is best without having them feel like *they are bad*. What they did may need transforming, but this has nothing to do with *who they are*. Every child is a child of God.

The younger we are, the more we act out our emotions. At times, our actions may need behavior transformation. Children are active creatures of will. They spend their waking hours "doing, doing doing," and seldom pause to self-reflect. This development comes later.

Just as our bodies benefit from chiropractic adjustments, children benefit from behavior adjustments. Behavior is adjusted by the use of a word, gesture, or a look expressing what is wished for. In this way the tension is released before the energy explodes into emotional turmoil.

Threatening, manipulating, blaming and trying to make someone feel guilty (what I call ga-guilta-fish), are not positive uses of authority. Rather, we inspire the children to do well by serving as models of love. At times this may require a great deal of patience as well as inner clarity.

## **HOW AM 'I' DOING?**

When we hold our children in high esteem, nurturing without smothering them, they will thrive and do their best. If your child isn't behaving or cooperating as you wish them to, look inside yourself and ask: "*How am 'I' doing?*"

The magic to parenting and teaching can be described as that enlightening and powerful action of going inside and "doing the inner

work.” Parenting and teaching give us one of the best opportunities for examining and adjusting our own behavior.

As a ten-minute exercise before going to bed, I review the day. The goal is to see all of our actions objectively. This helps to process the day so we are then free to connect more deeply with the more nurturing aspects of sleep. Practicing this exercise with freshness and interest gives us a deeper insight into ourselves and our children.

We can also bring our attention to what we want to change. By picturing the desired outcome, we start the process of delivering that outcome. Thoughts become reality.

Another helpful exercise is to envision or form an inner picture of each child in our care. Picture who they are and what gifts they bring. In this light their highest goodness comes to life. Ask for help and guidance and express gratitude for all that we have. We are the driver of our parenting vehicle. If the driver isn’t rested, relaxed and healthy, our passengers (and the driver) may have a bumpy, unpredictable ride.

## **FOR CRYING OUT LOUD**

A baby’s cry delivers many different messages that we as their caregivers must learn to interpret. It doesn’t take long for a perceptive caregiver to know the difference between a “stress cry”—hunger, a wet diaper or some other discomfort— and a “please hold me or play with me” cry, asking for attention.

Crying exercises the vocal chords. Babies simply enjoy experimenting with this strange phenomenon of air rushing up from their diaphragm and out through their lungs as they mix and match a variety of sounds to accompany it. Also, if they know it will bring mommy or daddy immediately to their side, it seems well worth the effort.

Parents often feel guilty if they let a child cry. However, it really is all right to allow a short time before you come to them. An internal training process is taking place. In his book, *The First Three Years of Life*, Dr. Burton White states that pediatric studies show that children who are allowed to wait before having their needs met (when the needs are not caused by discomfort) learn more easily how to process their feelings of restlessness. As a result, they develop better focus for longer periods of time. Chances are, if it's not a stress cry, the baby will stop on its own after a short time and either start cooing or fall asleep.

If the cry is from tiredness or over-stimulation, hold your baby and rock them. You can never show your baby too much love! At the same time, part of loving is “letting go” and giving our children the independence they need. Babies will want to have times when they are not being held, so they have a chance to explore this wonderful new world all by themselves.

## **MELTDOWNS AND TANTRUMS**

Meltdowns or emotional breakdowns, and tantrums (violent demonstrations of rage or frustration) *can* be avoided. One important goal to remember is, *we need to be at least one step ahead of our children at all times.*

Caregivers cannot ignore the signs of an emotional build-up in children when it begins to swing out of balance. Just as the surfer tries to catch the wave before it sweeps past them, we parents and teachers can learn to catch and dissipate a “meltdown wave” whenever we sense one coming our way.

What are some of the signs of a possible meltdown?

If you spend enough time around a child, you know their normal behavior. You can then feel it slipping into lower levels of talking... and that's where you catch it. It is much harder to bring back emotional balance

once it's gone. Parents who are calm and centered act as a safety net to “catch” their children. What better place to have children display their concerns than in the nurturing environment of their home! Be attuned to the rise or fall in energy levels and sounds coming from the children before they escalate.

Learn to hold back until you have assessed the situation and are peaceful. As soon as you hear your child becoming irritated, it is time to interact and turn it around. Approach your child calmly with empathy and convey a comforting message, honoring and appreciating them. Use phrases letting them know what they may do, such as, “music makers may use their shakers softly” or, “you may play loudly outside.”

Perhaps they need to bang. Give them a hammer and nuts in the shell, or geodes they can crack—or just rocks to pound to dust. I have seen older children pound rocks into different colored powders and then put them into a clear jar to be used for crafts, such as sand sculpting. Have a pair of safety goggles for each child and a child-size workbench or craft table.

The goal is to metamorphose the problem into a healing adventure. These transformations are necessary lessons that provide abilities to work through stuck places.

## **AFTER THE TANTRUM HAS STARTED, WHAT DO I DO?**

When a child is already in the midst of a tantrum, if possible, hold them tenderly without reacting. If you are feeling any negative emotion, change your mood to one of empathy and understanding. This helps to bring the child back into themselves. Other children need time alone. It's a good idea to learn your child's sensitivities; many children are easily over-stimulated.

Once while sitting at dinner, “Eric” was being silly and getting out of control. Friends were there and the mother wanted to take care of this situation without having it spiral into a melt-down. His mother warned, “Eric if you do this one more time, there will be no cake.”

Eric quickly stopped the silliness; the mother was fortunate. Later, we discussed the situation to identify specific behavior issues that may need to be addressed, and also to determine if other factors were involved. I observed that the dinner was served after 7 PM. Before the guests arrived, the mother was busy with preparations and Eric and his little sister “Florence” were occupying themselves. By the time they sat down at the table, they were visibly tired. Mama wanted to enjoy her company and dinner. When Eric first started his silliness, he could have had a reminder whispered in his ear that it was great to have fun, but the sillies had to wait until after dinner.

It’s important to consider beforehand whether your request will be effective. Maybe the action can be more in the mood of, “Can I help you?” Or, “I see that you’re too tired to eat.” Whatever inspires change for your child will be the best approach. Redirecting a child to benefit their character and social behavior is our work. This can help them develop sensitivity to other people. To overindulge a child only weakens them.

Behavior issues, such as refusing to put on a jacket or throwing a hat on the floor, disappear when the child is encouraged to be self-sufficient and caring. Why would they want to deliberately oppose us? A person with a clear loving presence who provides consistent guidance builds a strong bond with a child.

Meltdown situations may also occur when you have to go somewhere and you’re already running late. Let’s say your child doesn’t want to get into their car seat. This is a perfect opportunity for doing some inner work. Take a deep breath and tell yourself, “I am a loving, creative parent.”

Then, relax and *focus on who your child is rather than who they are not. Picture peace.* Envision your child as peaceful while they are screaming and yelling, and cooperative when they are unwilling and stubborn.

One mother, amazed that this “picture peace” technique actually worked, has used it ever since. Whenever she gets into negative stress entanglements with herself and her child starts to tune in to her “stuff” (screaming, shouting, whining, etc.), she tells herself to *picture peace*. At once her child calms down.

Driving in a car is a wonderful occasion to sing with our children. This stimulates thinking and gives everyone a chance to be creative. There are many add-on songs, such as “Old McDonald had a farm... E-I-E-I-O!” where a sound or phrase can be interjected. Canned entertainment such as drop-down video screens and speakers in the back of the vehicle is certainly an option, but is so inferior to the live, original singing and storytelling experience we can give our children. DVDs and CDs should be a last resort because at this young age it interferes with their development. You may notice that recordings can become addictive and upset a child’s balance. Make sure you’re not playing them over and over again, because the fixed images limit the imagination. I observe that children who watch the same movie repeatedly play fixed roles. This affects their ability to play socially and creatively.

CDs can help us learn songs that we can later sing with the children.<sup>1</sup> By its very nature, any type of live interaction with your children will be fresh and vibrant. It is like eating food that still has its life force, versus canned, frozen or processed versions that are already a long distance away from their origin. Stay as close to the life force and local source of whatever you are doing with your children, whether nourishing them with food, playing with them, teaching them or demonstrating the way things are to be done.

## **SHADOW PLAY**

We all have “shadow times” when we are not in the best frame of mind and we can’t seem to shake whatever is bothering us. If we didn’t have those moments, we wouldn’t be human. The first few times your child experiences them, they may not know what these shadow times are or where they come from. They could be frightened about what they are experiencing and feel helpless because they don’t know what to do about such strange feelings or upsetting thoughts. This may cause even more discomfort and anxiety—yours and theirs.

Shadow times can be physical, mental or emotional upsets, such as a virus, head cold, a weather change, or some other cosmic activity. Maybe something they don’t understand is causing them to be afraid. They may have overheard an argument between two people or inadvertently seen something on TV that made them feel anxious or upset. Stressful times may simply be inner moments related to a child’s growth and development process. Once we understand that these moments are necessary friction or “grist for the mill” that allow us to move forward on our life journey, we will be grateful for them.

Whenever your child is distressed, hold them, listen carefully to what they tell you, and be there for them. This bonding is so important.

## **BITING**

A child who is biting is frustrated, and when we “go inside” and meditate, the picture of what the child needs can come to us.

Generally, biting indicates that a child needs to learn a skill that is related to getting certain needs met. Something is frustrating this child in their environment; diverting the energy keeps from shaming them. When a child bites, you can say, “Oh, you must be hungry. I’ll give you

something to eat!” Offer them a carrot. Use humor, not anger. If the child is old enough to process verbal information, you can say, “We use our teeth for chewing. You may chew food, but not our friends. Friends are for playing with. If you’re hungry, I’ll give you something to eat.”

Even at a young age, we heal the behavior of the child who did the biting and the hurt of the one who was bitten. We always want to repair any given situation. Healthy options to give them loving attention are: “Oh, let me see your mouth. These are such beautiful teeth! It looks like they need shining. Let’s brush our teeth.” Moralizing doesn’t work.

When one child hurts another child, always go to the hurt child first. If one child has bitten another child, have the one who did the biting place their healing hand or a cooling cloth of herbal remedy on the area.

When two children are arguing about who hurt whom and it escalates to the stage of, “He hit me first!” “No, I didn’t!” and so on, back and forth, it works like magic for the adult to exclaim lightheartedly, “Aren’t we lucky! I didn’t know we were so lucky! No one did it, so no one is going to do it again!” Instead of making it serious, dissipate it.

It is best to keep the level of drama as low as possible. When we are upset, the children receive only our distress and not our message. Thus, we only increase our child’s level of anxiety, frustration and hostility. They really do want to be shown how to do things in a harmonious way; in fact they expect us to show them.

Check inside to see if *you* are the one in disharmony and modeling these feelings for your children and others. If you are calm and peaceful yourself, it will be so much easier to change the classroom or home environment. Children absorb everything. You can be sure if you’re feeling out of sorts one day, they’ll “act up” more than usual or they may be ill-humored themselves. We always need to monitor our own mood.

Parents are already feeling responsible for their children's behavior and it doesn't help to place blame on anyone. We cannot deny that our child needs positive attention when we observe them misbehaving. Could it be that we need to be giving ourselves more positive attention? Turning it around and placing one's attention on what is good makes good things happen.

Many of us are in denial and don't want to be blamed for our children's behavior. We are all doing the best we can until we find a better way. Finding healthy expressions of our love by staying connected to our soul and inner life can help us take the next step. By expressing all the ways we are grateful for what life has to offer, we invoke the spirit of affirming instead of denying. All of us need to be honored rather than judged.

Sometimes a person can't see certain issues you feel they need to look at. However, it is a natural and spiritual law that we respect another person's freedom and not give advice unless asked.

## **HITTING**

You can say to the child who's hitting others, "Oh let me see your hands! They look like good working hands. You may use your hands for working. Come, let's find some work." If the hitting occurs again, I have the child sit next to me and I include them in my work for a short time until I sense that they're ready to play. Another successful response is to let the child know they can go back and play when they are ready to play well. If Johnny has hurt Nancy or Bobby, focus on the hurt child and have Johnny bring them something to repair the hurt. You could say, for example, "Oh, you've got such healing hands. You may put your hands on Nancy's arm (or Bobby's chin)." Show them a way to change the hitting hands to healing ones.

Recently a child who is six-and-a-half years old visited my kindergarten.

He swings back and forth from one mood to another. Sometimes he can be friendly and elevated, very bright—genius mentality—and then he reverts to biting, hitting, pushing and shoving one of the two- or three- year olds; or he'll throw something at them. This situation is difficult because the boy's mother, whom I requested to be present in the classroom, starts to cry and gets upset when he acts up. She, like many of us, is so involved with him emotionally that she is unable to view his behavior objectively and then act accordingly.

Also, this child becomes fixated on a certain idea or way of doing things; it has to be *that way* every time. For example, if a particular toy is not available, he falls apart. Then if he does something wrong he will say, "I hate myself! I want to kill myself!" In the next instant he will be telling you how much he loves you.

Such situations require more than the parent or teacher can accommodate. We have to be honest and humble, realizing that if we cannot meet their needs, then the problem requires a specialist. As teachers we have to insure the success of the whole of the class. For optimal success, the parents and teachers need to have open communication and embrace the child with a supportive team.

## UNINTENTIONAL HITTING

Susie has just used many logs to build a house. There's a hole at the top where she wants to add another log, and as she does so, the entire structure crashes to the ground. Susie gets upset; she throws the wooden pieces and scatters them about, in the process striking Lewis on the head.

First, we go to Lewis and attend to him; then we guide Susie to help care for him, and next practice placing the wood building blocks on the ground.

We might also guide Susie to say, “I will be more careful.” We will not ask her to say “I’m sorry,” because she did not intentionally harm anyone. Instead of focusing on what is wrong, we place our attention to what brings a healing resolve.

However, if Susie did throw something intentionally at Lewis, the situation would be addressed differently. We might have Susie help build something for Lewis or have them play together with the adult joining in at first as needed. When we bring the children close to us and lovingly guide them, this is what I call “Time-In.”

For the adult to be effective in redirecting an incident, the new direction requires relevancy to the behavior.

If Susie is a bit careless and wild in building with the wood blocks, we might inspire building something more challenging that is age appropriate. Together, place chairs in a circle and lay pieces of cloth over the chair tops to form a roof. This will make a hut or cave. Or, also using chairs, you can build a train with a diner car. Using logs, make an elaborate village. The point is to know a child’s energy level, creativity and attention span, and challenge them to go to their next step.

The ideal is to catch things before they fall apart and re-inspire the play as needed.

## **BULLYING**

When children see bullying among adults or have been bullied themselves, they will imitate this behavior with their classmates. The desire to take charge of a situation and be “king of the mountain” is instinctive; we don’t want to scapegoat the children and label them as bad. Instead, embrace them and show them how to cooperate. If we notice a child starting to take advantage of others, the adults need to arrange themselves and their work

within close range of where the child is playing to intercept and help to transform the play before it becomes threatening.

## **FIGHTING**

Fighting aggressively can be transformed into a game of skill with two people facing one another, open palms touching, each trying to tip the other off balance.

Establish rules, such as not allowing the players to bend each other's fingers. Since they need to press against each other as part of the intentional movement, make it a meeting rather than a fighting. Children love friendly rules. It then becomes fun; issues are forgotten and hostility dissipates. Children need to feel human contact and physical resistance in order to *feel themselves*: the border of their body, their muscles, skin, physical strength, and pressure.

The security of knowing that adults are really there for them preserves their childhood.

## **SCREAMING**

Screaming necessitates an immediate look into the outburst, to see if the child is in danger. However, when screaming becomes habitual, we can tell a pedagogical story like "The Boy Who Cried Wolf," to inspire a transformation.

Habitual screaming is easy to address. All you have to say is, "Oh my gosh, I hear a screech owl... Where is it?" The screaming child will accept the spirit of the humor and start to laugh, or at least stop screaming and start looking for that screech owl.

Children who scream at the top of their lungs are demonstrating emotions

that have escalated. We need to notice this build-up before it screams out at us. To win their attention, draw near and whisper to a child who is speaking loudly. Make it interesting so they will want to imitate you. Make it fun.

If we scream and yell back at a child, it will create more dysfunction; in the end we're hurting ourselves.

Let them know at the outset that it's not okay to scream indoors by saying, "I cannot hear you when you speak like that. You may speak softly." Be clear that "we use our inside voices indoors." We need to intercede as soon as we hear the volume increase. It is less effective to change the volume if we do not respond while it is first happening.

Instead of yelling when they are angry or frustrated, some children withdraw. In a kindly, interested voice, we then guide them and help them find a new connection to others.

There is no recipe for responding to children. Each encounter is unique and deserves a fresh outlook. Holding back and giving the child space to process what's bothering them shows respect, and then they bounce back again, learning to trust their own process.

Be present for the children. They know when we are not there, when our mind is wandering. They want us to pay attention. Children will scream and act up in order to get that attention we're not giving them, just as they will ask the same question over and over until we give them our full attention and nourishing answers for their soul.

By staying present with our children during their waking hours we also strengthen our inner connection with them. Keeping in touch with our inner life gives us an awareness of what the children are experiencing. As they encounter frustrating situations they have to work through,

they have us as models for their behavior. Instead of staying stuck and struggling, the children see how we work through our difficulties.

## **TATTLING**

When tattling becomes habitual, it's time for that child to learn skills for getting their needs met and for standing up for themselves.

I bring the children together and we listen to what each other wants.

I might say, "Oh, you have so many tales to tell! Let's go to Sonya so you can tell her the tale. I know she will hear your words."

When they are fighting over a toy they both want, I may say, "Oh, I will have it! I know that you both know how to take turns, and you can have it back when you are ready to share."

They respond well when we are aiding their development and have no other reason or manipulation in mind. By redirecting play, we also provide social skills. Children learn how to positively direct themselves and each other.

Also, we encourage the child to go directly to the source. The adult creates the space in which a simple conversation takes place, stating what is needed from all sides without blame.

## **BOSSINESS**

In my classroom when a child is bossing others, I go to them and say, "A goose is loose in my kindergarten. I can't have geese honking at my children!"

The child who was bossing will say, "I'm not a goose!" and I will respond, "I am so glad that there will not be any honking at my children." If a

child comes to me and tells me that someone is bossing them, I reply, “You may let Kendra know there are no bosses here. Everyone is their own master.”

## **GUNS & WEAPONS: WHAT IS APPROPRIATE?**

Media exposes children to brutality and rapes their childhood. News and movies about cruel sex, dangerous drugs and hostile aggression are inappropriate for the young child, yet many youngsters come to school well versed in these subjects. We live in a society in which we surround our children with images of violence and destruction. We attract what we think about and anticipate.

What is the message we are giving to our children through video games: a) we can kill to have fun, b) we need to dominate to get ahead, c) it's okay to participate in violence, or d) all of the above? Saturating youngsters with criminal images is promoting violent behavior in school-aged children. It is damaging when sex and violence are combined; it gives young men the illusion that they have power over women.

Up to the age of 12 we don't have the ability to separate Hollywood from reality. Bad news and sensationalism receive more publicity than inspiring stories and events. Our children are becoming accustomed to viciousness, thus numbing them down.

We are responsible for what we are creating and destroying. Care of our children includes doing all that we can to create healthy, peaceful, and thriving communities that are focused on wellness and change for the betterment of everyone. I feel we have a commitment to these brave young souls that are choosing to be born in these times!

Valuing children, flaws and all, is crucial for a healthy relationship with them. Children flourish with the understanding that who they are

matters more than what they do. Children need to feel that there is hope for the future and they need to learn skills for working on their inner development.

A shift has occurred since 9/11 concerning weapons used for protection, and the children are aware of this. Still, I encourage them to use peaceful means. In kindergarten, we celebrate powerful peace-loving heroes. Peace is power! Our children need to see us as individuals who value all human life.

Since shooting or aiming is an archetypal gesture, I say to the children, “You may aim your love toward others; you may protect” (you are a protector). At home, introduce target games such as dart throwing or archery (arrow shooting), using suction cup darts and arrows. Directing clothespins into a bottle opening is an example of a good vertical aiming game.

Games with aiming skills sharpen our mind and body and focus our attention. I always have balls, rubber rings and other equipment available to project at a target.

One time when the boys were playing outside, I noticed they were building a trap where they were placing weapons. I told them, “You know the rule. We don’t have guns in the kindergarten.” If you forbid something, it needs to be replaced by offering what is possible. This applies to children of all ages. Keep it positive.

The children then responded, “Oh, but we HAVE to do this!”

This is the first time I ever heard such an imploring, primal need from children for weapons. For the sake of self-defense, they felt they had to have guns. They had to know they could protect themselves. How do we protect ourselves? We make friends with the world wherever possible.

When the children make you aware of a nuance that is vitally important to them that you don't yet understand, pay attention. As caregivers it is important to be receptive, to hear what the children need and then guide them accordingly. It is also important to be contemplative with the children; they need to experience that the real source of strength comes from within.

Keep it positive; change what isn't working, and replace it with what does work. Assure the children that they are more powerful than monsters, or anything that can attack us. Give the children the confidence and knowledge that they have the inner strength to defend themselves and that they can ask for help, that help is always available.

We foster a child's courage and remind them that they are our brave knights learning to protect. Boys and girls innately want to protect their loved ones. Once I understood this need, it deepened my perspective about playing with weapons. It is my responsibility to show them another way to meet themselves and each other through peaceful means.

One of our greatest challenges as adults is to guide and inspire our children to not only connect with The Sacred, but to acknowledge that *they are that sacredness*. From that sense and feeling comes the right use of will.

## CHANGING HABITS

If your child slams the door shut, how do you change that habit? Certainly by now you know if you tell them one time, two times, a hundred times, "Don't slam the door!" you can count on the door being slammed the next time they come in or go out. The same goes for not closing the door at all.

Here's a suggestion: When your children are on the way to any door in the house, arrive at the door before them and close it softly after

them. Model what you want them to do. *Be their consciousness* to help it happen the way that you would like.

***Nail biting*** – This is an indication of a nervous condition; the child is not assimilating what is happening during their day. Observe your child to glean a sense of what could be bothering them. Guide a conversation with your child so you can hear what is going on with their emotions without questioning them. (In Chapter Six, we discuss the importance of including a review of the day’s activities in the bedtime ritual.) Make sure to listen well so you can assess if this is a nervous condition or if they are just copying a friend.

Care for your child’s hands. Have a cuticle care ceremony, soaking hands in lavender water, trimming, filing and buffing their fingernails.

***Rolling of eyes, looking sideways, eye blinking, etc.*** – At four years old my mother noticed that whenever I grew tired my right eye would wander, so she made an appointment with an eye doctor, who had a twelve-month waiting period.

It was a big adventure and a lengthy therapy. Once a year until I was nine years old we took a city bus to the doctor’s downtown office. I was given eye drops and sent off for a time until the drops took effect. My mother would find a place to sit as she couldn’t walk very well, and I would make up a story game while trying to place my foot on each of the cobblestones that still remained from Detroit’s horse and buggy days. Then, with my eyes blurred, we would return to the doctor’s office.

On the first visit, the doctor told me that I could correct this stigmatism in my eye (a weakened muscle condition) if I did a five-minute eye exercise daily. He warned me that if I did not follow his instructions, by the time I was nine years old surgery would be necessary to correct the problem. I did not need any reminders to do these exercises daily over

the next four years, as I had *made up my mind to do them*. What I did not realize back then was that this simple exercise not only corrected my eyes but also strengthened my will and spiritual capacities.

If your child demonstrates any signs that you feel may be related to possible eye stress:

- Have their eyes checked by an optometrist.
- Describe to the optometrist what you are observing that your child is doing with their eyes.
- Ask if eye exercises may be helpful.
- Review your child's lifestyle to consider possible sensory overload (too much stimulus).

Let children develop at their own pace. Look deeply into their schedule to discover if some activity—or too much activity—is overwhelming them. Facial grimaces are signs of stress and often distress.

Let them dress up in colorful fabrics and play animated roles, e.g., clowns and jesters, making facial expressions that release tension. I remember when I was a child having so much fun singing and making dramatic facial expressions as I flew around on a broomstick.

## **CHILDREN ARE NOT SORRY**

Asking a child to say “I’m sorry” after doing something that was inappropriate is unrealistic because the young child really should not be made to feel bad about themselves. Instead, it is important to teach them to affirm the response we would like; e.g., “I will be more careful”; or, “I will use my mouth for speaking kind words”; or, “I will use my hands for working”; or, “I will use my feet for walking (as a response to inappropriate kicking).” Whatever needs repairing is done with a positive approach.

Many children are expected to behave in ways that we ourselves don't live up to. For example, you are upset that your son just tripped his sister, yet you interrupt your spouse and trip up what your partner is doing. As we become more aware of our actions and consciously improve our behavior, the children will follow.

“Johnny” spilled rice all over the floor. He had a great time being carefree, letting the rice pour out as he squished the bag and watched it come out through the opening... imagine the fun of emptying the entire bag onto the floor with no one watching him at that moment!

When mama turns around from the stove where she's finds Johnny and the spilled rice, of course she wants to convey to Johnny that this was a wrong thing to do... and now she or some other adult has to clean it up. But to ask Johnny to say “I'm sorry” is not appropriate, because Johnny really isn't “sorry.”

Instead she will find another way to demonstrate how Johnny must realize that spilling the rice on the floor was not a good thing to do, nor should he do it again.

For example, Mama and Johnny could clean up the rice together, fill bowls and use it to hold lit incense and candles, or for making bean bags. Johnny will understand that once food of any kind is spilled or dropped on the floor it can no longer be eaten. He will learn a valuable lesson at the same time he is led to understand we help repair or restore any damage.

You can do many activities with your children to enhance their motor skills. Show them a pan where they can feed the dog or cat. Gather stones and spill them into a pile. This anchors the lesson in a positive way, giving them a spilling activity they *can* do, to replace the one they *cannot*.

When spills like this occur, find a playful way to begin a magical adventure to inspire the clean-up. Make a game of it. We all have had magical moments in our lives and we can use the memories to make up these games. I remember the magic of the first snow fall, rainbows, horse and buggy rides, new and full moons, a sky full of stars and falling stars, surfing a wave, lightning bugs, seeing mother dolphins nursing their babes, and riding a horse in the full moon. Use a magical memory of your own for inspiration to replace old patterns of reacting to a child's innocent testing of their boundaries.

The young child is experiencing magical and exciting first time occurrences many times a day. We do not want to overreact and squelch their receptivity when they are opening up to explore the world.

Another way to respond to a mishap is to ask yourself why this happened; what inner work do you need to do to make sure these situations do not recur?

You could, for example, keep things out of reach until children have passed the stage of impulsively trying out everything. Have sand, stones, etc., available outside for play, with buckets and other containers.

## **CHILDREN NEED ADULTS TO LEAD THEM**

Children are barometers revealing the emotional, mental, and spiritual states of the adults around them. They are like horses in the sense that if you do not know how to lead them, they will rear back and run off. Children need the adults to lead with confidence, joy and knowledge.

## **PERMISSION**

We could call “taking without having permission” a form of stealing. However, as Rudolf Steiner points out in a lecture to teachers (Albert

Steffen, London, 1948), young children have no understanding of this. They're simply imitating their parents. For example, they will take money out of their father's wallet if mama is used to doing this. Or, they will take a cookie from the cookie jar if this is something they see mama or daddy doing. Permission has to be learned.

In my kindergarten we have many situations that need supervision, such as water play, concealed areas, and use of tools, etc. The adult holds the responsibility for safety yet we want the child to develop this accountability. When they experience respectful boundaries that the adults set for them, a reverence can exist within this freedom.

Last year, for the first time in my experience, all the children would go off and do things without asking permission. I needed to find a way to develop the social grace (and safety) of asking permission.

Playing games, such as "Mother, May I?" helps develop respectful boundaries. The game is played with the leader facing the children who are standing on a line. The leader calls out to one child at a time the name and amount of movements to be performed (e.g., 2 frog leaps, 3 bunny hops, 1 helicopter spin, etc.). Each child must ask, "Mother, may I?" before doing their movement. If they forget and move before asking, they go back to the starting line.

It came to me that this game that I grew up playing would be a non-moralizing way to introduce asking permission. This fun activity awakens the children's ability to ask for what they desire.

My class required three weeks of playing the game before they could remember to ask, "Mother may I?" In past years, the children caught on to this quickly because they were used to asking their parents' permission to do things. The children loved the game and began of their own volition to ask politely for what they needed.

My solution is to turn the situation right side out. When “Joey” has taken something, we make him the one who has golden eyes and he is then encouraged to help find those “missing treasures.” Without shaming him, we make a game out of finding what was taken. This is one way to bring strength to a weakness. We need to view in a different light what children do. They’re just exploring and testing to determine their boundaries.

## **GOLDEN RULES**

All of the children’s experiences are taken in, worked through internally and processed. When these impressions are digested and then released, we can gain a sense of how well they are assimilating life.

