

Words for Parents
in Small Doses

JUDITH FRIZLEN



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*D*ear Reader,

If you were to walk into the Rose Garden Early Childhood Center, you would see many small slippers, rainbow colored silks, wooden toys and comfortable furniture. You would hear the sounds of children laughing, singing, moving about, occasionally falling and sometimes crying. You would smell lavender soap most of the time and bread baking if it's Thursday.

There are four rooms in the Center where young children spend their days. It's like an extended family with adults and children living together, tending the children's daily needs and their environment. Everyone shares a kitchen and outdoor play space as well as songs, stories and friendship.

You wouldn't take in with your senses all that goes into creating this home-like environment where children and adults exist cooperatively, in a playful, joyous way. You might, however, perceive that there is more than meets the eye. Indeed, externals are the tip of the iceberg, and underneath the surface, there is a picture of human development that informs our methods of assisting children to grow into themselves, using life as the curriculum.

We are a LifeWays Representative Site, applying Rudolf Steiner's indications about human development to create a childcare program that asks adults to develop themselves in such a way that they are worthy of the imitation of the young child. In our Center, we have more than seventy-five years of accumulated experience working with children and working on ourselves.

Our work is a form of meditation where we show up in mind, body and soul so we are fully present, and in that consciousness, we hold and welcome the young children. With our being and gestures we communicate, "You are new here. I have been here longer, and I will help show you the way. Be assured that all is well." This message helps children feel secure. It also demands that the adults are calm, confident and caring.

In this book, we share thoughts relevant to parenting young children. We have found that a rhythmic approach to life is most effective and sustainable for

both children and adults. Hence, the following weekly readings are only a page long and present a theme to digest and a question to hold throughout the week. This consistent rhythm of weekly readings enhances their benefits. Rhythm is a form of respite from decision-making.

The readings are categorized according to the mood of the seasons. In the fall, the emphasis is on will forces; in the winter, reflection; in the spring, growth; and in the summer, the theme is play.

Remember to have compassion for yourself as you walk the path of conscious parenting. There is no perfection on the human plane, but there is good enough. That's what we are striving for--and to remember humor when we meet our mistakes, for we will make them. If possible, find a group of parents that can come together to share support; a community can do what one person alone cannot.

Finally, enjoy the journey. It's not as long as it sometimes seems. Eventually, our children grow up, and when all is said and done, they do understand our intentions and what we set out to do--and they find their own way, too. In the end, that's good enough.

Blessings on your way.

Judith Frizlen, Director
 The Rose Garden Children's Center
 Buffalo, New York

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FOURTH APRIL WEEK

Why is organic produce healthier than non-organic? It's not only healthier because it's not pesticide-laden, but also because while fending off pests, it becomes more anti-oxidant rich. The value of organic produce comes not only from what is missing but from its increased nutritional value. Learning to face adversity strengthens the organism.

However, humans have greater consciousness than plants, and within our consciousness, hungry dogs are vying for food in the form of our attention.

One dog feeds on fear, habits and negativity. The other feeds on love, possibility and hope. Which dog grows in our consciousness? Simply said, it's the one we feed with our thoughts, consciously or not.

Children experience bumps, bruises and conflicts while growing up, helping them become strong and resilient. When children experience challenges, the adults need to work consciously to choose their responses. Do we feed the dog of fear and habit or do we feed the dog of possibility, valuing the qualities born of adversity? Positive affirma-

tions give children the sense that they can come through whatever it is they are experiencing. When a child falls we can say, "That scrape hurts, let's clean it and put on some boo-boo cream. You are a quick healer, it will be better soon."

On the other hand, if we react with fear when a child gets scraped, we reinforce to the child that we don't trust their resiliency and are not sure they can heal or handle life's bumps. Since we can never protect children from all that will come, and eventually, we won't be there with them, it's important to give children positive messages while they are young.

Choose the environment for your child carefully. Expect bumps and bruises. Affirm the child's strength when they experience physical or emotional discomfort. Children are strongly influenced by our consciousness. Adults' sunny gaze (chosen to reflect that all is well) feeds children, as does the good soil of healthy experiences, but passing storms also have an impact in developing strong, capable and resilient children.

How do you react when your child gets hurt?

FIRST MAY WEEK

If you get enough sleep, nutritious food and exercise but are still tired, consider that you might have energy leaks. Stop and pay attention to invisible habits. Bearing regrets, worrying about the future, and overcomplicating life allow energy to leak out.

When focused on regrets, we are not present for the moment. Attention is divided between doing and thinking, an exhausting state of being. Also, we cannot do anything about the past; it's done, and rumination will not produce any good.

