

Introduction

This book is offered in the conviction that parenting is one of the most important, most rewarding, and most demanding activities that human beings ever undertake. With an emphasis on creating respect and cooperation between parents and children, the book introduces 7 keys to unlock and inspire specific parenting capacities. These capacities include parenting with a purpose clearly in mind, looking beyond behavior to the needs that motivate it, and actively choosing structures and practices that fulfill one's purposes and intentions.

We still vividly remember our younger selves as new moms in our twenties, mothers of grade-school children in our thirties, and mothers of high-schoolers in our forties. During all of those times, we wanted more understanding, clarity, and support for our parenting. What we were then experiencing ran counter to society's prevailing notions of parenting. We were seeing an integrity and wholeness in our children that we wanted to interact with, marvel at, and learn from. We saw possibilities for growing with our children, learning together, and coming to deeper understandings of the world through our interactions with them. At that time in the 1970s and 1980s, most support for parents did not focus on ways to reduce family conflict and enjoy being with children but instead promoted ways to manage conflict by managing kids' behavior.

This behavior management approach to parenting persists today. Hundreds of books and articles are published each year that direct parents to get kids to do what they want them to do through guilt, shame, praise, fear of punishment, or promise of rewards. In recent decades the approach has softened a bit. Terms that are currently being used, such as natural consequences, time-outs, and positive incentives, sound friendlier, but the end goal is still the same—to control kids' behavior.

Most parents we know have tried at least a few of these managerial approaches and have found them less than satisfying. Although the tips and methods sometimes help them get more of the kind of behavior they want and do reduce conflict for a while, the gains are always short-term and always come at great cost. The more these parents have tried to manage their kids' behavior by laying down the law, imposing consequences, and motivating with rewards, the more power struggles, yelling matches, slammed doors, icy stares, and tears they experienced. Many parents tell us that these behavior management approaches are difficult to carry out because they go against their parenting instincts and their desire to create goodwill and heartfelt connections with their kids.

What You Live Is What They Learn

Respectful Parents, Respectful Kids offers a refreshing alternative to managerial parenting. The good news is: you don't have to figure out how to change your kids' behavior, and you don't have to *manage* anything, in order to end conflicts. The parenting we advocate is in many ways much simpler and more instinctive than this. It is also more effective in meeting the needs of kids and parents, in the short term and, especially, in the long term. It builds on the good feelings you and your children experience at your most connected moments, and it addresses the only behavior you can actually change—your own. The beauty of it is, when you change your behavior, your kids' behavior will change too.

It is commonly believed that a parent's job is to teach and enforce cultural values. Customary methods for doing this include lecturing, advising, making demands, and correcting behavior. This parent-as-teacher orientation is, unfortunately, a set-up that creates frustrated parents, irritated children, and conflict all around. At the same time that you are doing your best to teach your kids cultural values, they are doing their best to develop a sense of self-direction and self-respect. All too often they learn to turn a deaf ear to you and your advice. They avoid saying anything that might result in another lecture, admonishment, or ultimatum that reminds them how they are failing to live up to your expectations.

As a parent, of course you want to have influence with your children; you want to pass on values and guide them in ways that will contribute to their happiness and success in life. The question is: How can you have the most influence with your children—by lecturing and taking them to task or by sharing your values and living those values yourself?

Everyone knows that actions speak louder than words. In fact, studies show that only 5 percent of lifelong learning comes from instruction: 95 percent of what we remember comes from family and social interactions.¹ At some level you likely know that your children learn more from what you do than from what you say. You may hear your own voice in the way one sibling talks with another. You may hear your children using the same line of reasoning with you that you use with them.

Think for a moment about what you learned from your parents. Did you learn the most from, or even listen to half of, what they told you? Or did you learn the most from what you saw them do and how they lived their lives? Many parents tell us that they learned from painful experiences with their parents what they *didn't* want to do with their own kids. Whether their modeling was positive or negative, your parents' actions are a primary motivating force for the way you are parenting and the life you are living now.

Children need parents who live honestly and with commitment to their values. Parents have a chance to be exemplars and model what they want their children to learn and live. This is an invitation and opportunity, and for many it is a powerful incentive to get clear about what has purpose and meaning for them and to do their best to live in harmony with it.

To live authentically, with clarity about what is important and true for you, is the goal—not perfection. Giving up the ideal of being a perfect parent can be a huge relief. Then, when you blow it and do things that don't match your values—as you will—you won't spiral down into self-condemnation but will be able to enjoy the opportunity to be honest with your children and let them learn what honesty looks and sounds

1. Mendizza and Pearce, *Magical Parent, Magical Child*.

like. And because you aren't expecting perfection from yourself, you will be less likely to expect it from your children.

Build Your Capacity to Create a Loving Home

Your home is where your children learn the most elemental lessons of human life—how to take care of their own needs and how to contribute to taking care of the needs of others. Home is a foundation for your children's future relationships as spouses, life partners, mothers, fathers, aunts, uncles, grandmothers, grandfathers, good friends, community members, co-workers, and stewards of the planet. And home is a sanctuary to protect your children so they can learn lessons of caring and contribution at their own developmental pace and with your support, guidance, and respect.

A loving home is free of fear, which is the source of all conflict. It is a place where children trust that their needs matter and that everyone's needs—theirs included—will be considered and cared for. They can then relax into the life that calls them forth with such urgency—and find their place in the net of giving and receiving that forms a family, a community, a nation, and a world.

Respectful Parents, Respectful Kids is primarily about parent-child relationships. The processes and suggestions for improving respect and co-operation apply to all ages of children and are also very effective in communicating with adult family members. Each of the three parts of this book will contribute to a parent's growing capacity to create a respectful, loving home.

Part I. The Foundation for Respect & Co-operation

The three chapters of Part I focus on the underlying dynamic that links the two things that parents say they want most: respect and co-operation.

Part II. The 7 Keys to Co-operation

The 7 keys that make up Part II gradually develop parents' capacity to establish a home as a No-Fault Zone—a place where valuing every family member's needs equally and doing one's best to meet them replaces fault-finding, punishment, and reward.

Part III. Family Activities & Stories from the No-Fault Zone

Part III provides a wide range of games, activities, and cut-outs for additional skill development as well as for fun and further exploration. For inspiration and real-life stories from parents who are using the processes introduced in this book, go to the end of Part III for Stories from the No-Fault Zone. (All stories, throughout this book, use fictional names.)

A Note about Nonviolent Communication

While Nonviolent Communication (NVC) is a foundational element of this book, it is presented here as a means or vehicle for arriving at a state of mind and heart that is the deeper goal. Although you will be introduced to the specific language components of NVC in Key 5, the emphasis of this book is not so much on the mechanics of the language as on the inner posture of respectful parenting. The practice of NVC transforms dualistic, adversarial, and fearful thinking—which is the source of internal and external conflict—into a respectful, loving awareness of the life-enriching human needs at the core of all behavior.