Numerous studies performed by biofeedback and other behaviorist experts show that habit-changing as well as assimilation of anything new and different in our lives requires approximately 21 days, or three weeks.<sup>2</sup> I can vouch for this phenomenon myself. It takes me approximately one week to absorb new information or sensory experiences, another week to process it, and a final third week to adapt to this change and allow it to come to full expression.

A child may be feeling pressured to compete, or it could be affecting their self-esteem to be thought of as a loser. Why? Such competitive concepts are not part of early childhood. Their world is one of wonder, goodness, and beauty (what many of us adults are trying to achieve!).

Today we witness this competitive pressure among athletes. The need to win can reach such levels of desperation, players will resort to breaking the rules and using dangerous and harmful drugs.

Before the age of six, children really don’t understand the limitations of rules. After that age, however, when they play games, they will indeed want to play by the rules. If they’re still very young and they bend the

rules and an older child complains, “He is supposed to come on our side; I tagged him!” I respond, “It’s all right. When they are older they will learn to play by the rules.” Or: “She is still learning to play by the rules.” Or: “Now that you’re six years old, you get to play by the rules.” Often children are not trying to cheat; they’re just in their own world.

We can be socially successful by playing cooperative rather than competitive games in which winning is the purpose. Ring toss, rope jumping, ball catch, throw the beanbag, hide and seek, etc., are examples of such games. When we are very young, learning how to play together is more important than winning.

## **CHILDREN LOVE TO FEEL NEEDED**

In the kindergarten I pretend that I make raw candy and cookies and the children are the ingredients. I mix together all of the imaginative ingredients: maple syrup, cinnamon, nutmeg, ginger, chocolate or coconut, and a pinch of salt. I grate the ginger, chop nuts and stir everything together. Then I knead the children, stirring them until they let me know they are “finished.” The boys especially love to run away like the ginger bread man and be chased!

Then I roll them on the floor in imaginative toppings, such as ground nuts or coconut. I use therapeutic movements: chopping with the sides of my hands, grating by sliding my palms across each other, stirring by circling my hands on them; and various other cooking movements. Children love to feel kneaded.

I find it so helpful to offer a child what they *may do* instead of what they *may not*. Forbidding them from doing something is sometimes necessary; if you forbid anything, make sure to demonstrate what is doable. Present an alternative for what is off limits or not allowed. Provide purposeful work so they feel useful. A child feels so good about

making a contribution to whatever you're working on. It gives them another way to value themselves.

Using affirming directives is one of the keys to transmitting a world of opportunities. Notice if you frequently say “no” or “don't.” When you invite the children to do something, you are giving them a positive direction.

It's just a matter of reframing our approach. Think how wonderful we feel when we consider *what we can do* rather than what we cannot.

## **ESTABLISH RHYTHM AND CONSISTENCY**

In a child's day, clear boundaries work hand in hand with rhythm and consistency. Regular times for meals, play activities and bedtime provide security and confidence as well as stability.

Do you have rhythm in your own life? Often people tell me they're grateful for having a daily routine of wake-up time followed by morning hygiene, breakfast, chores, etc., and work activities throughout the day. A schedule allows us to stay focused. If this schedule sometimes seems too rigid and structured, you can always adjust it. By having a rhythm in place, the child can move forward with ease, knowing that all is well. “The next thing to do” is always already there. Having the gift of knowing that we can depend on what is next delivers the message that we ourselves are dependable.

Set boundaries. When dinner is going to be served, give plenty of notice and guide this transition as an invitation. You can be elegantly playful and when it's time you can say, “Come to my royal dinner!” A little enchantment goes a long way.

## CLOSURE

A child needs time for closure, or bringing any activity to completion, and transitioning to the next one. This is one of the most important times for parents and teachers to be present. Respecting the need to consummate your children's work and play demonstrates that you value what they are doing.

By being with the children during this time of establishing order, we guarantee a smoother transition. Instead of wresting them away from their play, we give them a ten-minute signal to finish. I always try to use this time to methodically put away my own work. This way, they see the clean up time has begun and they can prepare for it. Children observe that *now is the time when adults are cleaning up... and soon, it's our time to clean up!* They gladly bring completion to their activities.

Carefully picking up their toys and putting them in their rightful places helps bring order to their lives. If we show them how to sequentially put away the larger toys first, they will learn that this method makes it easier to clean up. By tidying up with them in an orderly way, we help to organize their thinking capacities. Children need parents and caregivers to show them how to care for their belongings. By arranging toys neatly, they can easily find them again. Finishing a task strengthens the will. Having everything tucked away allows for fresh beginnings.

Try to notice before each transition, if your child is fully engaged in what they are doing. If they are not involved, make it fun to put everything away. For example, if you are putting away a cloth that is two yards long, you can each take two corners and let it billow up in the air a few times before folding it.

Also, we adults need to have a feeling of joy; otherwise, our joylessness or resistance acts as a repellent.

Closure is the crowning of all the rhythmic activities (the “breathing in and breathing out” times). The in-breathing times are absorbing periods of listening to imaginative stories, enjoying creative artistic activities, and doing homework, etc. The out-breathing times are expanding periods of self-motivated work and play.

Closure prepares the child for a harmonious transition between in- and out-breathing activities. It’s an epiphany when we quietly recognize the influence that these smooth transitions provide to the children. This inward recognition speaks loudly to the soul of a child.

Having closure at mealtimes lets the children know they can be excused from the table. Children will then understand how the current event will end. Closure to a family meal can be more than waiting until everyone has finished eating. In addition to a prayer or blessing at the beginning of the meal, some families also like to pause before leaving the table, to offer gratitude to the person who prepared the meal and to those who helped serve it. In my kindergarten, to end the meal we touch open palms with our neighbor, raise our arms and sing, “We are making a golden crown!” Then we say, “Blessings on the meal.”

If not allowed, closure can cause tears and outbursts of uncontrolled energy. For example, “Sally” wants to stay home and play with her dolls, but you have a doctor’s appointment for her and you’re already running late. You may be in a hurry to get her settled securely in her car seat so you can start out. But Sally doesn’t want to get into the van. She especially doesn’t want to be strapped into a car seat; she wants to stay home and play with her dolls. As soon as she learns what’s up, she starts to struggle and protest.

Instead of immediately forcing Sally to get into her car seat, let her explore the van. Plan ahead. The best way to prepare for your adventure is to give yourself twice the amount of time that you estimate will be required.

Make sure you're not dreading the procedure of placing Sally in the car seat; she will react to this and possibly make it even more difficult for you to secure her. Your unspoken message is, "*This is what is happening now.*"

In a relaxed manner, place a soft blanket over the car seat and have her favorite travel toy available. While she is settling in and you're fastening the straps on the seat belt, take an imaginary journey with her. "Let's go out in a canoe and let's paddle to Timbuktu..." Sally may want to continue the story herself, and the two of you can then go back and forth, telling the story together. Don't force your child to participate. Just let it flow naturally, weaving the magic.

Putting pressure on ourselves or the children to get something done sets everyone up for failure. The situation will indeed be a tense one. Make sure to build in enough time for *every* transition. Rushing from one thing to the next is then alleviated and it makes everything flow in a more harmonious way.

Keep the pace relaxed. Give your children plenty of time to explore and renew themselves with naps, rest or quiet time. This helps them replenish their energy supply.

Some children are eager to keep your attention for as long as possible, especially if they have brothers and sisters and everyone is vying for that spot in the limelight. If "Brenda" is putting on a puppet show and you are the audience, closure may be an issue. She may want the show to go on... and on... and on, because she knows you are now a captive audience. The adult can excuse themselves after a time and still allow the child some time to play.

You can help your children create closure without inviting a meltdown by intercepting with an imaginative suggestion, such as: "And now the

prince (or bunny) is traveling back to the kingdom (or forest) and is going to sleep.”

If “Sarah” and “Jonathan” protest, “No, no! Wait! Not yet!” you can say, “All right, the prince will first say good-bye to all his friends, and now he’s on his way back to the kingdom to go to sleep...” or, “the shepherd is herding in his sheep for the night.” Give your child a chance to create their own closure with the understanding that the end is beginning now and will need to come to completion. Make sure you allow sufficient time for closure.

If more than one of the siblings is stuck being the audience for a long time, they will get restless. Suggest to the child who is putting on the show that their brothers and sisters can be musicians, one of the other characters in the play, or maybe the lighting director, etc. Try to have everyone involved by actively watching or taking turns. If we take the time to observe, we discover that children often give clues about what they need.

When several children are putting on a play, some may want to assign roles to the others. Often they will start to argue because they don’t want to be told who they are supposed to be. They want to choose their roles themselves. Help the children learn how to make suggestions to each other in a non-demanding way. Make it understood that no one can tell you who you are supposed to be.

If friends or relatives are visiting and they’re asked to watch one of the children’s shows or participate in any type of activity that will eventually require closure—not only because every activity needs boundaries or limits but because dinner will be served in twenty minutes—make sure the children are clear about their boundaries *before* the activity begins.

Children live in the moment; the awareness that “time’s up” occurs only

to adults. Therefore, children need a gentle reminder. Ringing a bell or singing a song are alternative ways to let them know that it's time for supper, or the next activity.

## **TERROR IN THE HOUSE**

Many adults these days want to give their children free reign, feeling that freedom means saying yes to everything that a child desires. It is a dictatorship when a being can demand and get whatever they want. Children will not evolve without someone guiding them. A healthy way to hear what each child wants is to tune in to them with sensitive ears and with an inner hearing. We then navigate them towards what is needed. This process is similar to prayer. We pray for what we want and must not be attached to the answer. God gives us what we need, not what we crave. That way it keeps us flexible and we trust that a right outcome is always at hand. It may not be exactly the picture we had in mind, but it is the gift from God.

Many parents want their children to like them as a friend. When a child does not get their way, this immature relationship produces the reaction, "You're not my friend." The mature response is, "I am your mother." Single parents have double duty and the challenge of not turning their child into an adult confidant.

When an adult is held hostage by children, they've unknowingly given away their power—and since they've let the children dominate the situation, they can expect behavior that reflects this permissiveness. If you let a child do what they want all the time, they will become spoiled. The word "spoiled" refers to something that has putrefied and become rotten.

Trying to avoid tantrums by giving in to your child when they do not get their own way invites regular meltdowns. The demanding child is

**Ronna McEldowney**

taking over authority trying to see what he can get away with. A child who complains and says, “I don’t want to do that” responds well to an affirming, “This is what we get to do.” Try re-wording their response in a way that is a privilege and see what happens!

## CHAPTER FOUR

**SuperVision: Who's in Charge?**

Many adults today jump like toads as soon as their child asks for something, or they intellectualize: “Oh, okay... you don't want to wash your hands... okay.”

When we are the authority, we make sure that whatever needs to be done *will be done*. Simply confirm to your children, “*This is what we do.*”

If we express loving positive gestures and believe that what we do is in our child's best interest, they will feel and accept that. We acknowledge that it is healthy for a child to sometimes resist their parents and begin to gain independence. These are initiation steps toward their new-found freedom in discovering the world beyond their parents. Give the child physical distance, yet be ready at any given moment to be at their side to protect them as needed. Our attention holds them like a warm embrace as we give them constant care. Our ability to let them experience life and still bring them back into the fold is an enlightened art.

An invisible umbilical cord is attached between mother and child during the time the child is breastfeeding. Therefore, it can be uncomfortable for the child to be separated from the mother.

Recently I was invited to work with a couple who wanted parenting help with their three-year-old. The little boy, “Eddie,” was still nursing

and when his mom went out in the evening and left Eddie with his dad, he would cry the whole time she was gone. Dad would be holding little Eddie for hours; nothing he did would make him stop crying.

Some fathers feel out of place or inadequate when alone with a baby for a length of time. Many men often need reassurance and a walk-through of ideas of what to do if crying for mama persists, especially when the child is still breast feeding. To build confidence before leaving them alone together, I would suggest having dad take care of the baby at night for a few hours while mom is still there. More men are spending time sharing some of the parenting responsibilities that mom used to do all by herself.

A tendency is for mom to blame dad for not being able to manage Eddie while she's away.

Eddie has a sister who is a year older, and neither of the children wants to nap; this results in neither child napping. A household in which children are allowed to be in charge invites chaos and a breakdown of respect. Children benefit from having the sense that the adults know what is best for them.

Many parents come to me with similar issues. Unless a parent asks specific questions, I speak either about the progress or potential of their child and I feel that it is wise not to give advice unless asked. When a mother comes to my parenting classes, I can discuss her concern tactfully as a collective issue. If any particular issue is raised, I can then address it.

My dear friend who is a child psychologist was nursing her one-year-old daughter, "Bonnie." Her friends, who are also teachers, encouraged her to wean her child.

One day after nursing, the mother noticed that Bonnie was unsteady on her feet, almost as if she were intoxicated. Then, before she could catch her, Bonnie fell and cut herself above her eye.

Her mother thought, “I see now what my friends are saying. I will just soothe Bonnie one last time.” After nursing her daughter, Bonnie fell again, reopening the cut.

My friend observed that her child in that moment was not able to take hold of her physical body. Bonnie went back into a dreamy world and was wobbly on her feet.

Bonne’s mother knew that she had missed the opportunity for weaning her daughter, that there was a time when she had gotten up on her own and waddled away and she had missed the signal. Bonding through breastfeeding is the cosmic sweet nectar from the Gods, bestowed as a gift of nourishment on the earth for newborns. It is a whole food that builds and protects their immune system while their organs are being newly formed. However, by keeping the tie longer than necessary and by holding Bonnie in the horizontal position while nursing, she remained too dreamy. The young child’s ability to take hold of themselves and rise above gravity is a tangible demonstration of being upright and able to “stand on their own two feet.”

## **‘I WANT TO DO IT NOW!’**

I always have toys available for the children to play with on their own, close to where I am working. The children love to play in close proximity because we are the center of their lives. However, the times that we are unable to play with them are opportunities for communicating what is possible. For example: “Mommy I want you to do this puzzle with me.”

“I would love to do the puzzle with you after we’ve eaten and enjoyed our walk.”

Make sure the children understand that their activities are set within the rhythm of the family life. Doing a puzzle is a quiet activity that might precede bedtime. Taking a walk would be a physical activity that optimally would follow a family meal, thus improving our metabolism.

If a child protests, “I don’t want to do the puzzle then. I want to do it now,” your response is simple: “That is the time we have and that’s when we’ll do the puzzle.” Keep the conversation elevated and joyful. The goal is to have this be a chance to speak in a kind, understanding and guiding way. Children thrive on loving authority.

You can invite them to participate in the activity that is the current event. For example: “I’m preparing dinner now, and you can help me by placing napkins on the table.” Choose age appropriate activities that are fun for your children to do. Or, you could say: “You may go outside and find flowers or leaves for our table.”

I begin by saying “you may” because long ago I figured out that if we ask a child to do something we already want them to do, we are not delivering a clear message. We are asking a question when we already know the answer. We are offering a choice that we are not willing to accept. What begins as a question can disintegrate into a tussle of wills. If we question and give the child a choice and the child says no, then we need to respect that answer. When we don’t, they will not respect our saying no, especially if we try to persuade and manipulate their answer. The child sees through it and can become skilled at out-manipulating their parents.

Over-questioning a child makes them excessively conscious of themselves as an object of observation. Self-consciousness takes away

from the forces needed for growing during those first seven years of life. This is one reason to go easy on abstract conversations. A young child knows what they want until asked, and we adults can learn to know what they need without asking.

Change a child's objection to something positive like, "Let's make dinner together." Or: "I'm preparing dinner and I know you can help me. You may come and do this. I love your help!" Children want to contribute. Being involved is so important!

## **BONDING**

Closeness, understanding and care is the glue that holds us together. Parent-child bonding is one of the secrets to having a balanced, contented family environment. Often we do not realize the power of this bond until we become parents and teachers ourselves.

## **MALE BONDING**

Men need to come together to have bonding experiences at the soul level because they don't usually have this opportunity at the work place. The work at the office or place of business is usually mental or physical in nature, with little opportunity for emotional and spiritual bonding.

Following is a beautiful experience I had that I would like to share with you.

Several years ago, I felt privileged to have witnessed an event hosted by fathers on Kauai, at which I was the only female present. On Father's Day weekend, fathers and sons from Oahu, Maui, and Kauai went on an expedition exploring the remote Kalalau Valley. First they backpacked 11 steep rugged miles into a spot on the river. A few of us borrowed kayaks and paddled to the chosen spot where the evening's Father's Day

ceremonies would take place. Our group consisted of two young boys with their fathers paddling ocean kayaks, riding the waves for three days, camping on remote valley beaches, and viewing sea turtles and water caves along the way.

On Father's Day after a superb dinner prepared over the campfire, the men formed a circle with their boys in a huge dry sand cave and started drumming. What a celebration! Following the drumming, each of the men shared with the rest of the group what it meant for them to be a father. Speaking deeply and powerfully from the heart, they simply let the words flow.

I was greatly moved. For the first time in my life, I had a chance to witness an impassioned outpouring of male energy expressing the higher values these parents were striving for. I felt so honored to have been invited to this circle of holiness, for indeed, that is what it was: these were men aware of their sacred role, offering their gratitude to the highest for having been given the privilege of fatherhood.

The next day the men went off to explore more rigorous climbs, and since I didn't wish to participate, I stayed at camp with the boys to do some exploring. As boys, they were daringly inquisitive and adventuresome, and one of the first things they did as soon as their dads were out of sight, was to start a fire out in the open.

At this point, the choice was mine. Instead of moralizing and telling them not to light a fire because "that is dangerous," I looked at the flames shooting up and exclaimed, "Oh, you must be hungry! Here's some Saimin (Oriental soup). Let's heat it up with some water and make some soup!"

As soon as I said that, the boys realized they had a purpose for the fire and they transformed it into meaningful activity. Then I made it clear that matches are only used with adult supervision.

It is this type of transformation that quickly and easily delivers a positive, constructive message about the difference between reckless acts that could end up being destructive, and those that have merit and integrity. Intuitively children understand both of these values if you are constantly surrounding them with this higher level energy.

## **THINK AHEAD**

Plan special activities ahead of time. The more organized you are, the more spontaneous you can be in the moment. Always have “fallback plans” built into every day. For example, let’s say this Sunday for a family outing you’re planning to go for a hike and have a picnic afterward. You do all your packing and preparations the evening before and everyone is looking forward to this outing, but... you wake up and it’s raining. Forecast for the entire day is rain.

All is not lost, however, because you’ve already made rain provisions with at least one backup plan. You have scoped out a place with a covered awning—a park, or a friend’s house. You could pack umbrellas and rain gear in the van and have fun playing in the rain. Or maybe there’s an indoor playground with play equipment nearby. You could arrange to have an indoor picnic instead. Maybe this is a perfect opportunity to change plans altogether and make it into “theater day”: crafting new hand puppets or remodeling the puppet theater and creating a script and a puppet show. What are your children’s favorite activities? Center the backup plan around one of the items that is at the top of their list. Make being at home special.

## **EATING OUT**

More than ever before, families are mobile. Often our homes have become merely glorified parking lots between heavily booked schedules of sports, music, religious activities, day care, Scouts, dance lessons,

martial arts, etc., etc., and trips to theme parks.

When do working parents find time to cook meals? When does everyone find time to sit down and eat together?

For many of us, eating out as a family has become part of our lifestyle. We pile into one of the cars and drive to a neighborhood family restaurant or, if the children are already strapped into the car on their way to or from one of their activities, it's easy and convenient to simply make the dinner meal or lunch another public event.

The children are already over-stimulated or tired, parents are often sleep-deprived and stressed, and everyone is *hungry*. Barreling through the front door of the restaurant and knocking over anyone who happens to be in their way (*Hold the Fort! The Smiths are ambushing!*), let's hope this family of five doesn't have to wait for a table to be cleared or tables pushed together before they can be seated. If you've ever participated in one of these family eating frenzies or happened to be in the restaurant at the same time, you will need no further description: milk and water spillings, food fights, yelling and screaming from parents and children alike, banging on the table and sometimes even upsetting furniture.

If you and your partner are working parents with young children and the whole family is hungry—and you didn't have time to prepare dinner or simply don't want to—what are some of your other options?

If you're already at the restaurant and the chaos begins, the most consequential way to deal with the situation is to scoop up everyone, get the food packaged “to go,” pay the check and head for the door. Calmly, firmly, without being angry or showing frustration, deliver the message of “*I can see that you are tired but appropriate behavior is required everywhere.*”

When addressing the issue with the children, focus on the future: “The

next time we eat out, I know you will sit like a prince (or princess) and we'll be able to have a lovely meal together. You know how to speak kindly with each other." Use as few words as possible and do not get into a debate.

Another possibility is to order the meal to go, pick it up and eat outdoors or at home.

Have an alternative plan in place. If the restaurant menu will not be interesting for one or more of the children, bring food bags with snacks and finger food that they like.

One of the most important questions to ask before embarking on one of these restaurant outings is, is it necessary to eat out? Is there a better way—at least until some of the children are old enough to serve as models for the younger ones, or until the older ones can help?

One option does stand out clearly: if it's not working to take your children to a restaurant or other public place, *you really don't have to*.

Eating at home can still be an option. It might require planning and preparation and a bit of domestic time management, but it can be done and *is* done. Many parents prefer to teach their children how to behave at the dinner table first before exposing them to public places.

Large families may already have children who are old enough to help with food preparation, serving and clean-up. You may enjoy sharing the planning with them as well: making menus and shopping lists and taking them with you to help find items on the shelf. A service is available for those who have become accustomed to shopping on the internet. For a small additional fee which will be far less than the restaurant bill, many supermarkets offer at-home shopping and delivery. Several of these supermarkets now sell 100% certified organic produce.

## WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON WHEN CHILDREN EAT OUT?

Suddenly children find themselves in an unfamiliar environment bustling with activity and filled with strangers. Possibly they're being asked to taste food that is unusual to them, or maybe that familiar food has a different taste. Children are sensitive little beings; everything affects them. They are over-stimulated by bright lights, the hustle and bustle of all the people and many conversations taking place at the same time, etc. They take it all in and soon they're overwhelmed by this strangeness that hasn't been processed yet. They will respond in the only way they know how—either by joining in and talking louder than the rest—or feeling besieged, shutting down or crying, whimpering, etc. They're crying out for immediate parental attention; the adults are often distracted, so the children have lost their frame of reference.

I have noticed that children wishing to gain their parents' attention often send a clear message. Attention is sought by politely asking or tapping softly on a parent's leg, then a pulling on the skirt or pant leg. Parents deep in conversation with others do not notice this plea until a loud demanding voice ensues. The startled parent, unaware of ignoring the gentle request made earlier by their child, is surprised that such a forthright serious stance is presenting itself in public. The child tried speaking well but the only behavior that drew attention was to become boisterous.

Do not overreact. Warmly and clearly let them know that you really are interested in what they wish to express but that you need to hear their golden words. The way to prevent this unpleasant tangle is to acknowledge the child's wish to communicate and affirm that they can wait until you have finished your adult conversations.

Plan and practice a way that will work for both of you the next time. Practice taking turns talking and listening.

There's truth to the familiar phrase, "There's no place like home." Children usually prefer to be in an environment that is familiar. We all like to go places; nevertheless, home with their parents is where they do want to be most of the time. Also, at the end of a full day they need to unwind—we all do. Home instead of a restaurant is a better environment for this type of energy recharge to happen.

A restaurant—unless it is a gourmet treat for which we are particularly suited up to enjoy—will always be second-best to home-cooked meals and a warm and loving atmosphere.

One of the problems with eating out is the poor quality of the food and the way it is prepared. You may be served, for example, GMO foods prepared with rancid oil cooked at high level temperatures, or items that are over-salted, have high sugar content, food coloring and other additives. These types of foods as well as sodas and other junk foods are a major contribution to the increase in obesity.

Physical and mental illness are on the rise. We are experiencing the results of a couple of generations of children raised on junk foods. It's sad when we no longer can distinguish quality from quantity. One solution would be to encourage our restaurants to buy local, organic foods and use wholesome preparation methods.

Children are ready for their bedtime ritual soon after dinner is over; they've had a long day already. After the restaurant excursion, parents may have another errand or two. Often the children finally land in bed almost at the same time their parents flop into bed themselves, exhausted and stressed out—and well aware that another day like this one awaits them tomorrow.

Before taking the children to a restaurant, it would be good to make a list of everything you desire as the outcome. On the list you may have

written: your children's happiness and comfort; appropriate behavior; peace of mind for all concerned; a positive experience—fun for all; and an outing that everyone would want to repeat at another time. Suggestions I have for eating out are either to familiarize yourself with the menu and know what you are ordering ahead of time, or preorder for the family from the menu, keeping it like it is at home and calling it “the restaurant special.”

If children spend too much time in public places and if the goals on your list are not achieved, the children exhibit stressful behaviors. These behaviors show up at school the next day. Teachers frequently witness high levels of stress, fatigue, erratic behavior and situations that require special attention before they erupt into meltdowns. The key to success is parents and teachers working together to support the children's health and well-being.

## **THE PARENT-TEACHER TEAM, OUR SPECIAL RELATIONSHIPS**

Open communication among parents and teachers provides a deeper understanding of the child. When we have support flowing both ways, a vessel is formed that holds the child in the light of their highest potential.

Communication and support are paramount. My work could not have been done as effectively if it were not for parents who selflessly gave of their time. The parents' participation also helps bond the children to community. I value the selfless attention that each mom and dad has given.

*Dear parents: I have learned so much through your striving and your devotion to your family and to your teachers! In gratitude I remember the loving surprises, notes and incredible gifts of kindness, as well as the time you've spent working on various*

*projects with the children. I remember our delightful home visits together, getting to know one another better, bridging the gap between home and school. I honor the courage it takes to make your child's world a magical kingdom full of learning opportunities through self-discovery, play, and conscious enlightened parenting! I celebrate your role as parents, the most admirable mission there is. I thank you for entrusting me with your children.*

One of the dads volunteered to come in on his lunch break, to clean our bathrooms. He would stride in on his break, smiling and declaring, "If Gandhi could do this, so can I."

In Colorado it was very cold but the children did not like the zippers on their coats pulled up all the way to the neck because it would cut into their skin. On one occasion, I provided the parents with silk yarn and they knitted scarves for every kindergartener. The children loved wearing these soft warm scarves that their parents had made.

During the time I was teaching in Colorado, I began searching for a good location for a new school. One day I drove by a beautiful building surrounded by a generous amount of land that would make a perfect playground. It was exactly what I was looking for!

Whenever I drove by, I had the same powerful feeling that it would be a wonderful place for the school. Then one day the pull was so strong, I parked the car and went inside to speak with the owner. I asked him to please contact me if he ever decided to sell his property.

Months went by. Occasionally I would call the owner and inquire if the property was for sale and he would tell me that it wasn't, but one day I received the answer I was waiting for. Parents then gifted me with the exact amount of money still needed in order for us to purchase this beautiful school with an acre of playground.

On one occasion, a parent was so moved by an outdoor puppet performance we had just given that he gifted us with five hundred dollars.

On another occasion a dad from a previous year drove up to the school yard as I was outside working. He expressed gratitude for the loving care given to his son and said that he'd always wanted to do something for us but was not in a position to do so until now. He asked what we needed and I thought of a garden area with a tall fence. He gifted us with a large sum of money, the tears welling up in his eyes as he did so.

One year a parent gave me a crystal with three hundred dollars wrapped around it. Another year I was asked to make a wish list of everything that I needed for the kindergarten. Every item on my wish list was granted, totaling \$4,000.00.

Each year the parents would gather and decide on a gift for our classroom that would enhance our curriculum. We received a garden-cart wagon, gym mat, garden trellis, ski hut trip, and many more thoughtful gifts.

I began teaching in America again after studying, apprenticing and teaching in Europe for three years. In my first year I decided to build a sandbox the size of an immense swimming pool so there would be lots of room to dig and build houses. The engineering and building of the sandbox brought many moms and dads together who were architects, rock wall experts, heavy equipment operators and hardy workers, shoveling and digging until a contoured sand box graced the play yard.

A community effort of dads also transformed the interior of our classroom. They covered cement cinder block walls and metal rafters with rounded wood arches. They also created an entryway that inspired one child to exclaim, "Look! Angel wings!"

Now is a good time to discuss the value you personally place on parenting and your role as a mother and father. If it takes a back seat to your other titles or roles, you can elevate your position as mother and father in your own eyes and it will become elevated for your children as well. Just because a materialistic society doesn't honor and respect the profession of parenting by giving it status with other professions (since no price tag can really be attached to it) doesn't mean we have to go along with this perception.

Parents and teachers who do their own inner work and who set a high example for their children by providing a loving, nurturing home and school environment, are contributing to the life force of the planet.

The most valued gift to ourselves and others is our own humanness, finely tuned to the highest degree of inner development. This is who we are: Spiritual Beings living out of the darkness into the Light. We are our children's sunshine, their spiritual caregivers. These little seedlings lift their countenances to us and grow toward our light. Enlightened parents expand their hearts by practicing positive paradigms. A healthy seed planted in soil that is rich with nutrients will produce nutritious fruits and vegetables. Their seeds will transport the same high degree of wholesomeness and vibrancy to the next generation.