We learn the right thing at the right time, and mistakes are a part of that learning process. Reflecting about the past and considering new approaches is a fruitful exercise, but that is different.

Worry—imagining negative outcomes before they happen—keeps us focused on the future. One antidote is humor. We cannot laugh about something and worry about it at the same time. That is not to say that difficult things will not happen, but worrying about them does not prepare us to meet them when they come. If we have a habit of worrying,

our thinking can quickly dash off into negative imaginings that feed it. Better to stay in the present reality, perceiving what comes and trusting we will know what to do when challenges arrive. It requires some mental muscle not to engage with worry.

Overcomplicating things is another way we diffuse our energy. There is great value to keeping life simple, taking time to plan, being clear about what we are doing, and paring down to the essentials. For example, simplifying a child's toy collection makes it easier to clean up and reduces stress.

Also, it makes it simpler for your child to determine what to play with.

Energy leaks rob us of the present, consuming our time and energy, but we can plug them with conscious effort.

Although we may not have more time as a result, being present feels like it. Time expands when we are in the moment, not divided by our thoughts. This way of being nourishes children, who cannot understand when we seem to be there, but not really, because we are distracted by our thoughts rather than witnessing life happening.

How do you stay in the present with your child?

SECOND MAY WEEK

What are the qualities of a good mothering parent?

There are two primary aspects of mothering that might at first seem contradictory. One is pulling the child close to us and the other involves letting the child go.

For many women, the nurturing part is the easiest, and these mothers intuitively know how to hold, feed and soothe their infants. The more challenging part of mothering often involves letting our children experience frustration, stepping back and watching so they can learn and grow.

That is where the intentional part comes in. Intentional or conscious mothering involves remembering that the goal is independence. This often means making decisions that encourage strength and independence, and then staying the course.

A few months ago, a young child came to the Center. His mother knew we offered what she wanted for her child, and she also knew her child. He wants what he wants, and most of the time, he wants his mother.

However, she decided that it was okay for him to spend 12 hours a week away from his mother in a warm and nurturing environment.

She decided to allow him to experience the frustration of having his

needs but not his wants met, so he could become strong and independent. Of course, his cries touched her heart, but didn't diminish her resolve. She kept the goal in mind, gave him lots of love when they were together and let him have his morning cry when she left.

After a time, he stopped crying and when he did, his smile shone like a ray of golden sunshine beaming from his confident little self.

I told this mother that if we had a "mother of the year" award, we would give it to her. She mothers with instinctual nurturing as well as consciously allowing her son to separate from her in order to make steps toward independence. That selflessness is at the core of intentional motherly parenting and it requires both a lot of heart and a clear head.

How do you encourage independence and age-appropriate separation in your child?

THIRD MAY WEEK

One of the things that can be forgotten in the maelstrom of activity involve in parenting young children is self-care. However, in order to give quality care for our children, we need to begin with ourselves. Questions to ponder:

☉ Do you get enough sleep on a regular basis?

☉ Do you eat balanced, healthy food?

☉ Do you exercise regularly, even a daily walk?

☉ Do you go to the doctor and the dentist regularly for a check-up?

☉ Do you schedule time for recreation, such as being with friends, going out, reading or whatever else you like to do?

☉ Do you have a healthy rhythm that allows enough time to do what you have to do, or are you often rushing and feeling a bit breathless?

☉ Do you observe nature, its changes and beauty?

☉ Do you stop to listen and observe your child, taking interest in what he or she is

doing or saying and who he or she is becoming?

☉ Do you allow yourself time to reflect on what is happening and on your dreams for the future?

☉ Do you choose carefully the information you take in, reading books, seeing movies and surrounding yourself with people that are positive and inspirational?

☉ Do you allow yourself to formulate a picture of your children and your partner that emphasizes their best qualities,

reinforcing those characteristics so they will grow, and refraining from criticism?

☉ Did you know that your inner dialogue comes from the things you heard from authorities when you were a child? What kinds of things

do you say to yourself?

☉ What do you say to your child (in particular when he or she is having a hard time)?

☉ Did you know that making mistakes is a natural part of learning and that it takes three positive comments to balance a negative one and to keep a relationship healthy?

The most important relationship you have is the one with your Self. Are you in "right relationship" with yourself?

FOURTH MAY WEEK

The parenting journey is one that can both bring us to our knees and have us jumping for joy, sometimes all in the same day. Overall, it's a daily practice that requires us to meet what comes with an open heart, one day at a time.