## **HOME LAND SECURITY**

Home land security begins at home with the assurance that we take care of each other. For the first seven years of their lives, children benefit from a protected environment. Anxiety and uncertainty in a child can be brought on by fear-filled conversations among adults. These frightening conversations predictably will deliver high levels of stress. It's like feeding them filet mignon when they don't have teeth to chew it.

How could we possibly believe our children will "get used to it" and start to behave "normally"— unless "normal" has been re-defined to mean

stuffing one's fears and insecurities? It is a well-known fact among child development professionals that this method of coping is known to be linked to a whole host of potential illnesses, allergies and other physical and emotional problems.

We can offer a peaceful, harmonious home life by having one parent be at home whenever possible, or by having the children cared for in or near the workplace, especially during those earlier years.

One reason for restaurant/public place exposure that I've heard from two highly motivated parents who are always on the go is that they want to acclimate their children at an early age to be in environments where most people are strangers, and where they are expected to act like adults. Why?

Why not gift them with a nurturing environment of familiarity, where they will learn all the basic social skills for caring and sharing with others? Start them out with a lifestyle that is rich with life's celebrations: rites of passage, nature retreats and favorite seasonal festivals. Show them how to bond with nature and develop a love for working with their hands.

Consider the possibilities of a child who learns appropriate behavior and manners at home and who regularly practices what they've learned. When deemed old enough to accompany their parents to places where they will be exposed to strangers and strange sights, smells, sounds, etc., how long would it take them to become acclimated to eating out at a restaurant? Their first visit?

## **SHOPPING WITH CHILDREN**

With parents working, time management often becomes a juggling act. Consumerism has capitalized on this, providing recreation areas in shopping malls and fast food restaurants. It's feasible to participate in these activities joyously when we're willing to consciously stay engaged

with our children.

We can have a glorious time by going to a park and letting the children hike on a trail, swing from tree branches, play hide-and-seek among the bushes, etc. But that is not what we're talking about here. The objective is to get the shopping done with the children and make it a fun outing for them as well. The challenge is to combine the two activities and make sure our children are not feeling like drag-alongs.

That's exactly the point. When children go everywhere with you, they get all "wired up." Without giving them sufficient time to unwind, the stage is set for meltdowns and other unwanted behaviors because drag-alongs can turn into dragons.

Children can be shown proper shopping etiquette. Of course there has to be a first time, but perhaps that event should be saved for the age when you can say to them, "David, now you're old enough to come with me to the store and help Mama place things in our cart! I will show you whatever we need."

Often they see something they want you to buy for them that is inappropriate, so there's always the possibility of a public meltdown. Make shopping fun by writing out a shopping list as if it were a treasure hunt. "And these are the treasures we are going to find!"

If your child is still an infant and they're tired, teething, hungry or have a soiled diaper, they might launch into a crying jag. Infants and young children in distress are not a pleasant experience for anyone to witness in a public environment such as a store. However, when you are relaxed, then your child will be relaxed. Have them face you while you are shopping so they will not be over-stimulated, and be prepared for anything, if you choose to shop with a child.

As if this weren't enough, a child is a very sensitive little being and they

might suddenly become upset by the toxic fumes in the household cleaner aisle, chemical odors from artificially scented bathroom deodorants, candles, etc., or the arctic chill in the frozen food section.

So, how *do* you avoid shopping upsets with your children? Shop at a farmers' market where the sights and sounds are more natural, and go to local family farms when possible. If you are a two-parent family and only one of you works, you can do the shopping after the other parent returns home; this also gives the working parent special time to be alone with the children.

Do major shopping once a week when the children are either at school or day care or being watched by a reliable neighbor, relative or babysitter. During the week, arrange to have your partner pick up incidental items you may need. Is it possible to do your errands without having to bring the children with you? Like everything else, it's a matter of time management: creating a schedule that accommodates your wishes as well as your needs.

## **TAKING YOUR CHILDREN WITH YOU TO MEETINGS AND OTHER PUBLIC EVENTS**

Taking children to a long meeting and expecting them to be on their best behavior without adult supervision is unrealistic, even if you have packed a bag of toys and things for them to do.

Often we may not be aware that we've actually set the stage for a child's meltdown. If you must attend an adult meeting and you have no one to look after your little one, consider what you're asking if you take them. First, you are expecting them to act like grownups when, in fact, they are not. The meeting is not for them, so they are not welcome. They will *feel* unwelcome.

If your attendance is imperative at this meeting and you have no other

choice than to bring your children with you, be prepared to spend a good deal of time outside the meeting room or at a place in back where you can be close to them and tend to them if necessary. If they start to become rowdy and you're focused on the meeting and not on them, the children will be aware of that disconnect and may become even more disruptive.

It is ideal if you can work out arrangements with a friend. If they have one or more children, they may be grateful to you for your help when *they* have to attend similar events. Or maybe you can find a responsible teenager to accompany you, so the children can play in an adjoining room. Let that person know beforehand what is appropriate. Today there are so many options for participating in meetings without being physically present.

When you are in charge of children's play, keep an eye and ear on them at all times. Over the years, I've developed an ability to inwardly sense what the children are doing, even when they are all over the play yard. One day, for example, a government education supervisor was visiting and we were talking together outside during the children's recess. "Terry" was playing at the other end of the yard and although I couldn't actually see him, I knew he had just placed something in his mouth. "Terry," I called out, "what did you just put in your mouth?"

Terry turned toward me. "A clover, Ms. McEldowney!" he answered.

The young supervisor was amazed. "How could you possibly have seen that?" she asked me.

I told her, "I hope that you will see lots of things on your visit here."

Another time, a teacher was visiting and a child went running behind me. I sang out to the child, "Julia, walk, walkety-walk!"

The teacher expressed amazement that I could tell who it was when it

happened behind my back (Julia was one of 24 children in my class at the time.) “Ronna, how could you see behind you?”

I smiled at her. “It’s my connection to the children.” There’s nothing unusual about this “sixth sense” skill. By keeping my awareness focused on the children, I can sense what they’re doing. Each of us can develop this helpful sensitivity.

Children are very intuitive. They feel this connection we make with them from deep inside. For example, some will know the color of clothing I’ll be wearing to school and they’ll match that color. Others will know what activities I did over the summer and imitate those activities in school through their play. One summer I went on a kayaking expedition and on the first day back to school during playtime without my having discussed my summer vacation with them, they were pretending to be kayaking!

## **PROVIDING SAFETY**

The teaching of safety is very subtle. For example, rather than merely telling children not to enter the street by saying, “Don’t do this” or “Don’t do that,” instead, *we make sure they wouldn’t go into the street by guiding them with our presence and example.* It is imperative that they learn to ask permission before approaching the street, and when they are older, that *we are at the street showing them how to cross over by looking both ways.*

It is we adults who need to be accountable rather than believing we need to tell our children at a very young age to know better.

Safety begins with observation, always looking out for potential danger. Making sure we are one step ahead of the children allows us to create a safe space for them to enter. At home have your private items safely

stored or inaccessible to your children. Let them know that they have their space and you have yours. Your home office is best set up with your work space kept for your own use. If you allow your child in this room, you could set up their work and play space near yours. If you do let your children enter these areas when you are present, you will have an excellent opportunity to teach them how to respect the property of others, i.e., by asking permission. In any situation that involves borrowing, you can remind them about returning things to the promised land.

## **VULTURE-CULTURE EXPOSURE AT HOME**

Today the toy business has become a multi-billion dollar industry. The global marketplace is flooded with children's toys, computer games, films, DVDs, etc., based on non-traditional values. The current images and values portrayed are ugly, garish, chaotic, sarcastic, disrespectful and violent. Practically eliminated are our naturally beautiful, nurturing, sharing and cooperative toys. When selecting a gift, choose toys that give your child a sense of worth.

Toy industries are making dehumanizing products, capturing and manufacturing the latest locker room talk, biological nicknames for body parts and off-color jokes into deliberately vulgar, obscene and obnoxious product lines for children of all ages. The toy spectrum includes overly sentimental toys and movies that are animated to be sappy, sexy and violent.

Whenever vulgarity is used at home, it will find a way into the classroom. Children quote what they hear and see. If a child starts using inappropriate language, I tell them, "You may use your golden words. Let me see—open your mouth—oh, it looks beautiful in there!"

Sometimes it helps to say, "I can't even hear you. I love to hear who you are! I love to hear what you have to say!" Communicate and relate with

the children on a higher level. Give them positive attention.

## IS IT REALLY THE CHILDREN?

If we are good self-observers, in time we discover certain behavior patterns or ways we do things. We also start to learn about our temperament, i.e., our manner of thinking, feeling and acting. We may need to have things done a certain way, or we will become upset, worried, agitated, restless or frustrated. If we absolutely cannot cope unless things are done *our* way, that's something for us to take a look at. It may need massaging or a makeover.

When we want it to be completely quiet at the dinner table, yet the children chatter and sometimes become silly, we become agitated. The tendency is to become bothered as our agitation grows out of proportion. This only invites the children to become even sillier and noisier. At this point, no positive outcome is in sight; the energy escalates. We are caught up in a sea of emotions, out of control.

When I understand myself and remember that I love the children, I can then imagine myself radiating peace. From within, I begin to design what I can and cannot expect from them while they're eating. I can then orchestrate reasonable responses to bring about the mood that aspires to wonder-filled conversations.

Parents who go to parties or meetings and leave their children without an adult consciousness present—a loving presence that can help guide the social dynamics—often find chaos when they return. It is harder to assess the cause of turmoil when you have not observed it. I know of parents getting together and hiring reliable teenagers to watch over the children. Other parents take turns keeping an eye on the social dynamics. Party entertainment is available almost everywhere today. One can find people who can produce puppet shows, lead storytelling sessions or

provide various movement activities for children's birthday parties or special events. Mom and dad can have quality time together knowing that their children are well cared for.

In the kindergarten, when I came to the end of a school year I would ask myself what I had learned; every year had a significant lesson for me. The first year that I taught, I was frustrated with the parents over the issue of not yet teaching their children to flush the toilet.

Anger, I realized, is untransformed compassion. I needed to develop compassion for what it must be like for children not to be in the habit of flushing the toilet. Also, I needed to be present during the bathroom times to remind them of proper hygiene.

## **WE ARE ALL WORKS IN PROGRESS**

The following ingredients are necessary when establishing discipline for our children:

- regularity and rhythm
- love
- inner certainty
- respect
- boundaries
- timing
- humor
- objectivity
- consistency

Please feel free to add to the list of ingredients.

It is important that we don't worry or feel guilty. It's just as important that

we can laugh at and learn from our own mistakes, and for our children to realize we're far from perfect—that we are all “works in progress.”

## **SUPER VISION IS AN INVESTMENT**

Super vision comes from a parent's commitment to practice “inner interest”; our deeper insights come from cultivating a rich inner life. Our inner life includes meditating with the forces of the cosmos. We “save” on time and energy and gain the interest of our children and spouse. By “banking on our spiritual resources” we have accrued others' “interest” as well. That's what I call a “Cosmic Investment!”

## CHAPTER FIVE

### **Conversations with Children**

#### **EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION IS AN ART**

I once asked “Justin,” “How old are you?” and he answered, “Three.”

I then asked him, “When did you turn three?”

He replied, “I had to.”

Justin’s response made me realize that my questioning was out of place and needed to be age appropriate.

“Who are you and what do you want?” has no meaning for a young child; it confuses them. They understand so much without our actually verbalizing it.

Conversations are soul nourishing when substantial energy exchange occurs on a heart to heart level. When we are able to paint pictures using speech to describe the qualitative meaning of life, we become illustrators of the basic spiritual principles that govern the universe. Uplifting pictorial conversation feeds a child’s soul.

#### **HOW ARE WE PERCEIVED?**

Are we calm and centered, or is our voice usually tinged with tension?

How are we perceived when we communicate? Do we use our words like weapons? Our children reflect our mood to us and help us to be aware of times when we are harsh, condescending, sarcastic, nasal sounding, raspy, sharp, fearful, judgmental, demanding, or sentimental.

We embellish a story with whimsical and striving characters, taking it out of the personal realm by letting these characters' actions and words demonstrate the issue or "lesson." Such stories can produce amazing results. Pictures communicated in story form massage the inner being until it ripens into new possibilities. We portray a healing image to our children through pedagogical stories.

When dealing with a specific circumstance, I identify what's not been working and I then focus on positive aspects that are already in place. It's not about being perfect but about striving, going to our next level of understanding. The goal is to bring awareness to the quality of speech, and to be interested in what each other has to say. When we guide our children in a way that respects them and leaves an opening for them to express who they are, we allow for free will and healthy dialogue.

In a social setting, children will make it obvious when they need help in repairing or healing an impasse. A situation that requires adult intervention is an opportunity to realign ourselves first. We call upon our inner strength and reach out with a healing hand, positive word or kind deed that relates to that particular situation.

Children need to feel that whenever the opportunity presents itself, they are learning the skills to create a positive outcome. Without moralizing, we can show children what is best.

Some activities that provide moral guidance are: reading stories about saintly people, fairy tales, and poems; singing; saying prayers; expressing good wishes for others; community volunteer work; and giving to others.

Who we are is what counts, and what we do will follow.

## **CHILDREN CAN UNDERSTAND AND THEY *REALLY* DO WANT TO LISTEN**

Saying a poem or song before meals helps to place the focus on giving thanks and takes us out of the realm of self-consciousness. Here is a free rendering from a kindergarten verse I learned:

Good morning, Dear Sunshine, looking through my window fine  
The birds are all awaking, they are music making.  
They have brought with them through the silence of the night,  
Dear God, their loving thanks so bright.

Sometimes we think that because a child is two years old, they cannot understand what we're telling them. The fact is, if we speak to them in a heart-filled picturesque way, they will listen and know what we mean. Frankie, who is grabbing food from his parents' plate will be given license to continue this behavior if the parents are telling themselves he's only two and doesn't know better.

The child can in fact, know better! The action to take is: "Oh! Here's your plate. This is Mama's plate, you have yours. Here you go... here's your spoon—look at that!" Pick up the spoon, indicating to Frankie what you're referring to. Often the clarity isn't there. We need to demonstrate to our children what they are to do. Give them boundaries. Make it clear to them exactly what is expected of them. Being clear with ourselves is one of the best ways to get clear with our children.

Let's take this scenario a step further. Let's say that Frankie, pointing to food on his own plate, declares, "I don't want that!" Again, Frankie reaches for some food on Mama's plate.

Mama: “This is Mama’s plate. Here is your plate.”

Frankie: “No! I want that!” (Frankie tries to get to the food on Mama’s plate as Mama redirects him by placing her hand between Frankie and the plate.) With a reassuring voice, she gestures to his plate and says, “I know that you know this is your plate.”

Mama: “Here is your plate with your food. This is what you have to eat.” (Although it is ideal to have the same food in front of Frankie, if Frankie’s food is different from Mama’s, Mama could put some of the desired food on his plate.)

If Frankie continues to reach for the food on Mama’s plate, Mama says, “Oh, I see that you’re tired. Come.” Mama brings Frankie towards her; *she does not push him away.*

Mama can lovingly take Frankie to his room and, keeping him close to her, tell him a fictive story about another child or about some animals in the forest that illustrates the current situation.

If the child is older you can say, “Look how Mama eats.” *Focus on what is working.* Remember, if you focus on the meltdown, you’ll get more meltdown.

Or: “I know you know how to sit so tall! Let me see your hands. Oh, they know how to hold a spoon so well.” Then they’ll laugh and exclaim, “Oh *yaay!*” and pick up their spoon and start to eat.

Having a positive image of the desired behavior is essential. It is not helpful to try to manipulate or compromise. We honor our children by demonstrating ennobled behavior.

Another variation of chaos happens when mom cooks dinner and the

children make faces and complain that they do not like the meal.

Mom asks what they would like and soon the children, seizing control, are shouting disrespectfully across the table. Mom gets up and cooks whatever they are wanting, and the children then jump up from the table. After it is ready, the disjointed family gathering continues.

We could say, “Frogs hop around while eating, but we sit at the table. We can play frogs after dinner.”

Hopping up from the table:

- causes indigestion
- gives undue authority to the child
- gives the impression that they can demand whatever they want at the table
- disrupts family communing together at mealtime
- shows a lack of gratitude

Prepare a meal that you know the children will like, and introduce new foods in small portions.

Home and school are the perfect places for practicing table manners. Children learn that this is a specially prepared meal for everyone, for which we are so thankful. When one can cook in such a way that each dish can be appreciated, it awakens gratitude. We knew a dad who during every meal would say, “This is one of the best meals that I ever had.” Expressing virtuous thoughts inspires loving actions.

## **FOCUS ON THE POSITIVE**

Always focus on the positive. Reserve saying “no” to children unless it’s a warning of danger. If you use it in every other sentence when speaking to them, it will have a shock effect. *No! No! No! No!* Do you feel those

little shocks? That's what the children feel also, only with even greater intensity. After so many shocks, they will either become numb or else start believing that their name is "NO."

Children do have to learn what not to do and they also have to learn the meaning of "no," but it should be used for something major. We have to practice holding back and using this word sparingly. Too much verbiage will start to sound artificial and unnecessary. Be firm, direct and to the point. If the message comes back undelivered, i.e., as though they did not hear or they were unable to take it in effectively, check yourself to see if it was sent with anxiety.

Discipline helps our children to develop. It is a constructive way to keep our lives orderly and it also gives us the full opportunity to be responsible and responsive to life's challenges. Once we have that inner sense of knowing what we can and cannot do—what will work and what will not deliver the most desirable outcomes—all else falls in place. Children will be grateful in later years that their parents believed in and practiced discipline.

If a child becomes bothersome or tries to attract our attention through negative means, they will persist with this method of communication until they get what they want, or until we redirect them and give them what they need. By remaining peaceful and being present with positive attention, we won't waste any time or energy berating what went wrong. We will have moved on to help them grow.

When we get angry, a child experiences our anger and not what we're trying to say. Most often when we experience frustration over a child's behavior, it is because we have allowed the child's play to spiral out of bounds. If we intervene with just a word or gesture *before the incident escalates*, a new direction is possible.

For example, when a young child is kicking, we could say, “Oh, these feet need new dancing shoes!” Make a playful gesture of tapping on the soles of their shoes and start a little dance. The tapping stimulates them; they love it and they also get the humor of it. The mood lightens.

## NAGGING

If you complain to a child, “Stop nagging me,” you are nagging back, encouraging more nagging. Instead, you can say, “Oops! This piano is out of tune. Let me tune it!” Then bring them close to you and pretend they are a keyboard. Start to tune each note by singing and tapping on the “keyboard,” which can be their knees or hands. Children love this game and soon the nagging is forgotten. Children blossom with positive attention that changes the mood.

If a child is grumpy, I’ll say, “It sounds like the grumples!” I then glide my closed palm over their stomach, pretending it’s an iron, saying, “Let me iron out the grumples!” This is so much fun for them.

Another way of helping to lighten the energy is to look at them with great surprise as if to say, “You are surprising me with that unusual behavior!”

The situation worsens when you tell a child, “Not now; talk to me later.” Or when a child asks, “Dad, can I?” and then dad says, “Go ask your mother.”

As a child, when I would go to my father to ask him for something, he would often refer me to my mother for an answer. This annoyed me and made me feel that my dad had no authority in the house. Once I lashed out and called my dad a puppet, which hurt him for being disregarded. I did not mean to be disrespectful but my frustration got the best of me. I loved my father and later grew to value his humility.

Children lose respect when you put them off and don't respond directly to their questions.

## **MAMA! MAMA!**

A mother came to me for help with a common problem: "My three-year-old girl is loudly screaming out 'Mama!' all the time. What do I do?"

"Tell her that's not your name," I told the mother. "Tell her, 'My name is *Mama*' (spoken softly and with honor)."

The woman said it worked like magic. "How can that be?" she asked.

I smiled at her. "If you let the child know what you would like—in a calm confident manner—they'll go along with you because they really do want to evolve. If you scream back or shout at them, falling into lower levels of communication, you cannot expect them to change their behavior or listen to you."

You could also say something like, "I can't hear you when you speak like that. I would really like to hear what you're saying." Or, "You have such a fine voice; I would really love to hear what you have to say." This approach works; speak with confidence!

If a child repeats the same question over and over, they may feel they're not being fully listened to. They know when the words they send are bouncing into empty space.

It is best to let them know when you are available to listen. Since younger children do not have time perception, saying that in a half hour you can answer them will not work. Be more descriptive while conversing, e.g., "I am on the phone now and when I am finished I can give you my full attention. I am happy to hear what you are wishing for." This is more

what they can relate to, because they can picture what you mean.

## CONVERSATIONS ABOUT WAR

In 2003, even the youngest of the children had learned about our troops bombing Baghdad. They were frightened because they didn't know how to relate to this information; they had no reference point for war. Because of the serious way they heard grownups talking about it, they were trying to understand how it would affect them.

During the Kuwait war I had a child in my kindergarten who came to me very distraught because his parents had told him about the war. Bruce was five years old. He was thin with a small head and very much in his nervous system. He didn't know what to do with this disturbing "undigested" information.

"Is it true there's a war in Kuwait?" he asked me anxiously.

At the time we were out of hearing range from the rest of the class (I felt they didn't need to be part of this conversation). "Bruce," I responded, "we are so lucky! We get to play in the kindergarten. *They* didn't get to play together."

At once, Bruce relaxed and smiled back at me. He was relieved by this image.

In presenting a picture of the way we want life to be, we are giving our children a hopeful future. This offers reassurance and helps to alleviate fears that for a small child could lead to nightmares, behavior challenges, unwanted habits, etc. It's up to us to beam our confidence and stay positive. Find gratitude in everything.

## CONVERSATIONS ABOUT DEATH

One time during the school year, a father of one of the kindergarteners in the class had a car accident. The father, with his wife in the car, hit a tree and was fatally injured. In class, we commemorated Lonnie's father's spiritual birthday. The older children wanted to sing "Silent Night" and the younger children, "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star." Sharing this experience as a special tribute to the child's father brought love, warmth and caring to Lonnie.

That evening at sunset near Lonnie's house, three dolphins were dancing on the water in a circle.

We feel heavenly blessings in the presence of nature rejoicing in the beloved ones' passage to our spiritual homeland.

Children whose environment brings them in close contact with death, experience the threshold of dying. Instinctively they bury a dead animal, place flowers, make a cross with sticks, color a picture or demonstrate other forms of nurturing and kindness. A veil is lifted. They find strength in being together with classmates. I'm told that in some countries where people live under the threat of surprise attacks and annihilation, schools make it a priority for everyone to see each other daily to reassure each other's safety. They talk about each other's concerns and share their stories, keeping communication lines open. This daily conversation with teachers and classmates serves as a healing balm. The children know they are not alone.

If our purpose is to heal the planet, this heartfelt communication with our children forms an important link and helps them to feel love and protection. I grew up in one of the roughest and toughest city neighborhoods in the U.S. and at times I felt terrified and alienated. But I was protected by a warm and loving family environment. My parents

knew how to create and maintain a strong close-knit family life.

## **HOW DO WE KNOW WHAT'S REAL?**

One of my friends described a situation with their six-year-old grandchild. “Gary” developed itching between his toes, yet there was no sign of any skin problem. The parents took Gary to a pediatric dermatologist who gave them a salve to put between Gary’s toes.

The problem persisted and was so annoying, Gary would scream and have a meltdown until one of his parents rubbed the salve between his toes and beneath his toenails.

Gary loved to play baseball and one afternoon he went outside to practice with grandma pitching the ball. They had so much fun! The grass was wet because it had rained earlier that day, but Gary was having such a good time, the wetness didn’t seem to be bothering his feet.

When it was time to come in to prepare for dinner, Gary removed his sneakers and wet socks. Suddenly, breaking through the hum of pre-dinner activities were sounds of shrieking and howling. Grandma and mommy rushed to the scene and there was Gary writhing on the sofa, claspng both feet in his hands, face red, tears streaming down his face. “Mommy, they itch. Stop this! I can’t stand it!” he cried.

Mommy immediately sat down next to Gary, held him close, looked carefully at both feet and applied the latest salve.

All was well again until bedtime. Gary was upstairs with his daddy, who was supervising his shower and bedtime preparations.

Suddenly mommy heard daddy shouting. “Did you see Gary’s feet and toes? Did you see how terrible they look? They’re all red and inflamed!

Why didn't you do something about them?"

Father and son came bounding down the stairs to show mommy the rash that had developed beneath Gary's toenails. Gary was now howling loudly and lustily throughout the argument that ensued. Daddy proceeded to blame mommy for neglecting her son's foot problem. This scene took place in front of his sister and grandma.

Since the mother had already told her husband that she had applied the salve to Gary's feet and toes before he'd arrived home, she chose not to enter into her husband's anger. Instead, she said she would take Gary to the doctor the next day to have his toes checked once again. Mommy placed the salve on Gary's feet and he stopped crying; the bedtime ritual proceeded as usual.

If angry scenes such as the one described were frequent occurrences, Gary and his sister would be aware of the building tension and hostility between their parents. What are the possible responses of the children to a situation of this nature?

How can these two parents learn to communicate at a higher level, above blame and shame, and what does this elevated communication convey to children in terms of trust?

At the first appropriate occasion, the parents' dialogue could go like this:

Mother: "When you raise your voice, all I hear is your anger and I wish for the children to learn from us how to speak kindly."

Or: "Honey, I really want to hear what you have to say and I know you really want to tell me that it was hard to see Gary suffering. I really need you to know that I was doing the best I could. I want to have that trust

built into our relationship. I will do everything I can.”

They are also affirming that neither of them is right or wrong. “I would appreciate talking about charged issues when the children are not present. I feel that we can openly bring important questions and concerns without making each other wrong.”

The father’s dialogue could have been: “I apologize, honey, you’ve been doing everything possible to find out what the problem is. I appreciate everything you do. Thank you. I know together we’ll find a remedy that will work.”

*Treat with great compassion what a child tells you and bring it into the most healing reality.*

Gary did indeed manifest the foot infection—we manifest everything in our lives!—but he could have also sensed it in his body before it became physically evident. Therefore, it’s best not to draw conclusions about the nature of Gary’s problem. Honor what a child is feeling. What really matters is the way we address the situation, and how we meet each other in the moment.

It helps to visualize our situation made whole.

## **PAIN IS A POWERFUL COMMUNICATOR**

In kindergarten we make healing swords from sticks, and I show the children how to use their hands and arms as healing wands. When one of the children has an “owie” or hurt, each of us places our healing wand on the “owie” and then everything is remedied.

One year we were singing and parading around the school celebrating the autumn time of year, carrying our right arm held up high like a sword

and singing St. Michael songs. Little Jenny did not see the doorway and bumped her head. At once I stopped the procession and came over to Jenny, who had already started to cry from the sudden jolt and pain of the bump. Gently I placed my hand that had become a healing sword, over her head and motioned for the other children to do the same. As soon as Jenny felt 24 healing hands over her head, her tears were transformed to a beaming smile of joy.

I have incorporated healing swords into our practices ever since. This gesture demonstrates that we have the power to heal ourselves and each other!

This shows children they have the power of touch and healing for communicating love and care. It is one of the most valuable tools that we can offer our children.

We cannot give a recipe for resolving anyone's pain; we can only provide a healing, loving, environment.

## **DELAYED SPEECH**

Some children choose to start speaking later, and still others will develop their own language. They will carry on animated conversations in this language until one day they simply drop the veil and speak as clearly and naturally as if they'd been speaking forever.

It is important to speak and act as if your child is talking already, even if they're not. We can also sing songs for them and say their prayers for them at bedtime until they join in. They really are participating, and at some point they'll be ready to "go public."

Singing is another form of communication. Reciting verses with them is a great way for them to adapt and enjoy various rituals and processes,

such as: washing hands before meals, brushing teeth after meals, making their beds after they've awakened in the morning (with your help when they're still very young), straightening up their rooms and putting away their toys, etc. Saying a verse also helps children transition into sleep.

The human voice and human touch are so energizing, breathing life into us. When we sing and speak and touch with loving inspiration, we are healing our family.

## **STUTTERING AND STAMMERING**

Stuttering can occur when a child feels rushed. They forget to breathe and this puts them into a form of shock. Some adults then pressure them to verbalize everything they do. Self-consciousness adds to their stress so when they speak, they stutter or stammer. There could be many other different neurological reasons for a delay in speech, for which a specialist is required.

If you do speech therapy, turn it into a game that is fun. Choose activities such as singing; a change in their breathing releases the stress. Listen and converse in a timeless relaxed mood. Music and literature can expand our inner environment and lift us out of self-consciousness. I myself was not verbally understood until I was four years old; I garbled my words. As a baby, I had received several severe shocks.

## **REPLACE QUESTIONING WITH AFFIRMING CONVERSATIONS**

Children are looking for guidance and authority. The child who is always grilled about their day or what they're thinking about, or what they want to do is burdened. It is best when their sharing can spill out spontaneously.

Before the age of five, memory is usually triggered by an outer circumstance. During those first years, they are dependent on their environment for memory; then, around age five, they are able to remember from within. To retain an imaginative state of consciousness, their world needs to be unadulterated.

Continued questioning as a form of conversation can deliver the message that mommy and daddy don't know, so they're asking *me*. Children can answer our many questions, but this draws on the forces needed for their physical growth. When we dialogue without interrogating, the child is not self-conscious as if something is expected of them. They are then free to speak without pressure.

Young children know what they want until asked too many questions, e.g., *do you want to eat your supper now? Do you want to go to sleep? Do you want to go out and play? What would you like to do today? What would you like to wear?* It is a form of shock to be asked questions such as these, and children can interpret it to mean that someone is requiring an answer for their every move.

When they're asked to verbalize what they want, they have to *become aware* at the level of reason, or self-consciousness. This awareness is not an automatic mental ability that we're born with. It develops over time. When we over-question we are not respecting their inner space.

When children are left to decide what's for supper, for example, or what they will do today, this is misplaced authority. Their little minds are whirling through all the food and activity choices. Then when they do tell their parents what they want and if their parents tell them it's not the "right" choice, the child can feel disregarded.

It is not the intention of the adult to disturb their child's inner processes, yet this is the inevitable outcome of such interrogations. Consider what

this is like from a child's experience. For example, if four-year-old "Diane" usually makes decisions for her parents, it's possible that Diane would think it's all right to make decisions for her friends. She may become unreasonable, deciding if five-year-old "Hank" doesn't like her negotiations, she won't be his friend. In other words, it has to be Diane's way.

Such hardening among children places unnecessary obstacles in the way of free-flowing social play. A child can be so fixated in doing things their way, it is not even possible to experience a positive relationship with anyone who is in disagreement.

A mother wanted to take her daughter "Juanita" shopping to buy clothes. The mother brought the child into the dressing room with ten outfits and asked Juanita which outfits she wanted. This was more than Juanita could handle, so she had a melt-down.

Using our social awareness, we need to hold back and first see how the children work it out themselves. Then, if necessary we can offer a word of encouragement to guide them; in doing so, we will be supporting their next step of self-development.

When I'm guiding a child, I'm not asking them what to do; I am letting them know what there is to do. They are happy to acquiesce to my positive attention and feel an inner joy because they want to do their best. Also, they *know* my request is in their highest interest. I'm signaling to them beyond the stated request that I know this is something they will want to do. Allowing children this responsibility gives them a sense of worthiness.

Conversations with children are simple yet profound, and they bring a freshness to their expression.

## EAT! EAT!

Early on in my teaching I thought that the children needed to eat what I deemed was an appropriate portion, and I also had my own nutritional standards.

Recently I was invited to a potluck dinner with friends. One of my former students, Trinity, whom I hadn't seen since kindergarten, was there and when she opened the door, I exclaimed jokingly, "I brought barley soup!" We had a good laugh, since both of us remembered that barley was the grain that she had detested when she was a kindergartener!

During the course of our conversation, I let her know that she helped me to change the way I approached eating and offering food choices when working with children. I told her that a fairy bite, instead of a full or partial portion of food is what I now suggest for those learning to like what is on their plate.

Some of us remember experiences during our childhood when our parents forced us to eat something we didn't like, or just forced us to finish everything on our plate even though we felt satisfied.

At our house food was a big issue. My mother greeted guests with a spoon full of food. This was her way of being friendly. I was expected to eat my dinner or else sit at the table until it was bedtime. When the food, especially meat, did not seem to agree with me or I didn't like its taste—I hadn't realized yet that I was a natural born vegetarian—my sister often clandestinely ate my dinner for me.

To make children sit at the table until they've finished every last bite is something we parents and caretakers should look at ourselves. What issues are *we* dealing with that are causing us to make such a demand on them?

As a reaction to a “forced food” upbringing, many of us have gone to the other “food monster” extreme of letting our children eat whatever and whenever they want. This loosey-goosey permissiveness with children leads towards overindulgence.

We adults can offer solutions to our children’s unhealthy food choices and eating habits by setting an example ourselves. For example, we can choose water or a piece of fruit instead of juice or processed food. It’s fun to engage the family in food preparation; for instance, have everyone participate in washing the vegetables in a tub of water.

### **DRESS ME! CARRY ME!**

Many parents no longer consider guidelines for age appropriateness; some mothers like to nurse their babies for two years and others feel six months is too long.

Today this need is not always based on what is best for the baby but rather, on the mom’s schedule. The same is true with a child becoming toilet trained or learning how to dress themselves. These developmental stages mature when the child can orientate themselves around mature adults. When supervised with consistency and regularity, learning happens naturally. We can tune into and respond to our children by observing their signals of readiness. In encouraging independence I have them try first and will help as necessary. This builds trust and respect. Why wouldn’t they want to learn how to do things themselves when they know we think highly of their efforts whenever they master new skills?

While I was teaching kindergarten in Vienna, Austria, the parents of one of the little boys in my class were blind. The parents owned and operated a record store in the city. Paul, the little boy, served as their eyes; he guided and protected them when they traveled to and from

their home. Until he came to kindergarten and met other children and adults, he'd never experienced a world in which other people could see him, so at first he would make the funniest grimaces when the other kindergarteners looked at him. Imagine 50 seeing eyes all looking at you all at once, without having any frame of reference for being physically seen!

The little boy's mother and father had been blind since they were young children and their determination to give their child a "normal" life was remarkable. When Paul turned five, the mom made a birthday cake for his school birthday party.

Paul was unfamiliar with eating utensils so we consciously accentuated the use of our forks and spoons during snack time; by observing the others, he quickly learned this skill.

Communication takes on a whole new level in a situation such as this one. Since vision is only one of our many senses, we learn to compensate when one of those senses is not functioning physically. However, that doesn't mean this family didn't "see" each other spiritually, mentally and emotionally. They were a strong, loving threesome that was very self-sufficient. This little boy is an example of adapting to circumstances, learning how to do many things for himself at an early age, and simply accepting that "this is the way things are."

## **I WANT!**

Have fun finding your own delightful ways of receiving the response that you are wishing for with your children. In setting boundaries, be loving yet firm.

Formulate ideas that express what you want: e.g., "You may have dessert after dinner. Now you can have a glass of water." Or: "We already have

drawing paper. When we're home, let's color a picture together." Or: "It's cold out today. You will need to wear your winter jacket, mittens and a cap. When you have your jacket, mittens and cap on, you may go outside to play. Yesterday you zipped up your jacket by yourself. I know that you can do it again today!"

Let's say you planned to go to the park today, but it looks like it's going to rain. The children are very disappointed. "Today it's going to rain. The sky is already clouded over, so let's do something inside. Let's bake some cornbread!"

You set the schedule and guide the procedure.

## LIVING RESPECTFULLY

Our dialogue with our children will indicate our degree of respect. Be conscious of the manner in which you make statements; use a direction that inspires change. By letting them know what is possible, you are both successfully getting your needs met. Children learn social skills by observing. If we give our children too much authority, we can become a victim. When we exert too strict authority over our children, *they* become a victim.

If your child is unable to communicate what they want, take the time to feel compassion and ask yourself what it must feel like to not know how to get your needs met. How can we convey our wishes and needs to others with greater clarity and directness?

Do you have certain issues or challenges that you are not communicating to your partner or other adults who are part of your family unit? Do you avoid sensitive areas where you may be concerned about offending them? Or perhaps you're afraid of their response, so you prefer to let the matter remain untouched and unaddressed.

We are an open book for our children. They will pick up on the fact that we have issues that are not being communicated. Our children know everything about us. They're here to help us grow, so they'll push those buttons even if we don't want to push them ourselves.

If certain issues need positive attention, our children will tell us so by shouting, crying, manipulating, kicking, biting, etc. If they're older they may be disrespectful, literally telling us off. Respect grows both ways.

Children thrive when they clearly know what their boundaries are yet have artistic license to express themselves. If they ask why, make your answers easy to understand and practical. "Because I said so" has no meaning to a child. Often they are emotionally hurt by such an answer and we are so distracted or intent on making sure our children will do what we want them to, we forget about their need to ask questions in order to add to their information bank.

Repetition is reassuring. It gives children the confirmation that what you have told them before still holds true.

## **CONFLICTS ARE OFFERINGS**

We can help children work out their differences and find a compromise. What does each child have to offer? By viewing conflict as an offering from each party rather than "your way or my way," the conversation is elevated to another level. It also helps each child to see at least one other perspective.

Be a good listener; listening and being present for your children are the keys to effective conflict resolution. Identify what's not working and objectively describe it for each person. To reach an agreement, help redirect a better outcome that is respectful to both children.

***Here's an example:***

Tina: Betsy won't let me borrow her new storybook. She never lets me borrow anything!

Betsy: Every time Tina borrows a book from me, she writes in it. I don't want anyone to write in my books!

Mother: Both of you love to read—I'm so glad! And both of you have many storybooks you can share with each other. Tina, storybooks are for reading. We draw and color on pads of paper, not in storybooks. It is so special for Betsy to be kind enough to share her storybooks with us, so we will take special care of them.

Betsy, you may share your new storybook with Tina and Tina will return it to you by bedtime. When it is returned, it will be just as lovely as when you gave it to her.

Tina, you may share a toy that Betsy might like to borrow and return at bedtime.

It is then up to you as a parent to be watchful during the time that each child borrows the other's books and toys.

If Tina has written in Betsy's books, Mama might say, "Tina may read her books and care for them. Mama and Betsy know that Tina will give great care to our books."

Buy a book with blank pages to encourage Tina to draw her own stories.

The adult needs to set up an area where writing and coloring tools are taken care of, stored and supervised, especially for the younger children.

## **COMMUNICATE CLEARLY WITH OTHER PARENTS**

If you're considering letting your child go for a play date after school when they've been playing hard all day, ask yourself if they need more time with others or if it might be better to give them a chance to unwind at home. If your child is going home with someone other than the party who would usually be doing the transporting, you need to have information about that other party. Also, make sure you know the parents and family members where your children will be playing.

Forming a social understanding with the parents of the children your child plays with is essential so that everyone is on the same page. Respecting each other's principles is vital for having the desired environment for your child. You establish your values by discussing everyone's issues before, or as they arise.

## **KNOW WHOM YOUR CHILD IS WITH**

Make sure that you are notified of any changes in plans that involve some unknown factors. When you feel any doubt about a person who is involved in any way with your child, follow through with a more thorough background check. We do it routinely with any visitors who come to the school. Most parents notice their child's usual sunny disposition disappears if something drastic has occurred. Any negative change in your child's nature is a red flag to warrant further investigation. If your child does not want to be around someone or shows fear of them, talk objectively with your child about that person in order to bring up any feelings. For example: "I would like to know all about your day with Garf."

However, if the issue involves a family member, friend, or babysitter, it can be very difficult to sense if anything is wrong. Placing the responsibility on ourselves to know where and whom our child is with, commits us to find ways to attract the right people into our lives.

## HELPFUL ANSWERS

Children will ask you so many amazing questions. One day a five-and-a-half-year old asked me if Santa had many sacks filled with presents, or just one. She said she'd heard he had switches for children who were bad.

I told her I thought Santa had one big sack. I then told her there were no bad children and that everyone has things they're learning; for example, listening to their elders. I said I did hear of a couple of children receiving charcoal in their stockings from Santa. Her eyes grew big and she wondered if she was one where that might happen. I reassured her that she was learning to listen, and that counted as a very good thing.

Four-year-old "Elaine" was saying things that were a far stretch from reality, and I said to her, "I can tell by the tip of your nose when you're not saying what is so!" She quickly covered her nose and declared, "Uh-huh! I did so!" I realized it made her self-conscious and was a silly comment from me. Elaine revealed to me in a fun way how inappropriate my teasing was.

A child of a vegetarian family was concerned about others eating meat at lunchtime and innocently asked, "Miss Pollock (my maiden name), is it true that you are what you eat?"

I answered, "'Scott,' that was yesterday. Today you are what you think."

Two children were arguing. "I want to be the mother," declared one. "No, I want to be the mother!" shouted the other one.

"You both get to be the mother," I told them. They were thrilled and told everyone proudly, "We both get to be mothers!" Older children can usually figure that one out on their own.

When we guide them in this way, their own wisdom develops and shines through. They begin supporting each other and finding positive solutions, meeting somewhere in the middle. When a child is disturbed, they will make annoying gestures or play in a disharmonious manner. In reality they're trying to connect with others and they don't have the skills to do so. In their reaching out they create chaos because the proper connection to the self has not yet been made. To begin building up confidence, we need to affirm what is. That means that we need to focus more on a child's successes.

A child is like a delicate fragrant blossom whose petals are unfolding. If we don't respond lovingly to our children, they will wither.

## **BE PRESENT WITH CHILDREN**

It is so important to be physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually present for our children. If you're playing with them at the same time you're talking on the cell phone or listening to your iPod or sending emails on the computer, they know you're AWOL. And when you don't answer their questions or merely offer vague responses, they will surely know your focus is elsewhere and you're not paying attention to what is so important to them at that moment. They are asking you to join in and you can't. If we put our interest elsewhere, children may start to build up resentment. The communication that a distracted parent delivers is: *You are not as important as my business.*

One of the reasons why children repeat themselves is because they feel they have to. They know their parents aren't really listening to them, so they become determined to eventually get through to them. (Wouldn't you do the same thing if you were asking someone a question, intent on delivering a message?) These children easily lose focus while playing with others. They need examples of being, and relating in the present moment.

Sometimes when we become annoyed by our child's habits and behaviors, we need only ask ourselves if perhaps we are the cause. When children teasingly don't do what we want them to, such as dawdling over the bathroom sink instead of putting toothpaste on their brush, they may be delivering the message that they want us to lighten up and start to have fun with these little rituals. We could certainly be tired and we want to get these rituals over with, but our children are asking us to be playful. Sometimes when we do loosen up, we feel better and the tiredness dissipates. By not rushing through hygienic rhythms, we are instilling a basic value. We adults need to allow time for these transitions.

## **WE CAN LEARN TO KNOW WHAT OUR CHILDREN WANT**

If we're really paying attention to our children, we can learn to hear what they want without our having to ask them. It's like we're listening with our "etheric or inner ears" and then can guide them accordingly. It isn't necessary to make them feel self-conscious because this will destroy the wonder and charm of childhood.

Children need to know we know—and also when we *don't* know. Body language is so important. Honesty is learned through living examples.

Tune in to your children's spiritual essence. It is important to be able to distinguish your children's needs from their wants. As a simple example, let's say two-year-old "Danny" has an abundance of physical energy. He loves to run outside and exercise his little body. If he feels cooped up too long inside, he will become restless and irritable. You will be spending many hours outdoors with Danny, exploring nature together, and giving him an opportunity for lots of movement.

A child who relates lovingly to their surroundings and works supportively as a team player has had the benefit of a caregiver who has helped them

connect to the world and people around them. They have already taken that first important step of interacting and sharing with others.

The question that adults need to ask is, “How does what I do today affect my child?”

One of the children I’m working with has been very clear in communicating with his mom. “Joey” is left with babysitters a good deal of the time because the mother has to work and the father is unavailable.

Recently, Joey told his mom emphatically, “I’m really angry that when I fall asleep in the car I’m with you, but when I wake up, you’re not there. You’re gone. I feel really scared.”

“Did you hear what Joey told you?” I asked the mother (“Ruth”).

“But I *have* to do that sometimes,” Ruth responded.” *Ruth, do you hear what Joey wants you to do? He wants you to take him into the space where you are! He doesn’t want to be left somewhere without you, and then wake up in a strange place. He doesn’t know where he is!*

When a child brings up a consuming concern and tells us outright how they feel, listen carefully and get the message on a deeper level.

## **NURTURE YOUR CHILDREN’S IMAGINATION**

We have so many wonderful, magical stories to tell children; it is very important to keep these tales alive. Every culture and religion has mysteries, legends, epic struggles for development, and heroes. Children are enriched by the wisdom these stories convey.

When they reach the age of 12 or 13, we can remind them that this magical world of memorable stories is a precious part of earlier childhood and

we certainly want to keep it alive for our younger brothers and sisters. With this understanding, they will want to support you in holding this culture for the little ones until they grow to understand its role in the larger picture. We are magic weavers; we weave magic into the fiber of our culture and it strengthens the web of life.

## THE SPIRITUAL WAY

Sigmund Freud wrote: “What a distressing contrast there is between the radiant intelligence of the child and the feeble mentality of the average adult.”

Freud was speaking of that freshness of wonder and awe that a child brings with them into the world that is often stifled by the systems that “educate” us to be adults. It is exactly that suffocation that breeds robots and emotionally and spiritually impoverished adults who have no use for anything that is not tangible or doesn’t have commercial value. It doesn’t take long for these adults to “educate” their children to have the same attitude and outlook. They won’t even have to turn off their child’s imagination, curiosity and sense of wonder. Following their parents’ perception of life, children will start to suppress it.

For a child, anything is possible. Life is a great adventure. Wouldn’t it be wonderful to continue to nurture that hope and take it with us into adulthood? Naïveté will need to go by the wayside, but that shouldn’t affect the joy in our hearts as we greet each day, acquire yet another friend, master another skill, or add another amazing experience to our memory books. It’s all a matter of perception; it is counter-productive and illogical to destroy those innate qualities of wonderment and curiosity that we are born with.

For almost all of us, the systems that “educate” us to be adults stifle our natural joy and curiosity. We lose touch with our natural appreciation

of life; we forget how to dream. With gratitude and love of life, we can re-awaken our sense of wonder. We can dance with life once again. This ability is both a blessing and a gift.

Our soul life connects us to the Divine Being, Creator of us all. This is the essence of who we are. It is the “I AM” in each of us. When we consciously connect with our soul, we start to develop an awakened state of being.

Well-being and self-fulfillment come from contributing. When we give, we develop. When we do our best, we bring everyone along with us and we all evolve. In kindergarten, I like to start from the feeling of oneness, with the whole class together. Then I can go inside that wholeness to find the individuality.

Each child is unique and therefore, each needs something different. It is our privilege as teachers, parents and caregivers to get to know exactly how to respond to our children’s individual needs so we can guide them accordingly. We do not solve any problems by battling with children. In fact everyone loses. In living the solution, everyone wins.

## CHAPTER SIX

**(K)Night in Shining Armor:  
Bedtime and Other Children's  
Rhythms & Rituals**

Children look to us for dependability. They want to know “what’s next” so they can not only look forward to it but also have reassurance that *it’s really going to happen*. Regularity and routine create the foundation for a life that has both rhythm and purpose, with plenty of time for laughter and play.

Often we forget how profoundly modern technology has changed our lives. For example, electricity—the ability to create light at night—has led to decreased dependency on nature’s clock. We have also started to lose our innate connection with nature’s rhythms.

If everything in nature has a rhythm, why should we ignore this basic “ebb and flow” by choosing to banish from our lifestyle the concept of a regular routine that children can depend on? Although your family schedule may vary from another’s—let’s say you have a night job and you have to sleep during the day—if you maintain a consistent rhythm, it will support you.

Even if you have never been accustomed to keeping a regular schedule, even if your parents never had a rhythm to their lives and you were

the product of uncertainty and “catch-as-catch-can” mealtimes, you can create a different lifestyle that will allow you to experience the benefits of more regularity and rhythm.

The human body responds well to nourishment at scheduled intervals, sufficient rest after a certain number of waking hours, and recreation outside school and daily responsibilities.

Young children also need plenty of time to play, in order to allow them to live fully into their imagination. This is why having a regular relaxed setting for storytelling, social games and imaginative play is so instrumental in awakening a young child’s creative brilliance. True to life work gestures (e.g., sweeping, digging, cooking) are some of many movements to include in a child’s daily activities.

Start out by establishing rhythm and ritual from the very moment your first child is born. Create a daily schedule for yourself and be clear about the way each hour will unfold. You will be amazed how easily your children will adapt to that schedule and thrive on the certainty of knowing what happens next.

## **MAKE CERTAINTY A WAY OF LIFE**

Each of us can probably relate to instances in our own childhood when the uncertainty factor loomed like a dark cloud over our lives until someone either gave us the answer we needed or the usual schedule was once more resumed. Children express their worry. They will ask you, “What’s next?” “Are we going to Grandma’s house on Saturday?” “Are we going to read a story now?”

If it’s bedtime and they’ve just had their bath, your children may tell you what’s next on the schedule, not just because it reassuring, but it is also fun to recount what you know when it lives deeply in your bones and

is part of what makes everything run smoothly. They will easily flow into what's next because the rhythm lives deep within. For example, if "Kevin" becomes obsessive, this may be a sign that he is concerned that the activity or event will not be happening.

When "Melissa" cries and approaches meltdown behavior because you're going out for the evening and will not be reading a book before tucking her in (you're running late and the babysitter is due), she is delivering a message that something sustaining and reassuring is being taken away from her schedule.

Melissa is too young to understand circumstances that may have caused you to be running late. The best way to avoid an outburst is to plan well enough ahead to give yourself the time you need with her before you have to leave for the evening.

If you are running late, keep to the rhythm and have the caregiver read the story. Perhaps it is your tension and worry about being late that Melissa is responding to.

One way to find a healthful rhythm that works for you and your family is to ask yourself a few questions:

- Am I relaxed enough to enjoy my family on a regular basis?
- Is there quality time spent each day to connect with myself and each of us individually?
- Does my day breathe, or do I find myself running from one activity to the next in a robotic manner?
- Are my children left alone more than I would like, without my anticipating what they are experiencing? Is there an adult always present within seeing and hearing range?
- Are the adults affirming positive communication that is age appropriate?

- Is it possible for the child to play at their parents' side?
- Can the adult find work that the children can emulate?

## **CULTURE IS ONE OF OUR STRONGEST FAMILY SUPPORT SYSTEMS**

Holidays and customs, with all their ceremonial color, music, costumes, dances, special foods, etc., that are closest to us and that have been handed down through the generations create an important foundation for our family life. These expressions of our ancestors light up the children's hearts and connect all of us to the source of our higher essence. This culture is woven through our daily life and serves as poignant memories for our children. It is this heritage that transforms the mundane into the magical.

## **BE PLAYFUL WITHIN THE RHYTHMS!**

Enjoy the experience of teaching your little ones how important life's rituals are: brushing teeth, bathing, getting ready for bed... children love to learn the rhythm and order of things. Positive affirmations and songs that accompany these activities capture the child's curiosity in a light-filled way.

If you sense your child is stressing out, you can tune into yourself and see how *you're* doing. Are you stressed out yourself? You can sense if your child is experiencing your stress. Relax and say, "I love your big smile and how Teddy Toothbrush loves to wash those pearly teeth!" It will tickle them and hopefully make them laugh.

Let your pace be flowing and relaxed. You do have time. When you remove the pressure from your life, you'll be amazed how quickly your stress disappears!

There's no reason to hurry anything if you allow yourself plenty of time for both the activity *and* the transition. Little ones love to explore everything. As newcomers to the planet, there's so much to see and do (and taste and touch!). Give them time to conduct this exploration at a leisurely pace. If we don't rush them, they won't be stressed out and will probably be much more responsive when we're ready to move on to the next activity.

## **PURPOSEFUL WORK**

Although modern technology has eliminated many of the daily chores that once consumed most of our waking hours, meals do not fly onto the table by themselves—at least not yet! Tasks may be easier and less time-consuming, but they're still there, and there are good reasons for having our children pitch in.

One area of purposeful work has been almost eliminated, however. Today there is little necessity for learning handcraft skills. We don't have to build our own houses, make furniture, sew our own clothes, grow our own food, etc. Most of our basic needs are now available to purchase ready-made.

My mother was a skillful seamstress and craftswoman. Her creativity nurtured my own imagination. She sewed many of our clothes; I remember coming home from school to find three new dresses she'd made for me. I greatly appreciated her beautiful handiwork and although I never realized we didn't have enough money to buy readymade outfits, in retrospect, I still prefer her hand-sewn dresses. By doing handcrafts, we gain a sense of esthetics.

Consider all the wonderful comforts and modern conveniences we have today; our information network alone has given us instant communication to almost every part of the world. Add to that all the other scientific and technological advances and suddenly we realize how fortunate we are to be living at this amazing time.

Nevertheless, we've paid a heavy price for this technological progress. Our present commercial/industrial farming practices are dependent on fossil fuels for petro-chemical fertilizers and the far distant transportation of food. We are becoming aware of our reliance on fossil fuels (e.g., gas and electricity). When the power goes off, suddenly we realize how far-reaching that dependency really is. This awakens the call for locally sourced, environmentally beneficial and sustainable energy.

Modern comforts have dispensed with the need to be as active physically as in the past. Our bodies were made for purposeful work and our limbs are hungry for stretching and exercise. If adults do not do meaningful work with the children—gardening, cooking, cleaning the house, laundering clothes—children won't learn from these archetypal gestures.

These movements satisfy the restlessness of young limbs and gain valuable rewards from strong mind-body, head-hand coordination. Practical work is an integral function in family learning and sharing. It isn't healthy for children to be sitting for hours in school and then come home to sit for hours in front of a computer or television set. Inactivity causes a person's vitality and well being to decline.

Children who have connected to the earth and who have first-hand experience with the way food is grown and harvested are enlightened with the magic and power of the whole process of plant life. A child who is well rooted in nature feels at home on the earth. Likewise, a well grounded adult gives shape, continuity and comfort to family life.

Children who experience adults working in a rhythmic sequential manner naturally emulate these healthy gestures, which in turn work powerfully to help organize their mental processes. Knowing that tomorrow is a thread that is woven from what happens today, brings an innate sense of security and wellness.

## THE BRAIN DISCOVERS WHAT THE FINGERS EXPLORE

I have learned the value of developing will through creative skills. If handwork is new to you, it is fun to learn together. My mother and I once took a basic upholstery class together and we learned how to reupholster one of our living room chairs. She also took various crafting classes, such as ceramics and cake decorating. My sisters and I used to enjoy watching her perform these new skills. At my Uncle Sol's summer camp, crafts were an essential part of the program. I enjoyed the freedom to express myself through making jewelry, bean pictures, and pottery; braiding simple materials into useful chains; and painting backdrops for the outdoor theatre.

Emeritus professor of neurophysiology Matti Bergstrom (<http://www.matti-bergstrom.fi/cv.html>)<sup>1</sup> has conducted considerable research about the importance and value of including handwork in early child development. The sensitivity and perception of nerve endings in our fingertips are almost equal to those of our eyes. Dr. Bergstrom's research indicates that in childhood and youth, if we don't use our fingers we become "finger-blind." When this rich network of nerves becomes impoverished it can thwart an individual's general development. Such damage may be likened to blindness itself. Finger-blindness has other adverse effects. Although a blind person may not be able to find an object, those who are "finger-blind" cannot understand that object's inner meaning and value.

If we neglect to develop and train our children's fingers and the creative form-building capacity of their muscles, then we neglect to develop their understanding of the unity of things; we thwart their aesthetic and creative powers.

Those who shaped our age-old traditions always understood this. Today, however, we live in an information-obsessed society and our schools

do not allow time for the education of the creative potential of nimble fingers and hands.

Whenever we use a broom, shovel or bike; bake or cook; craft, carve, sew, etc.; we stimulate the brain centers, causing a myelinization process to take place.

“Myelin” is a whitish, fatty substance that forms a sheath around many vertebrate nerve fibers. The white matter of the brain is composed of nerve fibers covered in myelin. It insulates the nerves and permits the rapid transmission of nerve impulses. Without myelinization, a person could be considered “brain dead.” They would be unable to rapidly transmit nerve impulses. It is essential that children move their bodies and work with their hands; this awakens the nerve centers located in the brain.

Dr. Bergstrom and Pia Kkonen report that nature is the best environment for young children’s uninhibited learning.

## **REST TIME**

Often parents tell me their children don’t need rest times during the day. The truth is, most children do. They are very active and often keep going until they can’t go any more. Then you will watch them simply crumple into a heap and fall asleep. Establishing the ritual of a rest time during the day when they seem to need it most—soon after lunch—is a healthy way to prevent over-stress and over-stimulation.

If “Paula” resists and doesn’t want to rest, transform this time into a beautiful experience, an activity that she will really want to do. “Come, Paula, let’s make a nest... I’ll tell you a story... Let’s play some harp music... we’ll sing a song.” Make it into a quieting time when the two (or more) of you are together. After you’ve taken them to their bedroom or to the established place for their nap, sit by them and stroke their forehead or

their hands. A soothing lullaby to sing is: “It’s time for “Wendy” to close her eyes/ fairies of sleep will fill your eyes/ Slumber deep and you will rise... /higher and higher... in the skies!” (Charlotte Lovett)

Read poems to bring comfort. Rest time can easily become as magical and beautiful as all the other activities in a child’s day. Place the emphasis on “resting,” not “napping.” That way, a child doesn’t feel forced to sleep but rest; and if relaxed, often they will nap.

Some mothers who stay at home to take care of their children have a chance to nap at the same time as their children. This is certainly an excellent schedule for both. We can transform every experience into an adventure: “Come, let’s make a gnome home!”