What does it take for parents to choose consciously in spite of the prevailing uncertainty of our times? There are al-

ways two strands of information coming to us:

one from the outside that includes time, weather, our child's mood or state of health, resources available, and so forth; the other comes from within, including our feelings, thoughts, judgments and his-

tory, among other things. How do we carefully observe the outer realities as well as the inner ones to respond consciously rather than react to circumstances?

First of all, staying calm allows us enough time to notice both strands of information and to choose our response, rather than react.

Conscious parenting involves taking in information and cultivating our inward response. It means:

Even when a child is unhappy or strug-

gling (in a situation that has been determined to be all right), a parent can choose to affirm the child's strength and trust that she will pull through. Trust comes from the inside.

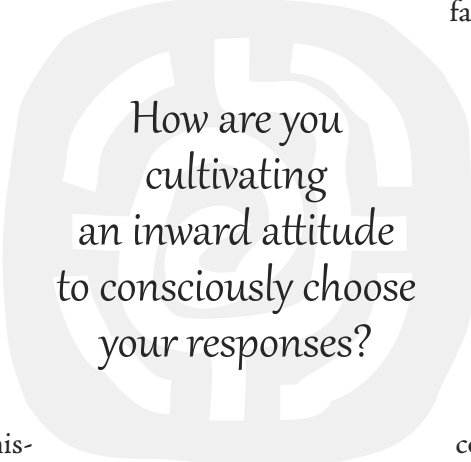
Even when we are in a hurry because we are running late, a parent can choose to stay calm and go forward without rushing. Acting deliberately gets us to the goal

faster. Calm is a gesture that comes from the inside; it's a practice.

Even though a child does not want to wear clothing for the weather, a parent can insist that she dress for the season rather than according to changing whims.

In this way, inner resolve meets outward information to foster common sense and balance. Authority comes from the inside.

Even if our child develops according to her own timetable and has her own quirks (like all of us), we can accept and love her just as she is. Mirroring a warm and calm presence will validate and help her become all she can be, in her own time and in her own way. A steady, sunny disposition comes from the inside.



How are you cultivating an inward attitude to consciously choose your responses?

FIFTH MAY WEEK

There is a strong case for reciprocity in the nature versus nurture question, suggesting that nature is dynamic and responds to nurturing. According to neuroscientist David Shenks, genes are not the blueprint for a human being that we once thought they were. Talent is not a "gift" that we are given (or not), but something that is cultivated based on what we do. Talent or exceptional ability is not connected to innate capabilities alone, but is also the product of highly concentrated effort.

Brain wiring is the result of our actions; for example, if we spend our time playing the violin, we have a brain wired for violin playing. Or if we spend a lot of time watching television, our brain will be wired for that activity. In other words, what we

do affects what we become. To that end, it's important to engage children in constructive activities that might be difficult for them and to step back when children struggle. That way the child learns how to learn, and learns that failure is a part of the process. It's key, however, that the activity is age-appropriate, one that the child is developmentally capable of learning.

Each aspect of our humanity has an op-

timal window for development. The time to be an active participant in life and to train the will forces is early childhood. That is when children need a curriculum that is rhythmic, consistent and activity-oriented. To train the will forces is to teach self-discipline, which is a prerequisite for success in anything, even more so than talent if you agree with Shenks.

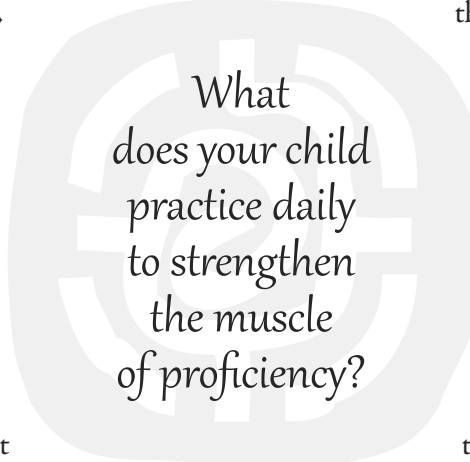
This understanding turns old ideas of genius upside down and supports

the importance of training, parenting, and appropriate teaching. Thinking,

"My child is 'gifted'" is not enough, and it may even thwart development by downplaying the importance of consistent practice. It's better to celebrate that your child

does something regularly. It be-

gins with simple tasks that are repeated to gain proficiency, such as setting the table, building with blocks and then putting them away, or washing a dish. Talent is not a thing, but a process; not something we have, but something we do. Practice leads to greatness. What a golden opportunity we have in early childhood to teach young children what needs to be done and to practice doing it.



What does your child practice daily to strengthen the muscle of proficiency?