## **MEALTIMES**

During the meal, family members share their stories of happenings during the day. Often this can lead to a conversation that resolves an issue for one of the children, so the meal becomes an opportunity for a joyous gathering. Parents can share family plans, or events that will take place the next day. They can use this time to observe the pulse of every family member and through this deeper understanding, feed their inspiration. Communing at family meals is one of the most valuable presents (and presence) we can give our children. This is a time when we are there for them for listening and sharing.

The simple lighting of a candle at certain meal times gives that occasion a celebrative air and a mood of spiritual warmth. Food seems to taste better in a festive atmosphere.

## **CHILDREN LOVE HOLIDAY RITUALS**

Throughout the year we honor and celebrate the earth’s cycles. Each seasonal, national and religious holiday has its own games, stories, songs,

special foods, decorations and other rituals. Children look forward to the rhythm of a calendar that produces these special times. One of the most memorable of all holiday seasons occurs around Winter Solstice. At this darkest time of the year with a shortened daytime, almost every religion celebrates a festival of lights, when we kindle the light within. Homes, city streets, and buildings are illuminated with multi-colored bulbs, trees, candles, bells, holly and greens.

Giving gifts, making time to do something special for others, participating in memorable activities and preparing a vast array of foods unique to this season, are part of this winter holiday that children vividly recall and adults are eager to re-enliven for their own families and communities.

When the emphasis is on giving rather than receiving, it enhances and often transforms a holiday mood that can become one of restlessness well before the event occurs. Four weeks before Christmas, children can already be consumed with what they will be getting.

Spring Solstice is another important holiday for most cultures. The earth has awakened from its long winter sleep and all the early plants and flowers are in bloom. Out with the old, bring on the new! Decorated eggs symbolize new life and fertility, and children proudly wear their new spring outfits. On May Day we gather lush bouquets of the early spring flowers and share them with our friends and family.

At the beginning of spring or summer, we may also create a flower-decorated trellis or bean-pole teepee that is large enough inside for playing.<sup>2</sup>

To celebrate the harvest time of year, it's fun to build a lean-to or wooden structure somewhere outdoors to eat in. Holidays are times for special banquets when the entire family clan gathers from distant places. It is a time to remember loved ones, sing songs and tell stories that are reserved only for that particular occasion.

Thanksgiving is associated with gratitude for the help and blessings we have received from others. Children love to hear the stories connected to each of the traditional Thanksgiving foods, and they enjoy participating in their preparation.

Fresh flowers and centerpieces may add another special touch to these meals. I like to plant a garden with seasonal flowers that I can pick and arrange as a table centerpiece for all times of the year. If you live in a winter climate, you can use dried flowers or perhaps a live plant. Or you and the children can create an origami centerpiece of flowers and butterflies.

## **RELIGION OFFERS SECURITY**

Religions, with their strong moral principles and ceremonies often give children the inner strength they need in order to develop a foundation for life. Rituals associated with these seasonal events convey a certain sacredness and are linked to universal principles such as, “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

It is so important and memorable to honor and acknowledge our earth, the spiritual world, ourselves and each other by rejoicing, dancing, laughing, meditating and praying. Children love to participate in these celebrations. It’s helpful to have a belief in a truth that holds a family together and that will give us a reverence for a creative “life force,” i.e., a being or spirit greater than ourselves.

Appreciation connects us to the root of energetic prosperity. When we create room in our hearts and value each other for our being-ness, even if beliefs may be different from our own, it is like a spring bubbling over that nourishes everyone.

Nature awakens a sense of majestic awe and reveals the mystery of birth and death that can open our awareness and feed our soul. Our lives

become so much richer when we have an opportunity to experience the vibrancy of nature. A positive experience of being at home in the natural world soon evolves to feelings of compassion, understanding and respect for life.

Nature lifts us out of our separate linear calculating mind. It fosters devotion to the highest good of all, acceptance of what comes to us, and caring for everything that is around us.

Over the years, I've developed a number of ways to commemorate the different holidays that celebrate the arrival and departure of the seasons by acknowledging and showing gratitude for the beauty and wonder of nature.

For the classroom I purchased an antique wooden cart with wooden wheels and spokes. At harvest time we decorate it with autumn leaves and flowers and lots of hay, and in the spring, with sprays and bouquets of flowers.

When it's time for the wagon to come out, the children treat it with great respect without my having to say a word. It represents a special occasion for them and since it is not there for everyday use, it gives them an experience of festivity and celebration.

If you no longer subscribe to a particular religious belief, you can enjoy commemorating seasonal changes and creating special events. Develop new ways of livening up your calendar. Create your own rituals and way of celebrating with the children the change of season as well as their birthdays and other special family days.

One day every week can be Family Day for games, crafts, hikes, sports, parks, friends and community services. Each of these events becomes a precious memory for your children. In subsequent years, every so often

they will bring forth these memories from their treasure chest to admire them and rekindle the special feelings they represent.

Sometimes if a story is connected to a religious holiday celebrated by one or more of the children in the class, I will tell that story in a way that illustrates a strong spiritual or ethical trait that supports their personal development.

Once when the parents of one of my kindergarteners asked if the class could celebrate Passover, I told them if they prepared the food, I would tell the story. Here is my retelling:

A mother had a baby named Moses. The mother protected her baby by making a basket for him. Picking some reeds by the riverside where she lived, she laid out the reeds to dry in the sun and then wove them into a beautiful basket. The mother then placed her son in the reed basket and set the basket afloat in the river, all the while reciting many blessings and wrapping her son with all the love in her heart and soul.

Her beloved baby was snuggled inside to keep warm and safe. The basket floated in the river and was discovered by the daughter of the king while she was bathing in the waters.

The princess raised Moses as if he was her own son and he became a cherished addition to her family. This son later performed heroic deeds for his people. Soldiers chased the people and tried to capture them. As they came to the sea which blocked their way, Moses stretched his hand over the water as God had told him to do, and the winds blew so strongly that the sea parted during the night. Moses was able to lead his people to the Promised Land, the land flowing with milk and honey.

As the soldiers approached, the sea closed up again and they were unable to cross. And if the soldiers have not drowned, they are swimming still.

I felt the parents' appreciation for celebrating Passover. They let me know how pleasing it was, to retell the events of that day to the fathers, who were unable to be present.

The inspiration that can be conveyed by a simple story such as this one that describes risk, trust, love, destiny and mission, can serve as a powerful metaphor for children and parents alike. Here is the panorama of life's vicissitudes with surprises around every corner, yet the recognition of a knowingness that "all is well" because there is indeed a powerful Force to which we are all connected.

It is most important for us to preserve for our children that folk soul that runs like a golden thread through the entire fabric of our wisdom literature and religious teachings. This is what sustains a culture, and it is especially important during the first nine years of life that children are nourished by this wisdom. This is where they live and thrive, with freedom to explore the spiritual essence of who they are. Prematurely breaking that veil by forcing children to grow up too soon will deprive them of their passion to strive for the highest and best in themselves and in life.

## **BEDTIME - SAILING OFF TO ANOTHER WORLD**

It is important for children as well as parents and caregivers to have sufficient sleep in order to feel refreshed and renewed for the next day's activities. When we establish a sequential rhythm around our children's bedtime, life becomes like the tide coming in each day. Everything has flow, with a sense of continuity and trust that tomorrow the tide will go out again and the sun will rise; the daily adventure will begin all over.

This is the kind of peace and renewal that children love.

Every time we go to sleep we cross a threshold that can be likened to a death experience. Give your children the time they need in order to prepare for this transition. They can be frightened because they will be leaving all that is familiar to enter into a world that is very different. They also need human contact with people they know and trust, who can lovingly help them transition over this threshold. Let them know that you will help them surmount whatever they're afraid of, but most of all, give them the sense that they have the power to remove all obstacles from their own pathway.

We can show a child other ways to eradicate these nightmares, monsters, etc. They can be commanded to leave or they can be swept away with a magic sword or broom. To repel unwanted shadows, make an atomizer remedy using rose water.

It is wise not to eat anything or to be over-stimulated right before bedtime, as this can bring on nightmares and prevent us from going into a deep restful sleep where we connect deeply to our spiritual source. The more bombarded we are from overstimulation in the daytime, the more difficult it is to connect in a deeper way and feel refreshed by sleep.

An important part of the bedtime ritual is to review the day and bring the major events to consciousness. This one-to-three-minute sequential review guided by the adult enhances the children's memory. After they've had their bath might be good to start this daily practice.

By commemorating our day with the acknowledgment of our many adventures and offering gratitude for those new experiences, we are better prepared to cross the threshold from a waking state of consciousness to a sleeping one. Also, when we review and emphasize the high point of the day, we reinforce those positive aspects and plant the seeds for

tomorrow. We co-create and weave a spirit-filled journey of countless hours of play, which then transforms into our “day at work” when we are adults.

## NOTES FOR THE BEDTIME RITUAL

1. Honor and respect what children tell you they’re seeing at night or at any other time. Take an interest in what they’re saying, and be aware that often they are talking about things they’ve experienced that are spiritual pictures. They may not be able to articulate them, so that’s why we need to listen to them with big ears and not draw conclusions! Comfort them by finding loving ways for them to enter into sleep.
2. If children are over-stimulated during the day by disturbing conversations or by a scary movie—anything that happened that has not yet been processed—re-picture these experiences together. Your child may be left with something stressful if it is not processed through discussion with you about the event or experience. If you do allow media such as television and DVDs into your child’s life, you may wish to watch the content with them or review it beforehand.
3. It is helpful that the fairies, gnomes, elves, giants, dwarves and other archetypal beings have an imaginative reality for our children. The fabric of a child’s imagination is woven out of spiritual truths and protects us until we cast it off. Then when a child asks to have a picture of physical reality (“There’s no Santa Claus, is there?”), you can say to them, “I too am a servant of God and now so are you!” This is a powerful way of conveying the difference between childhood and adulthood. Children then don’t feel betrayed but instead feel grateful they were able to live the magic of their ancestral home.

4. Playing music is another soothing way to begin and end the bedtime ritual. The first child getting ready for bed can play a soothing instrument, such as a children's harp, bells, or a xylophone. As soon as each child is ready, they can join in. Instruments tuned to the pentatonic scale have a pleasing resonance when played together. Music that's calming helps them relax. Light a candle and turn out all the other lights; then tell a story, sing or recite a poem. Give thanks: to the sun and moon and to mommy and daddy; "thank you for the day and for the stars at night and for tomorrow that will be coming soon..."

All of life is magical, is it not—and isn't this what we really want to convey to our children at bedtime? Dance with them into dreamland and sprinkle them with stardust.

Tell bedtime stories about magical moments in your own life. I live in Hawaii where there are moon bows, which is a phenomenon similar to rainbows that appear at night. We also have sea plankton; when you smear it on your skin, you glow a florescent green! I tell a story about moon bows and sea star lights and other natural phenomenon.

## **WEEKEND RITUALS AND RHYTHMS**

Weekdays are filled with activities from morning until bedtime, and finally when Saturday arrives, the family can be together enjoying this opportunity to be in each other's company. It is a grand time to do household work projects.

Invite the children to pitch in with domestic responsibilities. They love to help, and there's always something for even the smallest ones to do. Working together to go through the list can be a lot of fun, since children

love to spend as much time as possible with their parents. If we're folding laundry, as soon as they're old enough to learn how to fold, teach them. Have them separate socks, towels, shirts, pants, etc. If we're setting the table for dinner, have them place the napkins on the table. Be there with them and let them participate as much as they wish.

Children can also be very resourceful when left to find their own amusement, especially if they know we're nearby to watch and guide them. It's amazing what they can find to do by themselves, while you're busy taking care of chores that may be too difficult or complicated for their participation. Sometimes, depending on the work, they may even enjoy watching you. I think we all recall times when we watched our parents doing their work, talking with them and asking questions.

It is a wonderful way to learn and share with one another! If we model healthy work that the children are able to do as well—or at least participate in to some degree—we help them develop their motivation.

As we mentioned previously, we are living in a different era. Children who grew up on farms learned how to pitch in with the chores at a very early age. The quality of life was rich and much more connected to the earthly and cosmic rhythms. The children emulated their parents and enjoyed being part of a team that was creating life together. They had a living caring relationship with the farm animals. It is so much easier to understand our own life process when we have this experience with nature.

Housekeeping and yard work are still a reality in some form, since every environment requires maintenance. Children under the age of six should not be required to do chores, but if they want to help, there are always things they can do at your side, under your watchfulness. Later you can tell them, "Now that you're seven, you get to help (sweep the patio, empty the dishwasher, set the table, rake the leaves in the yard, fold the laundry, etc.). Choose one task at a time and make it a privilege.

Children seven and older will then have the experience of participating in and being part of the regular routine of family responsibilities.

Have the work you are doing in the children's presence be a "whole" process (i.e., from start to finish, as much as possible), whether wood carving, cooking, gardening, spinning, felting, grinding, sewing, etc. Children are inspired by the work you love to do.

The children will catch the spirit of your enthusiasm and may wish to join in. If you're sweeping, have a broom or hand sweeper for your child to use as well, or a make-believe one if they are very young. If you're baking, children love to help mix or stir, or add some of the ingredients. Maybe the recipe needs nuts and they can chop them with a chopper. And for special occasions they love whipping the cream in a large bowl.

An indoor sprout garden can be so much fun. Children love eating the food they've grown. If you have memories of this when you were a child, they are probably just as vivid as the day you picked the snap beans you planted in your vegetable garden, and then had great fun washing them off and snapping them into smaller pieces that would be steamed or cooked for dinner. Possibly you remember going out to the berry patch and discovering almost from one hour to the next that a fruit that was green is suddenly a deep black or red, ready to pick and eat!

Choose activities with your children that are simple and fulfilling.

If you dread your work, your children will not have much interest in joining you to help complete those tasks. Make peace with what you're doing; find something good or likeable about that work.

These days, many adults spend long hours in front of the computer; this is not conducive for children's play or for family participation. However, if that is the work we do, how can we make sure our children are happily

engaged? Arrange your office to be near a place in the house where they can be playing.

They may even enjoy pretending they're working on a computer, too. Whatever brings a child joy certainly should not be ignored. If a child loves to play the piano, for example, few parents would want to discourage them. The same is true for reading books or imitating other mental activities adults are engaged in. The problem occurs when we pressure our children to read and write before they demonstrate a readiness. They will give readiness signals, so it's important to set up and honor good two-way communication. We need to ask ourselves when—at what age or stage of their development—it is appropriate to introduce a particular activity.<sup>3</sup>

## **SPECIAL OUTINGS & EVENTS**

Children love to go to live events: concerts, theater, puppet and marionette shows, songfests, story hours, circuses, carnivals, magic shows, etc. These are the best types of outings and highest form of entertainment for children. Movies, television and DVDS are over-rated. Often children become dependent on these passive forms of entertainment, which tend to weaken their inner muscles. Instead, make music, and later on give them music drama or dancing lessons, etc.

If possible, make special times to take each of your children on their own outings. It may be a trip to a working ranch to see horses, cows and sheep, or to a planetarium, aquarium, library, etc. Each child will have their own favorite list.

## **BIRTHDAYS**

Birthdays can be some of the most memorable events for children; you may still remember some of your own celebrations.

Birthday gifts that you and your children make together for others will have special meaning for the givers as well as the recipients. The act of giving brings a child a tremendous amount of joy. It also builds confidence in their ability to independently find artistic ways to share gratitude. They realize quickly that the more they give, the more they feel they have.

Today, families like to create theme birthday parties. Recently I was asked to help parents make a birthday party for their two-year-olds. They wanted me to create a puppet show with a theme of “a tractor and a tea party.” Following is the story I created for them:

### **The Tractor and the Tea Party**

Once upon a time there was a little boy named Lucas who watched his father working the land and planting his nursery with his earth moving machines. Sometimes the boy was able to sit way up high on his daddy’s seat and go for a ride, helping him prepare the soil. He also busied himself with his own work, digging and scraping the earth with whatever tools he could find.

Lucas had a very dear friend named Malia, who loved to make tea parties just like her mama. She would invite all her dolls and play-animals to her parties. Malia loved pouring the water into the tea cups and setting them in front of each of her guests.

One day while they were playing together, Lucas told Malia, “Malia I wish for a tractor so I can grow a big garden. Then we will plant herbs in all of the rows. When the herbs are ready to be picked, you can use them to make tea for your guests!”

Malia was so excited at the thought of being able to serve such special herb tea at her parties! At once the two began to plan their herb garden

together. Lucas drew a map of how the garden would look; it would be in the shape of a star. Malia thought of the different herbs that she wanted to plant. She wanted peppermint, lavender, chamomile, spearmint, hibiscus, lemon grass, and chocolate mint.

Lucas soon had the tractor he had wished for, and at once he set to work preparing the soil for the herb garden. Malia helped plant the herbs; it was such a beautiful garden!

That is how the tractor and the tea party came to be. And now, Lucas and Malia want to share with you some herbs from their garden so you can make your very own tea party!

For the party, I wrote out the story and gave a copy to each birthday child as a gift. I then gave everyone who attended a peppermint plant from my garden, so they could make their own tea parties.

## **THE ARTS ARE BASIC TO HUMAN DEVELOPMENT**

Music, the visual and plastic arts, poetry and literature—all of those arts that call upon the use of our innate talents and skills are basic to our human development. They are an integral part of our culture that often gets overlooked today, or becomes transformed into a “digital-widget” mechanized electronic counterpart.

Art breathes and resonates with who we are as individuals. Give children an experience of inspiring art forms and introduce them to uplifting works of art. But mostly let them have hands-on experiences. Create living experiences that awaken their soul. The young child is

transformed by a story followed by an expressive artistic activity, such as painting with primary colors. This develops the imagination.

Artistic activities release and convey emotions and warm our thinking. By its very nature, art brings forth that creative part of us that loves to articulate, imagine, record and embellish the human experience. Celebrating these expressions with our children ensouls the life within.

## **ONCE A DAY, BRING EVERYONE TOGETHER**

At least once a day in your family rhythm, bring everyone together. My favorite time is morning. Before going your separate ways, hold hands and recite a little verse together, like the one I made up:

My family is a shining star  
That lights my way both near and far.  
Here we are forever, starting all together;  
We fill our day with work and play  
Offering blessings along the way.

The thread of coming and being together is very important and it means so much to the children.

Let your life be “full,” not overcrowded with “busy-ness.” There’s a huge distinction between the two, and the children know that. Children thrive on a multitude of activities as long as they are performed in the right spirit. Busy-ness, however, manifests from a lack of consciousness, as in constant chatter and other mindless activities.

Strive to keep things on the highest level. By going inside and doing our inner work, we find that inner calm. If we’re dealing with anger related

**Ronna McEldowney**

to a recent incident, for example, we'll heal that anger by forgiving and letting it dissolve, transforming ourselves with gratitude for the lesson learned. We will have then cleared the way to reunite with our family and they will sense that inner peace.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

**Love & Laughter**

Children love to laugh. Laughter is one of the healthiest and most joyous expressions of what it is like to be alive. Few gifts are greater than the ability to play and have fun, to find humor and a light side even to some of our darkest moments. In the English language, “humor” and “humanness” are derived from the same root.

When surrounded by a loving environment, no one has to teach a child how to smile or gurgle with delight or how to raise their tiny hands in glee to express their amazement at this new experience of being in a physical body. All little ones are also born with vivid imaginations and a sense of wonderment about everything they find here on Planet Earth.

Our children often lead us to re-discover our own wonderment, hidden beneath adult responsibilities and daily challenges. Instinctively they encourage us to nurture and sustain that quality of freshness and pure joy in ourselves. Soon enough they too will have to go out and make their own way, which is all the more reason for cherishing those early years and filling them with as much laughter and love as possible. Later in life, a good sense of humor can often mitigate and lighten up those times when life’s challenges can seem overwhelming.

It is we who have made the strong distinction between work and play. The fact is, when we’re happy and we love what we’re doing, almost all of

our activities become a form of play. Ask yourself if you enjoy your daily activities. Replace the things in your life that are not working by hitching to the star of your own joy and wonderment. Nothing is as important as making that connection. Start to focus on lightness and play, and notice how this attitude starts to transform everything in your family.

## **NATURE IS THE CHILDREN'S PLAYGROUND**

Children come alive when they're in nature. They develop a special relationship to everything they experience, and it becomes a part of them. You see this when they naturally skip across rocks and walk easily on uneven ground. They will gravitate towards logs in the woods and easily balance and walk across them. Children have no native fear or perception of space and distance. Adults instill fear in children when we keep warning them to "be careful" and hold them back from exploring on their own. Adults just need to make sure the area is safe beforehand. Some children are more cautious and others will simply run free. You'll find them up in the branches of a tree grinning down at you! They can climb by themselves, if we don't program them with fear.

Of course, we can't generalize; you have to know your child. But for the most part, children have a built-in safety sensor when exploring nature. By lifting them up into a tree, instead of waiting until they can do it all by themselves for example, they lose their ability for right judgment.

Children love to explore and learn from nature. Whether it's collecting shells, polished glass, or tumbled stones at the beach, looking for fossils, examining all the different forest plants and trees... nature is rich with surprises.

Many more children today have to be shown how to build huts, caves and forts, whether in the wintertime with packed snow, or other times of the year with branches, boards, and earth. Adults need only to begin

building and the children will catch on. They love to be outside in fresh air and sunshine, playing to their heart's content.

Recently when I was teaching in Hawaii, the children carved steps into the side of a steep hill. One day it became a waterfall after they filled watering cans and poured water down the steps until the ground was soaked. Then we terraced the back yard using rocks from the hillside for a small garden wall. The parents could see how their children really enjoyed playing with the earth. They were all earthy, head to toe, and loving it!

When we go for walks, I give the children a landmark they can run to, such as the next post or avocado tree. Then they run ahead of me and stop to wait for the next landmark. This is a wonderful game that develops discipline; it also acts as a safety guide and helps the children harness their will.

The children love to swing on a chain stretched across the pathway where their feet can touch the ground, and then proceed onward to the forest where we climb in and around the trees. There we build a gnome house and they climb inside. When it's time to go, I call to my forest children and we start back home, moving from tree to tree.

I like the children to experience all the universal forms in nature. For example, children will discover on their own the number 5 as we see it in the number of petals on a flower, parts of a leaf, fingers and toes of the human being, etc. I simply create opportunities that have the children looking for everything in nature. They discover the shapes of different natural forms. We can see faces in the clouds, in rocks and in the tree bark—and we can see the work of unseen helpers in everything!

We also appreciate plants for their healing properties. Someone inevitably gets a cut, scrape or scratch that will need attention. While the

children notice an aloe leaf is being used as a healing remedy, they will offer a story about other plants that their moms or dads use.

Or, I'll say, "This plant says to me, 'I am so fragrant. I am a rose. I am protecting myself with my thorns. I am so sweet.'" With great enthusiasm, children will chime in when they wish to, and they will usually come up with their own response.

Watching plants grow in our garden is fascinating for them; they also love to observe the seasonal changes, from the time a tree's limbs are empty in winter through the entire four-seasonal transition. Even if seasonal changes are more subtle in your part of the world, there will always be something different or unusual to observe as we move through the months. With school age children, enjoy observing and identifying these seasonal changes.

## **FAMILY OUTINGS AND FUN TIMES TOGETHER**

Take a family outing to a nearby farm. You may wish to find one where cheese is made or where baby lambs are born or where there are horse rides. Plan hikes or go swimming together; make picnics. Have herbal tea home parties, making the tea from herbs you grow in your garden. Make things by hand whenever possible. Read a large variety of stories together. Let children experience a whole life process, such as growing flax and then spinning thread and weaving cloth from the flax. Plant a seed and watch it grow.

When your children are old enough to appreciate outings with more content and substance, visit history, art and science museums together and encourage them to ask questions. If you don't know the answers, spend time together browsing through encyclopedias and other reference sources. For an older child, read together about modern heroes (Rosa Parks, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, John F. Kennedy, Mother

Theresa, Dalai Lama, and your most inspiring heroes, etc.).

In your yard, create your own sun dial, science park or outdoor cob oven. I had a hand water pump installed in our kindergarten play yard. After we purchased the pump, I flagged down a willing backhoe operator on the street and asked him to dig a large hole for the water tank reservoir. It allows children to pump, carry, pour and build with water in the earth or sand.

Angus Gordon shared having the four elements in our kindergartens: earth / garden, air / chimes hanging on different branches on the tree, fire / outdoor mud oven or fire pit, water/ water play or hand water pump or flow forms.<sup>1</sup>

Parents built a straw mud oven in the yard and the children participated by dancing barefoot in the straw and mud, making the right consistency needed for constructing the oven. The children helped find and carry rocks and bricks; together with the parents, they helped place and smooth the earth straw mixture.

## **HOBBIES**

Hikes and nature walks are often a time for children to add treasures to one or more of their collections. Findings from nature are among a child's most precious possessions because they represent memories linked to the stories of those outings. Choose adventures that invite the unfolding of natural phenomenon and lead to new discoveries. Participating in these projects together arouses an interest and involvement with nature.

Here is a list of some of the most popular children's hobbies and collections:

1. Stone collection
2. Dried flower collection
3. Card collection (made of handmade paper/flowers etc.)

4. Shell collection
5. Book collection
6. Art collection
7. Wood collection
8. Polished glass collection
9. Science projects
10. Arts and crafts

***Older Children:***

11. Weaving and spinning
12. Painting (easel set up outside)
13. Woodburning and etching
14. Wood carving, soap carving
15. Crystal radios
16. Ant farms
17. Needlework (sewing clothes, quilting, embroidery, knitting, crocheting, needlepoint, etc.)

## **MOVEMENT – PHYSICAL EXERCISE**

My childhood is rich with memories of neighborhood games. As I grew older in the inner city of Detroit, almost every day after school we were allowed to play until it got dark. It was not a competitive atmosphere but a gathering of whoever happened to show up. Boys and girls played together, creating a great group energy. We were always moving, always playing games that physically exercised and challenged our bodies.

Growing up in a physical body is not an easy adjustment for some children and introducing movement that is beyond what they normally do is helpful when presented in a playful artistic way. Movements of a young child are chaotic at first; then, over time with much practice, the body re-organizes itself. I once witnessed a summer class of children who were encouraged to build a house out of sticks and logs that they

could find in the forest. I was astonished to see that each of them built a house that looked just like their physical bodies. One was tall and thin, another was short and round, and so on.

Making music is another form of movement especially when it lends itself to dance, as it often does. Children love to dance! Make music with nature, using sticks and stones, shells and leaves as instruments—be imaginative.

## **CHILDREN'S PLAY**

The rule of thumb that I use is to tell children, “You may play where my eyes can see.” I always make sure the children are playing where they are visible to me, so they are able to orientate themselves around my work. Having the children play within hearing and seeing range adds a qualitative difference. There is no second guessing about what they are up to or about their safety.

Observe how your child interacts with others. As a parent, do you find yourself needing to suggest throughout the day what there is to do or play with, or is your child able to navigate most of their activities on their own? Does your child often need to be entertained or acknowledged a great deal in order to feel self-worth? By observing your children's play throughout the day you keep your finger on the pulse and can sense when a new impulse is helpful.

Carefully choose activities that match the time of day and energy level of your child. At bedtime have the nature of these activities be calmer and slower-paced. Have it be family music time, for example, with soft sounding instruments like the xylophone or children's harps, kanteles, soft bells, stones or shells lightly tapped together. Sing songs; gather around an indoor or outdoor fireplace or campfire, depending on the time of year.

When your children are invited to play at the homes of their friends or when you invite children to visit and play, communicate with the parents. Make sure you understand each other's guidelines. If the parents accompany the children, make it clear that this is a time to be with the children; have conversations that are uplifting to a young soul. Enjoy each other's company and share things that young ears can hear; guide the children in their activities with each other.

Some of the healthful social ideas for relating in love and laughter are:

- Instead of being in reaction, take positive action.
- Stay objective in any given situation.
- Be creative in your response.
- Seek out what is needed, to stay in love and laughter.
- When playing with others, bring toys that can be shared; these can be called "everyone's toys."
- Find gentle approaches to social dynamics that appear stuck

For example, if children are playing in the sandbox and a child is throwing sand at another child, we go there immediately and say, "Oh my! How high your sand doth fly! Sand is for keeping low on the ground for scooping and sculpting..." or: "You may keep the sand here; I will help you play with the sand down low."

When they can listen I give them more space to play and move out of the space, back to where I was or where my work is.

When it is you who are playing with your children, make sure you keep your identity as an adult. Don't let yourself get goofy-silly to the point that you jeopardize your children's ability to recognize appropriate behavior in public!

## GAMES AND TOYS

The children's soul life is so much richer when their toys are not finished products purchased at a store, but ones they make themselves. When we place value on making things, they have special meaning. Our children will also cherish the memory of that time spent creating the toy together, or the fact that it was made by us, especially for them.

The best toys are the simplest. Oatmeal boxes and a string become a walkie-talkie; a basket of scraps can be transformed into doll clothes, quilts, pot holders, etc. Hollyhock flowers become fairy princesses and queens. Discarded socks or painted clothes pins become puppets, dolls and marionettes; clovers and daises make beautiful necklaces and bracelets; shells and glue create ornamental dishes, earrings and pins; shoeboxes and rubber bands become ukuleles or guitars—how many of you at one time made a musical band out of old pots and pans and wooden spoons? Large cardboard boxes can become forts and houses. A tablecloth over a card table becomes a tent.

Children love to play in nature and make toys from pebbles and rocks, twigs, wild flowers (clover and daisy chains), grass and straw... a tree stump can become a table and a fallen branch, the bench. In the desert one finds natural rock formations that make perfect forts and hide-outs; at the seashore, children can play in the sand for hours, building castles and collecting shells.

I have heard parents speak of awkward moments at birthday parties when a child receives a gift and then says out loud, "I don't like this," in front of all of the children, embarrassing the one who has given the gift. The birthday child's parent showed no response and the remark hung over the party like a dark cloud, making everyone feel uncomfortable and unsure of how to respond.

Some ways for the parent to respond are: “I love this gift, it is so thoughtful; thank you!” Or to intervene with, “We will open presents when we are ready to see how special they are!” Or: “Let’s wait to open any more gifts until we can enjoy the ones we already have.” These suggested responses acknowledge consideration of other people’s feelings and gratitude for their efforts.

The saying, “Less is more,” is certainly true when it comes to children’s toys. Too much of anything is overwhelming. When a child has so many toys, they flutter from one toy to the next, unable to give any of them their undivided attention. If toys are layers deep in a toy chest, usually the child plays with only the top ones. Rarely do they dig into the chest.

I suggest arranging your children’s toys on shelves so they can not only view all of them but also care for them; or place them in an armoire with doors that when opened will display all of them. For older children, have a simple sewing basket filled with needles, thread, thimble, strings, scissors and some fabric scraps. Or have a box with lots of wood scraps, glue, nails and a saw and hammer that your children can use with parental supervision. Fill a tool box with screws and sand paper, hinges and a hand drill. Make a work bench for boys and girls. The hours spent in practicing skills such as needlework and woodwork are invaluable.

These activities also help to organize the thinking processes, especially when adults are doing their own work at the same time. The children observe and imitate the way this work is done. They will learn how to place the larger tools in the toolbox first, how to keep the nails and screws together in their containers, etc. The way in which we express care for the things we own is imprinted deep within the child.

## THE GIFT OF APPRECIATION

Children love to share their own experiences with us in the form of plays, puppet shows, etc. They also love to have a special ceremony for presenting us with the things they've created with their own hands. Gratitude grows in a child's being through this sharing and mutual expression of appreciation for the blessings in life.

When I was thirteen my parents explained to me that they did not have the money to buy me a birthday present and they gave me an i.o.u. for a yellow sweater that they knew I wanted. My mother let me know how appreciative she was that I was willing to wait. Her gratitude made me feel virtuous—I realize now that the gift that I received was so much more than a sweater; my mom's recognition helped me prioritize what was important in life.

I am incredibly grateful for all of the supportive people who have helped me grow in wisdom.

## FURRY AND NON-FURRY ONES

Animals usually bring out the best in all of us and are often therapeutic. A healing can take place for both the animal and the person. Responsibility is fostered through the animals depending on us for their basic needs of love and care.

I highly recommend the following books: *The Tao Of Equus: A Woman's Journey of Healing and Transformation Through the Way of the Horse*, by Linda Kohanov, and *Hope Rising, Stories from the Ranch of Rescued Dreams*, by Kim Meeder. These books illustrate the powerful healing that is possible on deeper levels of the soul. Meeder's book is a touching account of the healing connection between children and horses.

Our friend gave us a cat named Puma. On the first day of our new ownership, Puma bit into a big toad, which caused him to writhe and foam at the mouth. The toad lay down on its back lifeless, with its legs spread open wide and we thought for sure he was dead. While our attention was on Puma, the toad got up and hopped away.

A few days later, inside the house, Puma gently tapped me with his paw and showed me that a little toad was next to him. Clearly he was not going to touch it! I placed it outdoors and Puma has never bothered another toad since.

When we moved into our new home, the previous owner left us two dogs, Bella and Hula, and three other cats: Claws, Larita and Alice. For hours every day, Bella preened all of the other animals. It was quite a sight.

One day, after she had slowed down considerably and was showing signs of aging, Bella wandered off to die on our land. We never did find her. Bella showed us unconditional love. I felt so happy to have been her friend and companion; I am a better person by knowing her. It took all of us, the animals and Robert David and me, a bit of time to get used to her not being physically here. We treasure the gift of who she is.

## **LIVING AT HOME**

Just as your inner life is your personal sacred space, create your home as your temple and your home life as a place that is filled with love and caring. Make it warm, safe and comfortable.

Let it never become a parking lot or a place where you and your children are “stuck” between activities, school, shopping malls and eateries. Let it never be a place where children are subjected to parental stress, arguments or abuse. Strive to make and keep it joyous at all times.

Also, stay clear of the Stuck Rut: feeling stuck at home, bored doing nothing. This attitude drives families to spend the entire weekend entertaining their children, chauffeuring them to malls, recreation centers, eateries, movies, classes, sports participation, etc. Enjoy family culture at home. Use your talents to benefit others with theatre, musical evenings or storytelling. If the children wish to perform for the adults, join in as needed. Maybe there were some things you never had a chance to do when you were a child that you can now enjoy for the first time. Children will catch your spirit of fun and laughter. Go on creative journeys like this one I made up, for a large play yard.

## **OUTDOOR THERAPEUTIC JOURNEY**

*Ages: 3-6 years:* The goal is to develop balance and integrate the senses, i.e., to strengthen the proprioceptive, vestibular and tactile processing while increasing awareness of the three different planes of movement (right/left, forward/back, and up/down). The skills that I would like the children to learn are: to walk across a balance beam, roll down a hill, run through a turning jump rope, slide down a pole, and jump in and out of tires in a row.

I also like them to learn to step over several different sized and shaped stepping stones, to run up a slide and down a climbing structure. Next I have them run to a swing, bend over on their bellies and swing; then finally, to jump through a hanging hula hoop.

Here is the procedure: We gather in the school yard first thing in the morning (8:30 - 8:45 AM). I then announce that it is “journey time” and the children run to the back of the yard on top of the hill with the teacher assistant and parents who wish to accompany and help us along our journey.

I am standing 100 feet away from them, turning the jump rope counterclockwise while the children are repeating the words: “Dan, Dan

the river man! Can we cross your river dam?”

I then respond by stating, “Yes, yes, yes you may, if you are wearing red today!”—or any color that they are wearing—until all of them have run through the rope. The little squirrels (children) scamper up the hollow in the tree (up the slide) and then over into the garden (down the climbing ladder). There we discover a tunnel under the play structure and become lizards cross-crawling through the narrow opening.

The frisky little squirrels run over or under the wall (wooden bar). They run up the tree and down they go (to the other play structure with a pole). We become bears climbing on a log and we carefully stand and walk slowly across (some of the children require assistance). Then we spot berries from a distance, climb onto another log and pretend to pick the berries while walking across to the other side.

As eagles, we fly up onto a rocky cliff, lift off, rest a moment and swoop down to the ground. The eagles soar through the air once again (children run up to the swing and “fly” by swinging on their bellies). The rabbits hiding in the grass hop in and out of their den (jumping in and out of the tires). Frogs splash in the water, leaping from rock to rock (over stepping stones), while another verse is spoken:

Stepping over stepping stones, 1, 2, 3...  
Stepping over stepping stones,  
Come with me!  
Oh the river is deep and the river is wide,  
Stepping over stepping stones  
To reach the other side!

—Author unknown

The children who are finished first wait at the top of the hill until everyone is present. Then we play “Mother, may I?” moving towards the front

gate of the school building. Once at the gate, we review the journey by recalling the events in sequential order from the end to the beginning. A chosen child opens the gate and waits for all of the children to exit before closing.

## **FRIENDSHIPS**

Friendships are like a special journey we go on with one another. People we meet along the way will enter and leave but a friend is a friend always, regardless of the time that passes between physical meetings.

Friends share meaningful experiences together: times of joy and pain, and times of change. Extraordinary gifts we make for our friends will have lasting significance. When I was twelve years old, I collected rain water and bottled it in pretty glass bottles with labels such as “Clarita Cloud Fairy’s Herbal Shampoo,” with an accompanying “Conditioner,” and a number of other products. What fun I had! One of my friends still fondly remembers receiving these childhood gifts.

Children love to play with their friends, but after a full day at school, I suggest that it is best for them to return home for some restful down time. Then they are ready to have some outside activity with their friends.

## **THAT SPECIAL INVISIBLE FRIEND**

Often children have invisible friends who become their playmates and confidantes for years. These friends serve as alter ego protection and give a child a wonderful outlet for creating imaginary conversations and events. Sometimes that playmate is a favorite doll or toy. When we see a need for such a friend, create a Pocket Pal that can go everywhere with that child, tucked into their pocket. The Pocket Pal becomes a part of their soul and can be anything from a piece of their favorite blanket, to an actual mini-doll.

Let these early years be rich with recreational, learning and pleasurable activities. And enjoy the laughter.

## LOVING MOMENTS

### *Loving Moments are:*

- Holding a child on your lap while they are peeing on you and you respond like you have just received a blessing.
- Forgiving your sister, husband, or friend after they really hurt your feelings.
- Laughing so hard that you pee in your pants and have to finish outside in the snow at a friend's house.
- Pushing your mom's wheelchair through a store while she happily pushes a shopping cart ahead of her.
- Forgiving yourself for all of the times you hurt your spouse, sister or brother, parents, and others.
- Helping someone who needs a helping hand or a meal.
- Being present for a mother giving birth for her first time.
- Receiving a horseback riding birthday party with 11 friends on the beach.
- Acknowledging that you love someone who is married and lifting the relationship to a higher dimension beyond the physical and remaining friends forever.
- Holding dad in my arms while he takes his last breath.
- A dear friend contacting me through a poem after death.

- A romantic kayak trip up the river to waterfalls for your husband's birthday followed by a picnic afterwards with friends.
- Gift-wrapping myself up in tissue paper to be my husband's birthday present, and nestled in bed crinkling until opened.
- Singing a favorite verse such as:

In the pure rays of light, shines the world's divine being (repeat).

In the pure love towards all, out pours my soul's divine nature (repeat).

I will find peace in the depth of my soul!

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### **Interior Home Designer**

When we respond lovingly to each other and the children witness our sincerity, we send them a message that we value family life and have made a commitment to create a happy, wholesome environment for them. Living this example for our children is one of the most valuable gifts we can give them.

If you are visiting a family and you feel uncomfortable about the way the children and parents address one another or if the atmosphere is one of disrespect, simply *model how it can be*, without judging them. Relate to the family's higher nature and they cannot help but feel uplifted.

Showing gratitude or appreciation doesn't have to be overt. If that's not your temperament, you can express yourself inwardly. The message will still convey the same sentiment. A child is immediately able to recognize any expression that is false.

In her book, *You Are Your Child's First Teacher*, Rahima Baldwin Dancy reminds us that you are like a god to your children!<sup>1</sup> Love and adoration intensify and deepen when you see the light of the world.

Be realistic and aware that it is difficult to be attentive, energetic and enthusiastic all the time. Make sure you orchestrate your life, especially your free time so it serves the whole of family life. Awaken to the essence

of what feeds your soul.

## **SLOW DOWN**

Take time to slow w-a-a-a-y down when you're with your children. Leave your baggage at the Adults' Depot. This includes work, relationships, finances, etc. All those other adult concerns in our life are best kept outside the space where we are present with our children. Be healthy and energetic for them. If we are "checked out," stressed-out or self-medicating, it is not possible to meet our children's needs.

Share your wisdom and enjoy your elder status. Children are newly arrived golden souls coming in for a landing. They need our guidance and heart-filled wisdom to welcome them to their earthly adventure.

## **ISSUES AND QUESTIONS**

I'm often asked about protocol concerning children sleeping in their parents' beds. This is a complex consideration because of social complications that may be occurring. Another issue important to address is adult lovemaking when children are in the same room. If little ones have to drink in adult life in addition to their own environment, they may become overwhelmed. Without a concept of something, they have no way of processing it.

I do want to emphasize that we are certainly entitled to our choices. Whatever those choices may be is exactly where we are in our development. With consciousness, decisions are enlightened.

Let's say your child is sleeping with you in your bed and she's waking up during the night. Please look at that. Why is she waking up? Is she being subjected to someone else's energy that she is unable to digest and consequently is having nightmares about that emotion? Let's say daddy or

mommy is struggling emotionally and twenty-two-month-old “Mickey” is sleeping in the same bed because you’re still nursing him. Mickey is past the time when he should be waking up at night, so what is this all about? Doesn’t that communicate something to take a look at?

Start to observe your actions; how effective are they? Are they helping to bring you and your children to the next step? Are you evolving as a family?

If you have a situation in your family that’s not working, picture how you want it to be, instead of dwelling on the difficulty. Ask yourself, “What do I need to do in order to solve this crisis? What needs to change?” Envision family life the way you want it to be, and then create it. Become your own interior home designer. If you dwell on the problem, you can be sure it will grow. Place attention daily on your goals.

## **POSITIVE PARENTING**

We can always find our next step when we are seeking truth; it will be revealed. We have to ask the right questions, deep within, for our children, family, partner, etc., and listen while envisioning how we want things to be.

Make positive affirmations a part of life. Commend children in a way that will encourage them but not make them feel self-conscious. Let them know with sincerity and honesty when they’ve done something admirable.

One of the best demonstrations of a child’s fragile self-consciousness occurs when they ask us to be audience for one of their plays, puppet shows or other performances. They are so eager to have us as audience. Yet while watching them perform, if we stare directly into their eyes, we will immediately observe their retreat into themselves, bringing on a

self-conscious withdrawal or silliness.

It is our inward acknowledgment that children can feel. Letting them know we love them for who they are, *just as they are*, is so important.

We address each child differently simply because they *are* different. Comparing one child to another delivers so much unhappiness and unwanted pressure. Enjoy each child for their uniqueness.

## **UNCONSCIOUS ENNABLING**

Overindulging children is not helpful. Giving them everything they want deprives them of the opportunity to learn how to grow strong and develop their own sustainability.

## **UNCONSCIOUS PRESSURING**

When an adult does everything for their child, this creates a dependency that weakens a child's will. We also tend to want to overload them with skills as soon as possible. They've scarcely arrived on earth and yet we want to make sure they're reading and writing at three years old because "they may get behind."

Our society seems to be on such a race with time, and it is this perception of life that causes a large portion of our family stress and anxiety. The clock and calendar rule our lives.

Our culture seems to have it backwards. In order to be able to focus, listen, absorb, process, interpret and apply what is being taught, a child's foundation includes the following:

- 1) development of the imagination
- 2) physical coordination through movement, such as handwork (arts and crafts)

- 3) social group behaviors, such as sharing, cooperating, following instructions, participating and communicating well
- 4) artistic skills (music, dance, theater)
- 5) spiritual/human values (respect, honor, reverence)
- 6) enjoyment of work through enjoyment of play
- 7) self-esteem, developed through wholesome daily rhythm
- 8) practical life skills (to provide food, clothing, and shelter)

Certainly it is possible for a child to learn to read and write at a very early age, but intellectual development cannot be given priority over these other areas of early child development. It is so important that we parents and teachers give our children space and time to lay a solid foundation for their security and self-confidence.

Overloading them with scheduling that is as taxing as our own daily routine is both exhausting and counter-productive. A sleep-deprived individual at any age cannot function optimally, and a stress-filled highly competitive atmosphere adds to a child's anxieties and fears. Are they good enough? What will happen if they don't win? Both of these questions are inappropriate and they are often the source of a child's dysfunctional behavior.

Lack of self-confidence and low self-esteem can also be responsible for physical illnesses, allergies or other health challenges related to stress. Any stress can and most often will manifest physically.

Why do we over-fill our days, making it difficult for them (and us) to breathe? All of life breathes, expands and contracts, gives and receives. We have so many examples in nature that reveal the importance of breath. The spiritual breath of the human soul is in service to the cosmos.

When we finally arrive at that point of awareness that conveys to us the deeper meaning of life, our list of priorities changes radically. The

“arrival” can often be painful, delivered in the form of a jolt such as an illness, unexpected loss or accident. Only then do we start to understand that we are responsible for whatever we bring into our life and that every thought, feeling or deed that we create is a natural outflow from the Divine within our being.

The material things that we have deserve our care. Soul gifts, such as memories, friendships, experiences in nature, rituals, special artistic and cultural events that are heart-filled, and enriching conversations over the years become our most valued possessions. When we start to live for experiences rather than things, we discover what life is really all about.

## **TO SHARE OR NOT TO SHARE**

Keep your own uncertainty to yourself. If you tell your children: *“I feel insecure about this, Tommy. I know I should have more confidence in myself and my ability to know what to do, but I’m just not there yet in making certain decisions like this one”*; or, *“I just can’t decide what’s the best thing for us to do, Nancy. I know I should be able to make up my mind easier, and I don’t know why it’s so difficult...”*; you are actually telling them that you are not in control of yourself.

By carrying on this psychobabble, you are transmitting your uncertainty to them and making *them* start to wobble as well. It is not helpful to burden children with adult problems.

Observe your speech when you communicate with your children. Are you clear and decisive? Do they experience your confidence when you let them know what’s best, and what’s “next,”?

## GRUMBLING

Sometimes we find ourselves serving as sounding boards for disgruntled friends who like to grumble. Whining is toxic waste and does not help a person solve their problems. Just the opposite; complaining is a form of enabling. It allows a person to repeat this performance, each time refining their skills as drama queens or kings. They are not looking for advice or solutions but depend on their problems to get attention and keep the blame game going with the person who happens to be on their discontent list at the moment. This can have a lasting effect on depleting the physical body if it is a habitual form of relating, as described by Dr. Bernard Jensen whom I consulted as a young woman in the 1970s. In his book, *Foods That Heal*, he describes these consequences.<sup>2</sup>

You don't have to be anyone's dumpster unless you enjoy supporting victim consciousness. Tell that person, "I love talking with you but you need to know that these are matters that could best be aired with a coach or the person involved. I really want to spend quality time with you." That doesn't have to be the exact script, of course. With delicate matters like this, the timing has to be right and you will know best how to deliver this message in a non-threatening way.

Essentially, whining also shows a lack of gratitude. It would be good for that person to focus on what they're grateful for. Set boundaries for these adult friends and colleagues just as you set boundaries for your children. You are in charge of your (inner and outer) life!

## BLAME

"It's the children's fault," we say—giving them tremendous power that they aren't even old enough to acknowledge. (Remember: "We empower those we blame.") It's so easy to shift the responsibility for our actions to another person. The blame game is the downfall of many relationships.

Once I told my husband that he must have misplaced an object I was looking for. I was adamant that he was the one who had put it somewhere else, and then I saw that I had placed it underneath the bed. We both laughed and I exclaimed, “Oops! My double is in trouble!”

It’s time to start owning up to our dramas. We have to learn to shovel and compost our own manure. Then it becomes fertilizer for our growth.

When I’m working with families and the blame game is evident, I suggest to them that every adult needs to have an hour to themselves every day that is totally nurturing. This delivers the message that possibly some of the problems they are experiencing are caused by stress and lack of time to catch their breath. Bringing ourselves into balance allows us to look at issues more clearly.

## LEARNING TO REALLY LISTEN

Most of us are familiar with the airline safety instructions delivered before flight takeoff: “If traveling with children, put on your own oxygen mask first.” I use this metaphor when discussing every aspect of parenting and teaching. If we are not alive and breathing ourselves (if we are not heart-connected, i.e., loving, warm and enthusiastic), how can we expect our child to respond favorably to our guidance and instructions?

How can we be an effective caregiver if we are in a stressful state of mind? Take care of yourself first. Calm down and push the restart button by breathing and reconnecting to yourself instead of reacting to your children. *You* will remain in charge and the children will acknowledge that. Your calmness and clarity will dissipate any fears or anxieties you or they may have. Children want and need the assurance that they can depend on us to be available for them.

At night, review your day and instead of placing emphasis on a problem,

mentally picture exactly how you would like to have handled that interaction between you and your family.

You can also work with imagining your child responding in new ways. For example, in one of my kindergarten classes, a mom let me know that her five-and-a-half-year-old Dwayne always wanted to be first, and had meltdowns each time he wasn't chosen. This is a sign that Dwayne is crying out for attention. He needs a way to be noticed; he is feeling like he never gets to be important. Yet he has a brilliant creative mind. For the moment, Dwayne has lost touch with the fact that life always has plenty to go around for everyone, that *everyone* is special.

If I were to continue to overindulge that self-defeating energy and give in, I would be doing Dwayne, the social structure of his family and the other children in my class, a disservice. In a situation such as this one, it is important to ask and separate what a child *wants* from what they *need*. I've learned that if you can understand and see the difference, then guide them accordingly, you will have a positive outcome.

Giving Dwayne the opportunity to enjoy serving the younger children first gives him a chance to be important in a generous way. In this situation the adult can alleviate the competitiveness of who is first by the teacher or parent already knowing who has the next turn.

To help our children through difficult interactions we can let them role-play on their own, using puppets or a doll. This offers creative outlets for handling these outbursts by emoting through their puppets. Letting them set the stage allows them to more freely retell the experience without having to dwell on the episode. It also serves as a means for expressing soul qualities and processing undigested experiences.

By listening to what children say through the puppets, we gain a sense of where they are in their inner development and what they need so we

can find wise ways to meet them. Frequently I've witnessed children working through difficulties in this manner. Support the feeling for yourself and for them that life is all about improving and striving, and that we always have a next step.

It is crucial that we learn to really listen to what children have to say by giving them our full attention. We have a dear friend who has six children, each requiring time with dad, who maintains a very busy schedule. One day as he was working at his desk at home his daughter beckoned, "Papa, look at this flower!" He glanced over and nodded, then went back to his work. Bringing the flower closer, again she implored, "Papa, look at this flower!"

He took notice once more and again returned to his work. However, when his daughter insisted a third time, "Papa, look at this flower!" finally he stopped what he was doing and turned his full interest to the flower, drinking it in. Then his daughter was completely satisfied and felt recognized.

## **ENJOY YOUR RELATIONSHIP AND KEEP IT FRESH**

Renewal is part of the natural life cycle; build it into your relationship with your partner as well. Go out on dates, real ones, with each other! Arrange a festive outing and *have fun!* Express your appreciation for each other and you will begin to see the goddess emerge in both of you.

Children pay attention to the exchange between their parents. When parents radiate a deep love and respect for one another the children bathe in the warmth of their affection.

Take vacations that are truly sacred time together; I recommend no phones, computers or emails--maybe just the two of you without any

interruptions. Every time we meet once again in this “still point” of being one with each other, we give ourselves a chance to celebrate the magic that first brought us together. Be romantic; be outrageous... and keep the laughter growing! Do something that will bring you together with new people and ideas.

## **SACRED FAMILY TIME**

Just as important as making the time and space for our partner is scheduling sacred time for our family to be together. It is a time when we are present for ourselves and our children.

Earlier societies often shared family responsibilities. Parents cared for each other’s children and they worked together to provide the basic necessities equally for everyone. This unified sense of community was both expedient and practical. It was also an excellent way to give the children an abundance of love and nurturing, a feeling of security and self-confidence. For most of us, extended families with grandparents and relatives residing with us no longer exist. Many parents now get together with other families to socialize and share ideas. This gives us an opportunity to create our own lifestyle. Freedom does have its benefits as well as its drawbacks. It’s up to us to make that commitment to give our children all the tools they will need to go out into the world as confident, self-reliant thinkers.

## **SIGN UP FOR WHAT’S WORKING**

Be an objective observer of your daily life and review it often. Focus on what’s working and change everything else. Make those changes in a balanced manner; avoid extremes that will upset the family routine and cause the children to be confused or upset. We want to explore what is working.

## **TREAT EACH OTHER AS HONORED GUESTS**

It is important to treat each other as honored guests and not “let it fall” into lower levels. For example, if someone is angry and yells at you, simply say, “I can’t hear you when you speak like that.” Draw a line.

When you observe someone’s behavior that doesn’t resonate with your own or that you feel you wouldn’t want to model yourself, instead of judging it, simply serve as a witness. By staying objective, you may bring consciousness to that other person by being a clear mirror. You can also be a model for them by remaining centered.

## **EVERY MARRIAGE IS DIFFERENT**

Often when a person is having marital or partnership challenges, they think “that’s the way it always is; marriage is like that.” They’re ready to settle for less than what they really believe an intimate relationship can be.

It’s so important for people to strive for the highest in all relationships. If you’re not getting along with your partner, the first assignment is to go inside and ask yourself why this is happening. Take responsibility for the things your partner doesn’t like about your relationship. Get professional help. Keep communication lines open between the two of you and make sure both of you have a clear understanding of the problems.

Fighting is a primitive counter-productive way to get our needs met. It is dysfunctional and also a sign of deeper issues that both of us may need to address. We come together to grow and learn from each other. If these emotions start to surface, our inner self is sending us a signal that we are ready to look at what needs to heal. In every given situation we can awaken to the unnecessary pain that we are causing ourselves or others.

Unprocessed emotions asleep in our soul can become very active when disturbed. They can rear their ugly head at a most inopportune time, during intimacy or in a public place. If you notice unhealthy behaviors, seek counsel.

## **SEPARATION AND DIVORCE**

When I encounter a situation in which a child feels they are the reason for their parents' divorce or separation, I reassure them that it has nothing to do with them and that mommy and daddy are still learning how to become friends.

If you are separated or divorced, for the sake of your children, develop a friendship; at least hold them in the highest light possible. Practice positive communication skills. Most of us are learning at this point not to blame the other person; whatever is going on in our lives is our own stuff. The "mirror calls." It begins with each of us.

## **DON'T BE AFRAID TO DO THE WRONG THING**

So many of you have expressed lack of confidence when it comes to caring and giving your children the values you want them to have. You've told me candidly, "I'm afraid to interfere. I'm afraid I'll break their spirit."

Perhaps our concern is related more to that old-fashioned way of disciplining by intimidating, threatening and frightening into submission. This is so different from making clear choices for our children when it is necessary and appropriate for us to do so.

Instead of the demanding, "You WILL do it!" we can guide with an inspiring and enthusiastic, "This is what we are doing."

## **GIFT YOUR CHILDREN WITH YOUR HEALTH AND BALANCE**

Drugs and other self-medicating curricula distort our intuition. Children are aware of this broken communication even though they may not have a way of verbally expressing it. When we are living in denial (hiding anger, guilt, shame, remorse, regret or fear) there is a lack of self-fulfillment. We are not serving our life's purpose.

We can find help when we need it. Today there are so many coaches who can support our desire to live a joyous, productive life. We don't have to give away our power to any substance, activity, behavior or human being. Abuse of any kind is never appropriate; it is a sign to take the necessary corrective measures.

## **WE ARE SPIRITUAL**

When we tap into that deep core essence, that part of us that is one with spirit, we enter into a new paradigm. It has been my experience that the heavenly realm includes us in their wisdom. We receive help when we ask the angels and other spiritual beings to guide us with issues that seem difficult. We may even see a completely new way of looking at something that we wanted to change; and now, effortlessly we can move forward without impediments. Having this kind of invisible support makes life so much fuller and easier.

## CHAPTER NINE

# Partners in Parenting

### I MAKE HOUSE CALLS

My goal as a parenting coach is to create resolutions that are effective, long lasting and relative to the situation. In a non-threatening atmosphere, children learn easier and are more receptive.

After teaching for several years and observing challenges with children that involved everything from health issues (tiredness, nutrition, under- or overweight, nervousness, etc.) to behavior challenges (disrespect, anger, abuse, hyperactivity, bullying, fear, low self-esteem, etc.), I realized that it is important to not only meet with parents at school during the regularly scheduled conferences, but also to visit them in their homes. These home visits reveal a more complete picture of the family and also confirm that a positive experience in the classroom calls for a team effort of parents and teachers.

Additional consulting work that took me around the country visiting classrooms and meeting with other teachers and parents led to the formation of a parent coaching practice that I named “Partners in Parenting.”

Partners in Parenting has become a bridge for bringing conscious

parenting into the core of family life. It provides families with a unique opportunity to have a private coach for the whole family. This responsive method has also proven to be a highly effective way to help a child as well as their parents address many school and home issues.

Raising children requires us to be fully present for them. It means supporting and strengthening what is already naturally inherent in them and also giving them assurance in learning new skills.

A child's adverse reaction to a caregiver may be a "spiritual reflex" delivering a wakeup call to the caregiver. The child who is acting up is asking for a *conscious connection*, offering the caregiver an opportunity for spiritual growth. Children often demonstrate opportunities for us to align ourselves with our spiritual essence. When we feel reverence for everything around us, we raise our vibration. Eagerly children look forward to being with us because our enthusiasm ignites their desire to do their very best.

Likewise, if we are feeling unsure of ourselves, a child will sense this blocked energy and challenge that aspect in us that needs strengthening.

If a parent tells me that a child is acting unreasonably at home yet these same problems do not exist at school, it is important and valuable to explore the differing dynamics at each place. Some children choose either home or school to exhibit challenging behavior. This often manifests when a child senses that adults are unable to meet them; they will then find ways to get their attention. It reminds me of the sensitive reactions of a horse. If a horse senses that you are unsure of yourself, that horse is going to give you the ride of your life!

During these home visits, I am with the children as they interact with their family and I take note of how the child relates to their surroundings.

This method of observing the family and later conversing with the parents provides a perspective for understanding and serving the children. If relationship issues are part of the mix, this too can be addressed, because whatever is happening at home and among family members will be affecting everyone.

While working in the home setting, I coach and model parenting skills, showing mom and dad how to connect with their children to get the most positive response, and how to establish family programs and schedules. These visits lead to deeper levels of parent-child understanding. I demonstrate that children's problems are workable as long as their environment provides encouragement and consistency.

## **THE COACH APPROACH**

When I visit a home to coach parents, I feel it is my responsibility to encourage them in considering their next steps: how to best communicate with their children and how to be more conscious in their observation, to elevate their perspective.

I first experience and acknowledge the blessings already present in the home. I set my intention to be objective so that higher pure impulses can arise and help to transform and uplift interactions and behaviors. This gives the family freedom to change what they wish. I enter as a witness and not a judge or person who analyzes the situation from a psychological perspective.

By using this approach, progress comes from self-education. This process also helps us become aware of those times when we're too harsh or unreasonable, or at the other extreme, too permissive or overindulgent.

One of the keys to good parenting that often seems to be missing is the establishment of healthy boundaries. When those boundaries are not

clear to children, they get into the habit of not listening or respecting. The first way to address this situation is to establish boundaries within ourselves. With clear guidelines we become a moral force, a powerful example. When we say one thing but do another, a child under the age of seven will mirror our behavior rather than our words.

My coaching work demonstrates to busy or new parents and caregivers how to establish family routines with creative discipline. Spending several concentrated days together is a marvelous way to blend in new impulses with what is already working. A five-day session is usually sufficient.

## **GROUP COACHING**

I have assisted many groups of parents wanting to start a school. We have worked together with their children in a classroom play setting.

The morning program of parent-children participation included handwork activities, movement games and stories. The parents observed how to interact with their children and enjoy this positive experience of teaching and learning while having a great time.

## **ENNOBLING OUR HOME**

Years of consulting with families whose children have difficulties in school or at home taught me the wisdom of ennobling every member of the family. This approach allows a child to develop freely, manifesting a healthy social development within a family network.

In one instance, the family had four children ranging in age from infancy to fifth grade. Although I worked mainly with the fifth grader, I soon became aware that each family member had distinctly different needs.

At the time I worked with them, they were planning to move to beautiful surroundings that would allow much freedom in the outdoor world. They had full-time help, a cook and caregiver for the children at various times of the day.

At breakfast the children ate alone before going to school, and the fifth grader's emotional outbursts agitated his younger siblings. Although dad was unable to have breakfast with them because he was preparing to go to work, I suggested that mom sit at the breakfast table to guide the mealtime, bringing her baby with her.

Connecting as a family is important. To facilitate that process in this household, I suggested that before they all go their separate ways for the day, they recite a morning verse together, that I created as a way to connect:

Whenever I go,  
Wherever we are,  
My family will guide me  
Like a shining star.

## **WHOLE SOUL SPACES – BEDROOMS AND PLAYROOMS**

I believe our environment influences us more than most of us realize. It is we who create a sacred home by blessing it with our presence and offering gratitude for the opportunity to experience freedom, growth and joy.

Children need form, structure and rhythm and we provide this through what I call whole soul spaces. A room that is spatially playful is most conducive to learning. That is because play is the young child's work. We can always rearrange the spaces available for us to fulfill their purpose. My own living room has swings and hammocks hanging from the ceiling and lots of open space for moving and stretching.

A child needs space for their own expansion, their own breathing. Toys can take over, crowding the space. Most of the toys can be in a playroom or tucked neatly away at night.

At bedtime we are quiet and reflective; we place all of our cares to rest. However, this is a time when some children are sensitive to things adults are not aware of. Parents ask, for example, why their child is saying that monsters are in their bedroom. This verbalized fear can be an indication that their child's room may not be conducive to feeling safe and peaceful.

If a bedroom has things in it that look like they come alive at night, make sure the scary toys are put away. A simple, well ventilated room is an invitation to renew one's strength at the end of the day.

We had an electrical switch installed in our bedrooms so we could turn off the electricity to these rooms at night. We did not wish for the electrical currents to surround us during our sleeping hours.

Busy patterns on drapes, curtains, blankets and sheets detract from the calmness and tranquility that are most conducive for a child's intimate environment. This doesn't mean the room has to be austere; on the contrary, it should have a feeling of warmth and comfort that delivers the message that this is a place where love and caring are present. Warm colors, soft natural fibers and beautiful inspiring pictures contribute to a child's peacefulness. An ideal child's room holds us like a mantle of warmth.

Somewhere near where the child is sleeping, you can hang a silk canopy. Possibly you can hang it over the bed, making a "blue heaven" above them. Bring in soft touches. If the children are not allergic to wool and they're no longer bedwetting, you can place a sheepskin mattress cover on their bed. Then if they throw off their blankets, the wool will

hold warmth. Allow your child to play calming music in the bedroom. Louder or percussive instruments such as drums, castanets, trumpets, and horns can be kept in the playroom.

Children's room consulting has become a helpful aspect of my Partners in Parenting sessions. During the kindergarten year, parents invite me to visit the children at home and my little friends are proud to show me their house and family. It is always a delight to be such an honored guest, to build a bridge between home and school. A child's bedroom is their kingdom, where childhood reigns and good habits are formed. The most important elements to consider are harmony, tranquility, safety, and a feeling of order.

I love helping to design these sleep and play/activity spaces, making them beautiful as well as functional. It is then a joy for me to observe the qualitative differences in behavior and disposition that come from an ennobling environment.

Since there is a direct connection between inner and outer life, a child's room is an extremely important aspect of their development. It is an expression of who they are and can reflect the way they will respond to classroom activities. It is disquieting to encounter some children's rooms that are overcrowded with toys and a general sense of confusion. It can feel like being in a disheveled toy store or garage sale.

Some children are messy and others are neat. If the playroom or bedroom becomes disorganized, make a habit of cleaning them up together. Create a place for things: racks, hooks, shelves, mats, bins, etc. It will be easier for them to be neat and keep their rooms orderly. If you organize everything with them, they will discover where to place each item. You can make this a game, and soon they'll get into the spirit of being orderly themselves.

We can all benefit by downsizing the volume of toys in our child's room and having the family be part of the process of gathering and redistributing. Finding homes for the toys that we outgrow or are not using allows more space for the child to play as well as new toys to be welcomed. Give the extra toys to someone who doesn't have many, or drop them off at a donation station. Have fun selling them at a garage sale or flea market. Most plastic toys off-gas and may not be all that healthy to play with. We can also downsize the number of toys in our child's room by changing the selection each season. A few quality toys are preferable to many.

Children soon appreciate the benefits of a creative, active playtime rather than having television as a substitute caregiver and non-responsive playmate. They love this opportunity to exercise their ingenuity and imagination and make their own creations.

Room consulting also gives me an opportunity to know the children better within their family dynamics. When I visit, they always look forward to bringing me into their world of magic.

## **TO BE OR NOT TV**

A dad who worked in television advertising reported at a parent evening that "television is designed for the idiot mentality!" Since watching television is such a controversial issue among today's parents, I am including the following story about the way television, clutter and "overwhelm" can profoundly influence a child's school performance as well as their energy levels.

Soon after the school term began, I started to notice that Neil, who was one of the new children in my class, seemed to have no strength for work or play. Whenever we did our circle he would flop down, unable to participate. I asked the parents to try an experiment with me and

for three weeks, cut out television. Within three days, the boy's parents noticed a marked difference in Neil's energy levels. The dad came to me amazed, and asked, "What's next?" They were enthusiastic about solving their child's problems.

I then paid a visit to their home and we bagged up a huge number of toys that the boy rarely played with. On my next visit, we worked on nutrition: understanding the importance of eating more fresh foods and dispensing with anything processed whenever possible.

It was a lot of fun working with this family because they were eager to learn how to improve the quality of their family life. It's rewarding to experience progress by making these simple changes in a child's daily life. I have witnessed countless improvements in children's performance and stamina after their parents have acted on dietary and media changes.

## **PARENTING AS A TEAM EFFORT**

Each family's unique beliefs are integrated into the work. Mothers and fathers may have different approaches to parenting. Some parents want to over-protect and control their children and not let them have enough independence to grow. Other parents lack boundaries and are more concerned about being liked than giving their child what they truly need.

Fathers can bring out the rascal; they like to play energetically with their children and the children love that! However, playing excitedly right before bedtime can over-stimulate them. Possibly this is the only time when dad is around to play with the children during weekdays. It is best for parents to come to some type of agreement about this.

Both yin and yang energies are important. They complement each other

and bring a richness of various qualities for our children, who want and need both the gentleness as well as the rough-and-tumble play.

## **EVERY PARENT’S REQUEST IS UNIQUE**

Research studies indicate that children engaged in make-believe games of various kinds are more likely to be smiling and to be demonstrating signs of elation, happiness and contentment. Children with less capacity for spontaneous make-believe are more likely to appear either sluggish or sad, or become aggressive and assaultive. They disrupt the play of others, find themselves the object of their parents’ or teachers’ anger and are often labeled “bad” at an early age.<sup>1</sup>

I have worked with parents wanting to volunteer in the classroom. In my kindergarten I have a father, Mr. Miyazaki, whom the children call Uncle Jun. He expressed an interest in teaching the Japanese language to the children and asked how that could work.

I shared with him that language is best taught to the young child by going on a magical journey. He asked, “What is that?” I then showed him what I meant. We traveled over an imaginary bridge to Japan and then, while we were playing pentatonic music, we entered a train. When we arrived at the “tea house,” sensei greeted us in his ceremonial robe. We were steeped in the Japanese language while sipping warm herbal tea in ornate Japanese cups. We bowed to our tea master and then voyaged back home.

Uncle Jun’s wife, Liang, who is Chinese, is now going to share her language with us, so next we will be sailing to various parts of China, to the bamboo forest to see where the Pandas live and play.

## **ONE PITCHER IS WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS**

In a kindergarten in Hawaii, a group of dedicated fathers eagerly built a beautiful school for their children. The school had a lanai that was constructed from exquisite hardwoods.

One day, as our class was finishing our snack on the lanai, my co-worker tossed the excess drinking water from the pitcher over the railing to water the plants. Although I wanted to tell him it felt funny and that I preferred him to walk down the stairs and then water the plants, I decided not to say anything, in order to let him have his own experience. However, the next day when once again he tossed the excess pitcher of water over the railing, I did say something. His puzzled expression showed me he didn't understand. Just then a child stood up and threw their plate over the railing. Then he got it.

## **WORK WITH WHAT YOU'RE GIVEN AND RELEASE JUDGMENT**

On another occasion, parents flew me in to visit their family for a week, to help them with their eight-year-old daughter, "Susie," who was on medications because at times she would turn violent. (Since she was adopted, her past history was not known to the family.) The mother and father were very tender, caring people and they really loved Susie, but they didn't know how else to help her behavior.

Both were very concerned about their daughter and while I was visiting, the father, whose professional practice was very demanding, took off five full days from work to be home with the family.

Susie's diet consisted mainly of junk food; she would break down and cry until she got what she wanted. The parents were unable to differentiate what she wanted from what she needed. Susie would also

ransack her teenage step-brother's room. When he reprimanded her she would run to her parents and they would coddle her. The older brother was clearly annoyed by the attention his parents gave Susie for unsociable but tolerated behavior. After we started to give Susie plenty of attention for positive behavior, the situation started turning around. We found moments and places where we could reach her; for instance, helping out in the kitchen so that she could be more a part of the family activities. Because Susie had a low anxiety threshold and deep self-esteem issues, she was having many meltdowns.

I empathized with Susie, who was always on medication to help her function calmly, yet who struggled deeply with trauma that burdened her golden heart.

I went to school with her, shadowing her during the day. Her teachers worked with her one on one and gave her remedial work to give her confidence.

After school Susie returned home for play, study and meal time. Her favorite release was jumping up and down on the trampoline.

Susie's parents were understanding and patient with her development. The brother became more understanding and respectful as we included his input. The parents gave less attention to her reactions to disappointments and frustrations and more to what would help her develop. Susie was finding that other options were readily available because the attention was now placed on how to move forward.

## **PARTNERING WITH PROFESSIONALS**

In extreme situations, with parental agreement it can be beneficial to consult with a therapist, doctor, or other professionals. I coach teachers with parenting concerns and have also been asked to mediate among

colleagues and couples. As a team we can be more supportive of parents by offering a spectrum of perspectives and a deep range of solutions. Other professionals have consulted with me when they feel a child would benefit from my work.

During an interview for our summer program, one of the children from a single parent family was exhibiting challenging behavior that was extremely self-destructive. After conferring with the child's mother, I coached the family in their home, spending one or two days at a time. It was designed this way because of the intensity of the situation.

Tommy, the oldest boy, was five years old and had two-year-old twin siblings. The mother was in medical school and had been married to a man who was a drug user and alcoholic. Tommy had witnessed his father physically abuse his mother over a period of a few years.

The mother was intelligent but seemed to lack parenting genes when it came to knowing how to raise her children.<sup>2</sup>

At home, Tommy's behavior was wildly out of control and the twins were heading in that direction. The mother asked me if Tommy should see his father. With most families I would say yes, but in this case the probability of more harm was too evident; it wasn't even an option. I learned from her that Tommy had threatened previous babysitters with knives. He also threatened me with graphic physical violence that displayed the unusually deep pain that he was in. I responded by saying, "When you grow up, I look forward to seeing who you truly are."

One time when I was with all three of them alone, Tommy started hitting the twins. Then he ran upstairs, picked up a table and a large heavy mattress and threw them down the stairs. Without any anger, I told him, "*You will listen.*" Then I took him in one hand and the mattress in the other and (I don't know how I had the strength!) I pulled the mattress up the stairs.

When he experienced my strength and peaceful resolve, I won his respect. And that's exactly what he needed to see. After that we were able to work together. Tommy's psychiatrist came to his public school shortly after that incident, and Tommy grabbed for his groin. I told Tommy's mother, "This is a case where medication needs to be looked at as an option. I would prefer this child not to be on drugs, but he's losing his humanity. If you don't have time for him, he will have to have some other type of help."

The mother didn't want to drug him; instead, she chose to home school, which turned out to be a good decision. During the short time I worked with him, he did make some progress. The family delighted in working together in the community garden.

Also, the boys liked to bike. I would tell them, "You may ride to that tree and not a hair past. Oops! You went over. Come back!" This little game helped the children to harness their will; they loved doing this. It's like holding the reins, pulling in and letting them out.

The family needed a healthy father figure in order to build love and trust, so the mother brought in a male caregiver with skills to work with each of the children. The twins progressed from learning how to use eating utensils to having pleasant social graces at the snack table. Later when I would see Tommy we had a warm exchange.

This is a severe case that needed a lot of time for healing and ongoing support. One could feel how troubled and tortured Tommy was, apparently from earlier experiences.

## **TIME TO HEAL**

Several years ago, after twenty-five years of teaching, I began to observe more disorders showing up in children that were previously diagnosed only in adults. Increasingly, therapists and other pediatric practitioners are treating these disorders with strong pharmaceutical medications that can mask the problem and have undesirable side effects.

Also, a growing number of children are having an extreme allergic reaction to our polluted society. What are our priorities? This is not a rhetorical question. We who care about our legacy are engaged in doing everything possible to create an environment that is healthy, safe and sustainable, with food that is nourishing and wholesome, and air and water that is of the highest quality.

## **SUPPORTING IMPROVEMENT**

Two children with extreme behavior who needed special attention were recommended to me. The two children, ages five and two, had extreme mood swings and the oldest one had been dismissed from previous schools. After observing the children in the classroom and on the playground, I felt I needed to work with their parents as well. Family issues seemed to be causing part of the children's problems.

I learned that the parents were divorced and acted unpleasantly toward each other. The dad took care of the children once a month for a week, and the rest of the time the mother was their caregiver. The mother really wanted to be a good parent but was uncertain how to give them what they needed. The house contained children's books that were not inspiring.

The mother's inability to discern what was appropriate for her children created a challenging situation. "Danny" was five and "Vivienne" was

two. Both children had many allergies so the mother spent a good deal of her time cooking special meals for them. Fortunately the children had a grandmother who was kind and gentle, a wonderful woman. However, probably because of the family circumstances at that time, she did not intervene in matters of discipline.

The first priority was to establish a household routine. The children needed to have a rhythm in their lives, to eliminate much of the chaos. This also made it easier for them to relate to the rhythm during school hours.

The father was very positive and warm but permissive; he didn't know how to say "no" to his children and he gave them everything they wanted.

Danny asked to bring his beach ball on a nature walk and the father permitted it, although I signaled that it was not a good idea. While we were walking up a hill, Danny kicked the ball and it rolled far away down into a gully. The father did not want to interrupt the walk to retrieve the ball, so he offered to buy Danny another one. I motioned that it was best that he and Danny fetch the ball. (First of all, it sets up Danny for failure in losing the ball, and second, it shows a disregard for personal belongings as well as a disconnect with nature.) I had anticipated that the ball could be a distraction. This incident turned out to be a great demonstration for the father to see how important it is to plan activities and anticipate possible outcomes.

The father liked to take the children to toy stores where he would give them free rein. I suggested that I accompany them to the store so I could help choose age appropriate toys. Part of the problem was his highly demanding job which kept him away from home most of the time. He explained to me that I did for families what he did for businesses; he visited the management on the premise and showed them how to be more successful.

I realized this family also needed professional medical help that I was unequipped to provide. They expressed their gratitude for everything I did in the time I spent with them. Perhaps the greatest gift was showing them how to set healthy boundaries. I also suggested that it would be extremely important for them to prioritize their family values. The children did much better in school after that—there were slips, but for the most part, they were harmonious in the classroom while under my care.

This family was definitely interested in making improvements and I appreciated their efforts. A major transformation was needed for the children’s behavioral problems to disappear. Sometimes it’s important to know when to move on and be thankful for the gift of the experience. We can evolve as far as we want and if we encounter sensitive issues we don’t want to address, we can leave these for a time when we’re ready.

## **A COACHING CONVERSATION**

During parent group meetings, I invite everyone to share ideas and participate in the discussion.

One mother asked me to help her with the following situation: “Both of my children are in the bathtub while I am getting the bedroom and their pajamas ready. It is the only time that I have to prepare for their bedtime. But when I return to the bathroom I find water all over the floor. They’ve flooded the bathroom! How can I solve this problem? What should I do?”

When a parent asks me a question like that, I can hear the underlying time constraints. They’re saying, “I need to know what I can do with this existing situation to make it work for me.”

I listen carefully to those types of questions because I want to meet parents where they are. In this instance I responded, “We always want

to be several steps ahead of the children, and what's happening is we're chasing our tail because they're ahead of us! So how do we turn this around?"

I then made this suggestion: "Put only a little water in the bathtub and if they protest that they want more water, say to them, 'I know that you know how to keep the water in the tub. When you can keep this much water in the tub, next time I can give you more water.' Parenting is enjoyable when we keep our sense of humor.

Often we're looking for something complicated, but we can make it easy. We practice seeing what the children need in order to enjoy life in harmony with their surroundings, and we provide it for them. When we guide by example, we empower the children to evolve out of their own free will. This gives them a sense of achievement.

I feel happy when parents are successful in helping their children go to that next step. At the conclusion of my coaching sessions, I am rewarded by the gratitude and acknowledgment that it was well worth the time, effort and money. Follow-up calls or visits are sometimes arranged to reinforce progressive parenting.

## **DOING THE INNER WORK**

When something within the family dynamics needs attention, we can work with the spiritual world by asking for help. With this help we can realize who each child is and how we can help them take hold of their highest potential. This spiritual teamwork illuminates our understanding of what is a reasonable expectation for each child and their age of development.

Speaking pictorially to the little ones and more allegorically as they grow older provides spiritual substance without moralizing. Christ

spoke in parables to illustrate spiritual discipline (Matthew 13:10-13). Hafiz, Rumi, and many other spiritual leaders and initiates have used stories and poems as a method of teaching. Children will imitate these stories in their play, giving them another opportunity to develop a moral structure.

The following is a wonderful example of a mother speaking to her daughter in this manner:

Giesela, a mother of six children with a Ph D. in biology, was giving her daughter a bath. The little girl pointed to her belly button and asked, “Mama, what is this?”

Giesela responded: “This is where dear God pulls everything in together.” (Mother could have given a lengthy scientific explanation; instead she chose a picture that would satisfy the soul of her child.)

## **RESPECT**

Always, we meet children with dignity and respect. When we are not respectful, they display disrespect. These are times when we need to let go of what is not working and replace it with what is. We have to work on transforming our grumpiness—not that we don’t have those moods, because sometimes we do. But the fact that we are striving to do better is the virtue the children will receive. They will value that virtue and feel it as a strengthening to their own character.

## **PARENTING CLASSES**

Look for a parenting class in your area that embraces your family values. Start a book club of friends and study a parenting book together; or get together with more experienced parents.

When requested, I organize parenting classes where I share child development, celebration of life, caring for ourselves and others, practical applications of transitions, creative discipline, elevated conversations with children, and many other topics about which parents have interest.

I find pleasure in handwork that can be done with the children. With the fathers I've carved wood—we've made windmills and boats—and in workshops with the mothers we've created handmade toys, dolls, and puppets. Moms and dads as well as the children enjoy these artistic activities. A father described our parent evenings, which included an artistic activity, as “warming yourself around a fire.”

Being actively present in our child's development gives us the opportunity to grow spiritually; our relationships unfold and bring soul nourishment. We need the determination to manage ourselves as well as our children with the same loving patience.

Parenting gives us the opportunity to realize *it is our own resolve that brings transformation into our family life*. This enlightenment elevates us to new dimensions of thinking and self-understanding which enliven our desire to cultivate a society that honors each of us.

## **EVERY CHILD WHO COMES INTO THE WORLD IS A PRECIOUS GIFT**

We are beacons of light for our children. By radiating love and connecting to our children's genius we are graced by the gift to be “enlightened” parents, caregivers and teachers. Those of us who are blessed to become parents and teachers have the opportunity to express our gratitude by doing the very best we can to be supportive for each of these treasures. Dedication to the responsibility of allowing a child's inner processes to develop uninterrupted is a commitment to consciousness.

## MY THREE WISHES FOR THE FUTURE OF CHILDHOOD

1. Family life preserves the innocence that every child deserves. A child's natural play is recognized as heart intelligence that socially and skillfully prepares them for life.
2. Adults demonstrate care for one another by honoring the spiritual in every living thing.
3. It becomes unconscionable to kill, allow another to die of starvation, or to benefit from world pollution or the suffering of another.

Let this book be a source of comfort and inspiration, a light along your path of parenthood and inner development. May it also serve as a constant reminder to look inward *first* for the answers!

*Parents and teachers, you have chosen to open the door to the magical kingdom of childhood where the earth and spirit worlds play together.*

*Through this gateway we soar over rainbows and moonbows and learn to live in the moment. Our child within yearns to reach out; to connect with our highest potential so that when threatening storms come in, we can prevail with our heart as a compass to stay on course. —Ronna*

**BLESSINGS ON YOUR SPIRITUAL PARENTING JOURNEY!**



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

### **“God Dropped By to Water My Garden”**

When I was three years old, I dreamed of becoming a kindergarten teacher. Several years later when that dream revisited me, I enrolled in the Detroit, Michigan Waldorf kindergarten training program. Following this training, I continued my Waldorf studies with master early childhood teachers in Austria and Germany.

For the next 30 years I taught and helped to start kindergartens in California, Colorado and Hawaii. In Colorado, I co-owned and managed a kindergarten with an enrollment of children from over 70 families.

My teaching experience confirmed my belief that parenting work is an essential part of successfully educating young children. Eventually, as the need became more evident, I began working directly with families. The love and wish of each magnanimous parent to support their child’s keenest interests and the child’s desire to “stay connected” is what inspired me to become a parenting coach. This coaching work started to take on a life of its own as teachers and administrators from other schools, seeing the effectiveness of this work, requested my services as a consultant.

“Partners in Parenting” is now a thriving global enterprise, answering calls for help from parents, teachers, school administrators, kindergarten owners and professional therapists specializing in early childhood development. My website is [www.partnersinparenting.net](http://www.partnersinparenting.net). I can be reached by email at [ronna@warmlava.com](mailto:ronna@warmlava.com) or by phone at 808-217-6166.



# Notes

## Chapter 1

1. Akashic Field, Akashic Records - The name “Akashic” is derived from the *akasha* (or Soniferous Ether) on which these soul records are impressed. Each person’s soul record becomes available through a certain unique frequency similar to a fingerprint that is encoded in the energies of the universe. Some indicate the Akashic Records collectively are similar to a cosmic consciousness. Many people believe clairvoyance and psychic perception are possible when a person learns how to “read” or tap into the Akashic Records.

## Chapter 3

1. Mary Thiennes Shuneman has lovely songbooks with CDs in her “Singing with Children” series. [www.naturallyyoucansing.com](http://www.naturallyyoucansing.com).

### 2. THE 21-DAY MIND-TRAINING AND HABIT FORMING RULE

Twenty-one days is a KEY length of time which enables new learning to occur, effectively supported by the various natural life-cycle rhythms. These include circadian (wake/sleep), diurnal (day/night), biorhythmic (physical, mental and emotional energy) and even lunar cycles, all of which have a natural beneficial impact on our body/minds. Occasionally people prefer 23 days (coinciding with the shortest physical biorhythmic cycle), and some prefer 33 days (coinciding with the longest mental biorhythmic cycle). If you feel there is more benefit to be obtained after 21 days, continue to Day 23 or 33. After that period of dedication to one goal, if you feel there is still more room for improvement with regards to the goal, plan another new 21-Day Cycle of mind training, coming at the goal from a new direction, with new mental imagery in response to the guiding suggestions, fresh sensory detail, new perspective, etc.

--Thermal Biofeedback Mind Training for Peak Performance Trading with Patricia Chamberlin, Professional MindPower Trainer, ©SuccessKey, All Rights Reserved, [www.mindpower-trading.com](http://www.mindpower-trading.com) (quoted with the author’s permission)

## Chapter 6

1. Dr. Matti Bergstrom - <http://www.matti-bergstrom.fi/cv.html>, [www.childrenscotland.org.uk/cie](http://www.childrenscotland.org.uk/cie), March 2005, in Europe; ISSN 1475-4207, Issue 7, "Europe's role in children's services" <http://209.85.173.104/search?q=cache:Ymg8PjzAMtkJ:www.childrenscotland.org.uk/docs/pubs/CIEflyer.pdf+matti+bergstrom&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=3&gl=us>
2. Sunflower Houses, Sharon Lovejoy, Interweave Press, 1991
3. For more information about determining a child's readiness, see [www.millennialchild.com](http://www.millennialchild.com) (Eugene Schwartz)

## Chapter 7

1. <http://www.waterresearch.org/about/director.html> (Jennifer Greene); <http://www.hiramtrust.org.uk/> (The Hiram Trust); [http://www.flowformsamerica.com/vd\\_home.htm](http://www.flowformsamerica.com/vd_home.htm) (Sven Shunemann)

## Chapter 8

1. Dancy, Rahima Baldwin, *You Are your Child's First Teacher: What Parents Can Do with and for Their Children from Birth to Age Six*, Berkeley, CA: Celestial Arts, 2000
2. Jensen, Bernard, *Foods that Heal*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 2000, pg. 21.

## Chapter 9

1. Singer, Dorothy G. and Jerome, *Partners in Play*, New York: Harper & Row, "Happier Children," Pg.4.
2. Some adults are parentally challenged and more and more people feel their partner is missing some of the parenting gene. <http://psychologytoday.com/articles/pto-19980201-000033.html>

# Additional Comments & Information

## Environmental Issues

### *Air & Water Quality*

Air quality continues to be a major challenge as levels of toxicity from chemicals, car exhaust, etc., increase annually. Tap water in many areas of the country is considered unsafe to drink.

Most environmentally conscious homeowners install water as well as air purifying systems.

We can consider today's unhealthy environment a challenge or an opportunity to become involved and join the growing number of individuals who are working toward viable solutions.

[https://www.freedrinkingwater.com/water\\_quality/quality1/1-which-us-cities-have-risk-water.htm](https://www.freedrinkingwater.com/water_quality/quality1/1-which-us-cities-have-risk-water.htm)

## Health Issues

### *Genetically Modified Foods*

Either we are indifferent to anything except our own personal day-to-day challenges or we have chosen to embrace a belief system that delivers the message that science and technology will soon be able to provide superior substitutes for Mother Nature.

Natural resources are dwindling, and artificial alternatives continue to produce even more pollution that we as parents and teachers must deal with in our determination to raise healthy, wholesome children. Where is the proof that shows us that genetically modified food has an equal or greater benefit than fresh fruits, vegetables and grains grown from untampered seeds?

Instead, we see alarming statistics about the rising number of life-threatening diseases that medical science tells us are directly or indirectly related to a diet of processed and artificial foods.

Many of the ingredients in these foods have proven to be toxic and it is said there is a direct correlation between intestinal sludge and residue from these toxins, and acute and chronic illnesses as well as obesity.

***Websites with valuable information about genetically modified foods:***

<http://articles.mercola.com/sites/articles/archive/2007/11/06/the-real-reasons-you-want-to-avoid-genetically-modified-foods.aspx>

[http://www.organicconsumers.org/articles/article\\_1860.cfm](http://www.organicconsumers.org/articles/article_1860.cfm)

<http://www.sdcma.org/GMFoodsBrochure.pdf>

[http://books.google.com/books?q=illnesses+related+to+genetically+modified+foods&ots=UIVUOgGGgo&sa=X&oi=print&ct=title&cad=legacy \)](http://books.google.com/books?q=illnesses+related+to+genetically+modified+foods&ots=UIVUOgGGgo&sa=X&oi=print&ct=title&cad=legacy)

***Harmful Chemicals***

Food, soil, air, buildings and products such as playground equipment to which children are exposed can be chemical hazards to children and adults alike. A product known as greenwood is used for treating playground equipment to keep bugs from invading the wood. Medical science has found a direct correlation between greenwood and ADHD among children.

***Health Food Tidbits***

For many years we've been using pesticides and other chemicals on our crops. It is not surprising now as a result, that we are experiencing sick, malnourished children.

In the 1970s I was at a therapeutic healing center in Escondido where I met a woman who had sprayed her gardens using pesticides. The inside of her arms were visibly colored black and she was in a weakened state. She told me that her condition was due to pesticide poisoning.

De-toxing the physical body has become an industry in its own right. We spend

## **Ronna McEldowney**

billions creating problems from chemical pollution and make millions of dollars in profits before people are aware of the problem. Then we ask those same people to spend billions to clean up the problem they didn't make in the first place.

Slowly, we're making inroads. People understand, for example, that trans-fats are bad for the body systems and it's time to stop using them in food processing and preparation. Waxed fruit, processed cheese and monosodium glutamate, to cite a few of the most glaring examples, will not be properly digested by the body systems and may leave unwanted residue that becomes toxic. Also, poor quality processed food gets stored as body fat and a person often overeats because they are trying to satisfy their body's natural hunger to obtain sufficient nutrients.

<http://www.organicconsumer.org>,  
[www.organicconsumer.org](http://www.organicconsumer.org),  
[www.hawaiiiseed.org](http://www.hawaiiiseed.org)

### ***Inoculations***

Many naturopathic doctors believe that we need to have some of the common early childhood diseases because our immune system has to be challenged in order to build up immunity. In today's western world, however, the medical establishment has made vaccinations against childhood illnesses and diseases mandatory; babies born in most hospitals are automatically inoculated. Home births are a viable option.

It would be good to research this matter more thoroughly before you allow anyone to inoculate your children. Unless we protest for religious reasons, usually parents do not have any recourse.

### ***Ritalin***

Is Ritalin a viable solution for hyper-activity? If this is your doctor's suggestion, read here, research it further, and decide for yourselves.

***Ritalin-*** <http://www.drugs.com>

Generic Name: methylphenidate (meth il FEN i date)

Brand Names: Concerta, Metadate CD, Metadate ER, Methylin, Methylin ER, Ritalin, Ritalin LA, Ritalin-SR,

What is the most important information I should know about Ritalin?

Do not use Ritalin if you have used an MAO inhibitor such as isocarboxazid (Marplan), tranylcypromine (Parnate), phenelzine (Nardil), rasagiline (Azilect), or selegiline (Eldepryl, Emsam) within the past 14 days. Serious, life-threatening side effects can occur if you use Ritalin before the MAO inhibitor has cleared from your body. Do not use this medication if you are allergic to Ritalin or if you have glaucoma, tics (muscle twitches) or Tourette's syndrome, depression, or severe anxiety, tension, or agitation (Ritalin can make these symptoms worse). Ritalin may be habit-forming and should be used only by the person it was prescribed for. Keep track of how many pills have been used from each new bottle you receive. Ritalin is a drug of abuse and you should be aware if any person in the household is using this medicine improperly or without a prescription. Some stimulants have caused sudden death in children and adolescents with serious heart problems or congenital heart defects.

What is Ritalin?

Ritalin is a central nervous system stimulant. It affects chemicals in the brain and nerves that contribute to hyperactivity and impulse control.

Ritalin is used to treat attention deficit disorder (ADD), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and narcolepsy.

Before using Ritalin, tell your doctor if you are allergic to any drugs, or if you have:

⇒ a congenital heart defect;

⇒ high blood pressure;

- ⇒ heart failure, heart rhythm disorder, or recent heart attack;
- ⇒ a personal or family history of mental illness, psychotic disorder, bipolar illness, depression, or suicide attempt;
- ⇒ epilepsy or other seizure disorder; or
- ⇒ a history of drug or alcohol addiction.

If you have any of these conditions, you may not be able to use Ritalin, or you may need a dosage adjustment or special tests during treatment.

This medication may be harmful to an unborn baby. Tell your doctor if you are pregnant or plan to become pregnant during treatment. It is not known whether Ritalin passes into breast milk or if it could harm a nursing baby. Do not use this medication without telling your doctor if you are breast-feeding a baby.

Long-term use of Ritalin can slow a child's growth. Tell your doctor if the child using this medication is not growing or gaining weight properly.

Do not give Ritalin to a child younger than 6 years old without the advice of a doctor.

What should I avoid while taking Ritalin?

Ritalin can cause side effects that may impair your vision or reactions. Be careful if you drive or do anything that requires you to be awake and alert.

What are the possible side effects of Ritalin?

Get emergency medical help if you have any of these signs of an allergic reaction: hives; difficulty breathing; swelling of your face, lips, tongue, or throat.

Stop taking Ritalin and call your doctor at once if you have any of these serious side effects:

- ⇒ fast, pounding, or uneven heartbeats;
- ⇒ feeling light-headed, fainting;
- ⇒ increased blood pressure (severe headache, blurred vision, trouble concentrating, chest pain, numbness, seizure);
- ⇒ fever, sore throat, and headache with a severe blistering, peeling, and red skin rash;
- ⇒ aggression, restlessness, hallucinations, unusual behavior, or motor tics (muscle twitches); or
- ⇒ easy bruising, purple spots on your skin.

Continue taking Ritalin and talk with your doctor if you have any of these less serious side effects:

- ⇒ vision problems;
- ⇒ mild skin rash;
- ⇒ dizziness;
- ⇒ nervous feeling, sleep problems (insomnia);
- ⇒ nausea, vomiting, loss of appetite; or
- ⇒ weight loss.

Side effects other than those listed here may also occur. Talk to your doctor about any side effect that seems unusual or that is especially bothersome.

## Safety Issues

### *Infant Child-Proofed Spaces – Playpens*

Although playpens provide safety for infants while parents are busy doing other things, I would suggest you only use the playpen for very short periods of time, and maybe choose not to have one at all. Give your children a chance to move freely and make your home childproof so this will be possible. Cupboard doors will have safety latches and open stairwells will have gates that latch. Furniture will be solid enough not to be moved; if portable, it will not have glass, porcelain or china parts or sharp edges. It will not have any breakable parts. Electrical equipment with floor sockets covered, and cords will be inaccessible and surfaces will be clean and bare, without lamps and other fixtures and devices that are connected to electrical wires or cords.

### *Rules for Safe Play*

Rules for snowball fights allow throwing below the waist and never at the face. I don't allow bubble guns or water pistols in school, although we have a lot of fun blowing bubbles with bubble wands.

## Miscellaneous Information

### *Musical Instruments*

A musical instrument made from nature is always a beloved activity. We find leaves, sticks, stones, shells or pods on our excursions through the fields or park, and hear what kinds of sounds we can make from them by rubbing and shaking. Whenever children can be a part of a whole process you are helping them to organize their thinking capacities. Various activities do this and I can name a few just off the top of my head; growing a garden, preparing a meal, creating a story and turning it into a play. Knitting does this for the first grader. Really, anything done in a sequential order serves this function. Most hand work awakens these neurological centers in the brain.

### *Parental Tips*

If you're letting your child go for a play date after school when they've been playing hard with others all day, ask yourself if they need more time with

others or if it might be better to give them a chance to unwind at home. If your child is going home with someone other than the party who would usually be doing the transporting, you need to have information about that other party. Also, make sure you know the parents and family of where your children will be playing.

I suggest that it is best for the children to return home after school and then maybe once a week, take a walk in the park or have some outside activity with the children's friends.

### *Sibling Steps*

Children who are born one or two years apart feed off each other's energies and learn from each other. In large families the children really can give each other their gifts. The first-born usually loves to please their parents and the second-born is often more independent. The first child is doted on because everyone is so thrilled by this big event. Generally, the second child doesn't need so much attention because the two children have each other.

## MORE READING MATERIAL & RECOMMENDED WEBSITES

### BOOKS

Fallon, Sally, *Nourishing Traditions*, Washington, DC: New Trends Publishing, 1999.

Gardner, Malcolm and Susan Gardner, *Becoming a Biodynamic Farmer or Gardener: A Handbook for Prospective Trainees*, Junction City, OR: Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Association, 2007.

Glockler, Michaela, *A Guide to Child Health*, Hudson, NY: Anthroposophic Press, 1996

Goddard, Sally, *A Teacher's Window into the Child's Mind*, Eugene, OR: Fern Ridge Press, 1999.

Jaffke, Freya, *Work and Play in Early Childhood*, Steiner Books, 1997.

Katzen, Molly and Ann Henderson, *Pretend Soup: A Cookbook for Preschool and Up*, Berkeley, CA: Tricycle Press, 1994 .

Lovejoy, Sharon, *Sunflower Houses, Inspiration from the Garden: A Book for Children and Their Grownups*, NY: Workman Publishing Company, 2001.

Lyon, Michael R. and G. Christine Lyon, *Is Your Child's Brain Starving?*, Mind Publishing, 2002.

Mortenson, Greg and David Oliver Relin, *Three Cups of Tea*, Penguin, 2007.

Patterson, Barbara, *Beyond the Rainbow Bridge: Nurturing our children from birth to seven*, Michaelmas Press, 2000.

Petrash, Carol, *Earthwise: Environmental Crafts and Activities With Young Children*, Scotland, UK: Floris Books, 1993.

- Sabuda, Robert, *The Christmas Alphabet*, Orchard Books, 2004 (Pop-up book).
- Schaeffer, John, *Solar Living Sourcebook*, Canada: New Society Publishers, 2005.
- Schmidt, Michael A., *Childhood Ear Infections*, Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 1990.
- Seredy, Kate, *The Good Master*, NY: Penguin Group, 1935.
- Steffen, Alex, ed. *World Changing, A User's Guide for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, NY: Abrams, 2008.
- Steiner, Rudolf, *Agriculture: The Birth of Biodynamic Method*, Rudolf Steiner Press, 2004.
- Steiner, Rudolf, *The Four Temperaments*, London: Rudolf Steiner Publishing, 1949.
- Steiner, Rudolf, *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds and its Attainment*, Wilder Publications, 2008.
- Steiner, Rudolf, *Practical Training in Thought*, NY: Anthroposophic Press, 1949.
- Steiner, Rudolf, *Understanding Young Children*, Stuttgart, Germany: International Association of Waldorf Kindergartens, 1975.
- Thomson, John, *Natural Childhood*, London: Gaia Books Limited, 1994.
- Valez, Simon, *Grow Your Own House: Bamboo and Bamboo Architecture*, Vitra Design Museum, 2000.
- Vissell, Joyce and Barry Vissell, *Meant to Be: Miraculous Stories to Inspire a Lifetime of Love*, Conari Press, 2000.

**Ronna McEldowney**

White, Burton L., *The First Three Years of Life*, Fireside, 1995.

Zahlingen, Bronja, *Plays for Puppets and Marionettes*, Silver Spring, MD: Acorn Hill, 1982.

## **UNRELATED BOOKS OF INTEREST**

Peltier, Leonard, *Prison Writings: My Life Is My Sun Dance*, St. Martin's Griffin, 2000.

Twain, Mark, *Joan of Arc*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989.

Vitale, Joe and Len Ihaleakala Hew, *Zero Limits*, Wiley, 2007.

## **SONGBOOKS**

Seidenberg, Channa, *I love to be me*, England: Wynstones Press, 2002.

Thienes-Schunemann, Mary, *Lavender's Blue Dilly Dilly*, East Troy, WI: Naturally You Can Sing, 2004.

## **CATALOGUES**

*A Childs Dream Come True*, Sandpoint, Idaho.

*Gold Mine*, San Diego, California.

*Lehman's Non-electric work related tools, machines, etc.*, Kidron, Ohio.

*Real Goods*.

## WEBSITES

Alliance for Childhood: [www.allianceforchildhood.org](http://www.allianceforchildhood.org)

Enjoy Parenting with Scott Noelle: [www.enjoyparenting.com/](http://www.enjoyparenting.com/)

Hauschka: [www.drhauschka.com/](http://www.drhauschka.com/)

The Natural Child Project: [www.naturalchild.org](http://www.naturalchild.org)

Natural Family Online: [www.naturalfamilyonline.org](http://www.naturalfamilyonline.org)

Parents Talk: [www.parents-talk.com](http://www.parents-talk.com)

Pregnancy & Parenting: <http://parenting.ivillage.com>

RIE, Resources for Infant Educators: [www.rie.org](http://www.rie.org)

Weleda: <http://www.weleda.com/index.php?id=85&L=1>

# *Dandelion-Books.com*

Always Available through [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) &  
Other Online & Brick & Mortar Bookstores

TOLL-FREE ORDERS – 1-800-861-7899 (U.S. & CANADA)

## *Non-Fiction – Conscious Solutions:*

*Marrisingle: Growing from Chaos - How one woman learned to thrive on living “married to” & “separated from” the Love of her Life!* By Brenda Frantz... Writes Ms. Frantz: “By telling my story, I’m giving myself the courage and confidence to share with you the most intimate moments of my life and how I came to invent the term “Marrisingle.” This term, rooted in my experiences, then became the basis for developing a unique stop-loss relationships counseling and therapy program. It has become my life mission to help people become empowered as individuals *and* as partners in relationships founded on love, commitment and trust. (ISBN 978-0-9789611-4-5) \$23.95 + S& H

*A Rediscovery of Free Will: An Un-Doing*, by Frederick J. Smith, M.D.... Have you had your 10 “Hits of Joy” today? Have you had your 5 “Moments of Peace”? Is your intuition running, and available to you? Are your ‘hunches’ reliable? Can you get yourself into the ‘zone’? Are you able to, each day, open your heart and let the love out, at least once, without fear or caution? These and more, are the Practical Payoffs of investing your time, energy, and focus in “a rediscovery of free will.” (ISBN 1-893302-98-9) \$17.00 + S & H

*Living with Soul: An Old Soul’s Guide to Life, the Universe and Everything, Vol. I*, by Tony Stubbs... Who are we? Where did we come from? Why are we here? Master teacher and sage Tony Stubbs urges us to “go to the Source... look in the mirror.” In the first of a two-volume compendium of comprehensive spiritual teachings, Stubbs expertly documents his lessons and observations with excellent anecdotes, charts and other graphics. (ISBN 1-893302-85-7) \$27.95 + S & H

*Living with Soul: An Old Soul's Guide to Life, the Universe and Everything, Vol. II*, by Tony Stubbs... Learn how to work with energy and make it work for you by discovering your own energy patterns or bio-rhythms. Explore reincarnation, death, grief, near-death experiences, life on the “other side” and many other multi-dimensional experiences. Also learn more about the coming U.S. disclosures concerning extraterrestrials, UFOs and many over-ups that may have “Earth-shattering” repercussions for those who until now have been unwilling to accept that “we are not alone.” (ISBN 1-893302-86-5) - \$27.95 + S & H

*Unveil the Past: Heal the Future through Hypnotherapy*, by Doris Small Proiette, DCH, Ph.D.... Amazing stories from Dr. Proiette's clinical records about the healing power of past life regression that reaffirms the power of the mind and the ability for every human being to release themselves from unwanted feelings and belief systems. Dr. Proiette's books supports statistics that show Hypnotherapy as the leading technology for helping people heal their issues of dis-ease and dysfunction. (ISBN 1-893302-96-2) - \$19.95 + S&H

*Rediscovering Plato and the Mystical Science of Dialectic*, by Norman D. Livergood (Ebook only)...“The Greek thinker Plato (428-348 BCE) speaks trenchantly to us today about twenty-first century barbarism... A demonic cabal has seized power and imposed a fascistic dictatorship on the United States. It is only when teachings like Plato's dialogues become current again in the West that we will be able to rise above barbarity and depravity to a more enlightened existence.” (ISBN 978-1-934280-61-4) \$11.00

*Portals to Higher Consciousness: Exploring the Spiritual Domain*, by Norman D. Livergood... What is the process that serious students use to actually realize—bring to manifestation—their Higher Consciousness, “through which they are able to contact Reality in a region of pure Truth.” If you're interested in investigating higher consciousness, put on your hiking clothes and join this spiritual expedition (1-893302-92X) \$29.95 + S & H

*Creation and Metempsychosis (The Evolution of the Soul): An Introduction to the “Psychological Key of Man,”* edited and compiled by Q. Dean Sloan... A compilation of theosophical metaphysics that provides the technical metaphysical rationale for Creation itself, as well as Creation of the human soul (“crown chakra”) and is based on the psychology of the 7 rays. “The ‘petals’ in the crown chakra unfold slowly

over a long series of lives, and we achieve perfection only when they have completely unfolded.” (ISBN 1-893302-90-3) \$36.95 + S & H

*The Perennial Tradition: Overview Of The Secret Heritage, The Single Stream Of Initiatory Teaching Flowing Through All The Great Schools Of Mysticism*, by Norman D. Livergood... Like *America, Awake*, this book is another wake-up call. “It was written to assist readers to awaken to the Higher Spiritual World.” In addition to providing a history of the Western tradition of the Perennial Tradition, Livergood also describes the process that serious students use to actually *realize*--bring to manifestation--their Higher Consciousness. “Unless we become aware of this higher state, we face the prospect of a basically useless physical existence and a future life--following physical death--of unpleasant, perhaps anguished reformation of our essence.” (ISBN 1-893302-48-2) - \$21.95 + S & H

*Progressive Awareness: Critical Thinking, Self-Awareness & Critical Consciousness*, by Norman D. Livergood... how to avoid being manipulated by our emotions and ideas and how to start thinking for ourselves; increase your skills for understanding, critical thinking, self-awareness, critical consciousness, and enlightened discernment. (ISBN 1-893302-80-6) - \$19.95 + S & H

*My Name is Esther Clara*, by Laurel Johnson... Esther Clara's lifetime spanned two world wars and the inventions of electricity, telephones, automobiles, airplanes, radio, TV, computers and many other conveniences that have become basic necessities of modern American life. An authentic first-hand account of 20<sup>th</sup> Century rural America audio and videotaped before her death and adeptly reconstituted by master storyteller and book reviewer, Laurel Johnson. (ISBN 1-893302-89-X) - \$16.95 + S & H

*Romance Stew: The Way to a Woman's Heart*, by Becky Ruff . . . If you've ever tried to cook up a man or woman in your life, you're going to love Becky Ruff's colorful description of her multiple Cauldron Crashes. Today's excess of Internet “match” websites provides sizzling opportunities for relationships of every flavor. Like any women with a healthy appetite, Ruff decides to taste them all. She regales the reader with her unpredictable Kitchen Capers that keep manifesting the same fatal endings yet leave her feeling far from being a *femme fatale*. (ISBN 1-9789611-0-2, 978-0-9789611-0-7) -\$9.00 + S & H

*Why Don't You Love Me? I'm the Best Choice: Repairing Heartache, Finding the Right Mate*

*& Not Making the Same Mistakes the Next Time*, by Debi Davis... Everyone has a perfect mate waiting for them and it may not be the person you are trying to hold onto now. Learn how to manifest that perfect partner... for you by clearly identifying the qualities you're looking for and making sure you show the world a true and honest portrait of who you are. (ISBN 1-893302-91-1) \$12.95 + S & H

*The Compassionate Surgeon*, by Joop Schokker, M.D. . . . Do you or someone you love need an operation? Scared? Don't know where to turn for advice? Let Dr. Joop Schokker guide you through the process and answer such questions as: What should you expect before, during and after surgery? What should you ask of, and expect from, your surgeon? What can go wrong and how will your surgeon fix it? When is surgery unnecessary? What are your chances of full recovery? (ISBN 0-963294-76-8) - \$12.95 + S & H

*Executive Parenting: Risks & Solutions for the Working Parent-What you may not know . . . but will wish you did!*, by Debi Davis & Ellen Sherman, Ph.D....Health expert Debi Davis and Marriage and Family Counselor Dr. Ellen Sherman have combined their knowledge and experience to deliver a comprehensive manual for child-rearing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. (ISBN 1-893302-93-8) - \$19.95 + S & H

*The Courage To Be Who I Am*, by Mary-Margareht Rose... This book is rich with teachings and anecdotes delivered with humor and humanness, by a woman who followed her heart and learned to listen to her inner voice; in the process, transforming every obstacle into an opportunity to test her courage to manifest her true identity. (ISBN 1-893302-13-X) - \$20.95 + S & H

*The Making Of A Master: Tracking Your Self-Worth*, by Jeanette O'Donnal... A simple tracking method for self-improvement that takes the mystery out of defining your goals, making a road map and tracking your progress. A book rich with nuggets of wisdom couched in anecdotes and instructive dialogues. (ISBN 1-893302-36-9) - \$14.95 + S & H

Ronna McEldowney

*Fiction with Flare:*

*Waaaay Out There! Diggertown, Oklahoma*, by Tuklo Nashoba...Adventures of constable Clint Mankiller and his deputy, Chad GhostWolf; Jim Bob and Bubba Johnson, Grandfather GhostWolf, Cassie Snodgrass, Doc Jones, Judge Jenkins and the rest of the Diggertown, Oklahoma bunch in the first of a series of Big Foot-Sasquatch tall tales peppered with lots of good belly laughs and just as much fun. (ISBN 1-893302-44-X) - \$13.95 + S & H

*The Arbuckle Treasure Hunt*, by Tuklo Nashoba... The second in the WAAAAY OUT THERE series that takes Clint Mankiller and his deputy, Chad GhostWolf, Bubba and the rest of the Diggertown gang high up in to the Arbuckle Mountains on a hunt for buried Spanish gold. Maps, hidden chests and dangerous Werewolves are all part of the adventure that even manages to turn up the old man who originally buried the gold! Buckle up for some more great laughs and lots of campfire fun. (ISBN 1-893302-88-1 \$14.95 + S & H

*Drifters: The Final Testament, Volume One*, by Michael Silverhawk... Within the DRIFTERS trilogy is a powerful secret, a key that unlocks our human potential! Can one man “make a difference” not only in his own life but for everyone else on the planet? Is it possible for a single human to transform chaos into order, darkness into light? (ISBN 1-893302-57-1) - \$22.95 + S & H

*Ticket to Paradise*, by Yvonne Ridley...Judith Tempest, a British reporter, is searching for the Truth. But when it starts to spill out in her brilliant front page reportage of Middle East suicide bombing in retaliation for Israeli tanks mowing down innocent Palestinian women and children, both ‘Tempest’ and ‘Truth’ start to spell ‘Trouble’- - with a capital ‘T’, joke her friends and colleagues. A non-stop mystery thriller that tears along at a reckless pace of passion, betrayal, adventure and espionage. (ISBN 1-893302-77-6) \$17.95 + S & H

*Synchronicity Gates: An Anthology Of Stories And Poetry About People Transformed In Extraordinary Reality Beyond Experience*, by Stephen Vernarelli... An inventive compilation of short stories that take the reader beyond mere science, fiction, or fantasy. Vernarelli introduces the reader to a new perception of reality; he imagines the best and makes it real. (ISBN 1-893302-38-5) - \$17.95 + S & H

*The Alley of Wishes*, by Laurel Johnson... Despite the ravages of WWI on Paris and on the young American farm boy, Beck Sanow, and despite the abusive relationship that the chanteuse Cerise endures, the two share a bond that is unbreakable by time, war, loss of memory, loss of life and loss of youth. Beck and Cerise are both good people beset by constant tragedy. Yet it is tragedy that brings them together, and it is unconditional love that keeps them together. (ISBN 1-893302-46-6) - \$17.95 + S & H

*Freedom: Letting Go Of Anxiety And Fear Of The Unknown*, by Jim Britt... Jeremy Carter, a fireman from Missouri who is in New York City for the day, decides to take a tour of the Trade Center, only to watch in shock, the attack on its twin towers from a block away. Afterward as he gazes at the pit of rubble and talks with many of the survivors, Jeremy starts to explore the inner depths of his soul, to ask questions he'd never asked before. This dialogue helps him learn who he is and what it takes to overcome the fear, anger, grief and anxiety this kind of tragedy brings. (ISBN 1-893302-74-1) - \$18.95 + S & H

*The Prince Must Die*, by Gower Leconfield... breaks all taboos for mystery thrillers. After the “powers that be” suppressed the manuscripts of three major British writers, Dandelion Books breaks through with a thriller involving a plot to assassinate Prince Charles. *The Prince Must Die* brings to life a Britain of today that is on the edge with race riots, neo-Nazis, hard right backlash and neo-punk nihilists. Riveting entertainment... you won't be able to put it down. (ISBN 1-893302-72-5) - \$14.95 + S & H

*Come as You Are*, by Sarah Daniels... “Tongue-in-cheek” entertainment at its wackiest—and most subtle. If anyone ever doubted that sex makes the world go around, author Sarah Daniels will put your mind, and body to test. Non-stop humor, humanness and wisdom are bundled together to deliver one of life's most important unheeded lessons: each of us has a unique destiny to discover, and until we find and embark on that destiny, life may be one bowl of cherry pits after another. Adult language and scenes. (ISBN 1-893302-15-6) - \$14.95 + S & H

*Unfinished Business*, by Elizabeth Lucas Taylor... Lindsay Mayer knows something is amiss when her husband, Griffin, a college professor, starts spending too much time at his office and out-of-town. Shortly after the ugly truth surfaces, Griffin disappears altogether. Lindsay is shattered. Life without Griffin is life without life... One of the sexiest books you'll ever read! (ISBN 1-893302-68-7) - \$14.95 + S & H

Ronna McEldowney

*The Woman With Qualities*, by Sarah Daniels... South Florida isn't exactly the Promised Land that forty-nine-year-old newly widowed Keri Anders had in mind when she transplanted herself here from the northeast... A tough action-packed novel that is far more than a love story. (ISBN 1-893302-11-3) - \$14.95 + S & H

*Adventure Capital*, by John Rushing... South Florida adventure, crime and violence in a fiction story based on a true life experience. A book you will not want to put down until you reach the last page. (ISBN 1-893302-08-3) \$14.95 + S & H

*A Mother's Journey: To Release Sorrow And Reap Joy*, by Sharon Kay... A poignant account of Norah Ann Mason's life journey as a wife, mother and single parent. This book will have a powerful impact on anyone, female or male, who has experienced parental abuse, family separations, financial struggles and a desperate need to find the magic in life that others talk about that just doesn't seem to be there for them. (ISBN 1-893302-52-0) - \$16.95 + S & H

*Return To Masada*, by Robert G. Makin... In a gripping account of the famous Battle of Masada, Robert G. Makin skillfully recaptures the blood and gore as well as the spiritual essence of this historic struggle for freedom and independence. (ISBN 1-893302-10-5) \$18.95 + S & H

*Time Out Of Mind*, by Solara Vayanian... Atlantis had become a snake pit of intrigue teeming with factious groups vying for power and control. An unforgettable drama that tells of the breakdown of the priesthood, the hidden scientific experiments in genetic engineering which produced "things" -- part human and part animal -- and other atrocities; the infiltration by the dark lords of Orion; and the implantation of the human body with a device to fuel the Orion wars. (ISBN 1-893302-21-0) \$16.95 + S & H

*The Thirteenth Disciple: The Life Of Mary Magdalene*, by Gordon Thomas... The closest of Jesus' followers, the name of Mary Magdalene conjures images of a woman both passionate and devoted, both sinner and saint. The first full-length biography for 13 centuries. (ISBN 1-893302-17-2) \$22.95 + S & H

Always Available through [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) &  
Other Online & Brick & Mortar Bookstores

TOLL-FREE ORDERS – 1-800-861-7899 (U.S. & CA)

