



# EMPATHIC PARENTING

Journal of the Canadian Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children

Volume 23

Issue 4

Autumn 2000

Infants and small  
children require  
nurturing and love,  
consistency and  
permanency...

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## About This Issue

The Australian article by Helen Belfrage explores the infant's perspective as parents introduce the child to the world. She emphasizes that parents have to make room for an infant and how difficult it can be to cope with a new baby if the feelings of becoming a new parent are not acknowledged.

The second article, *Broke Not Broken*, highlights voluntary simplicity as a method for coping with the problems of consumerism in our society.

The final article by Susan Crockenberg describes some interesting research on parenting practices and how children learn to resolve conflict in families. The article emphasizes how secure family relationships and a parental understanding of the child's perspective foster children's ability to resolve conflicts with peers in the wider world. The author suggests that parenting practices that foster negotiation and mutual respect in family relationships will have positive consequences as the child experiences relationships beyond the family context.

Kim Powell and John Powell

### WHAT IS EMPATHIC PARENTING?

**Being willing and able to** put yourself in your child's shoes in order to correctly identify his/her feelings, and

**Being willing and able to** behave toward your child in ways which take those feelings into account.

**Empathic Parenting** takes an enormous amount of time and energy and fully involves both parents in a co-operative, sharing way.

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**EMPATHIC PARENTING**

Journal of the Canadian Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children

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Resolve Conflicts** pp 11-16**Guest Editors for this Issue**

John and Kim Powell have provided the content for this issue of Empathic Parenting.

John, long before getting his PhD in Economics helped with the first issues of Empathic Parenting, and Kim recently completed a PhD in early childhood in New Zealand where they have both lived and worked for the past 12 years. They have two children.

Many articles from past issues of Empathic Parenting are available on the Internet at:

<http://www.empathicparenting.org>

There you will find links to all our sites:

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Infants and Toddlers  
The Fastest Growing Religion  
Physical Punishment in the  
Home  
A Certificate for Parenting

*“There is no such thing as a baby.*

*“If you set out to describe a baby, you will find you are describing a baby and someone.*

*“A baby cannot exist alone but is essentially part of a relationship”.*

Winnicott, D. 1964

# What is a Baby?

*Helen Belfrage*

*At last, the journey is over! A gasp, a cry, a breath! What strangeness! Noise! Brightness! Sensations, inside, outside, everywhere! Confusion! A touch! So new! That familiar voice, (sniff) and smell, oh, a warm safe feeling, held close, nuzzling, sucking. A face appears through the blur! Sweet warmth and softness! Wrapped! Secure! So this is life! (slower) So this is life! Then sleep!*

## ***The newborn baby***

The newborn baby, (let us call her Susie), for the first few weeks has no sense of separateness from her mother. She has no sense of 'me' and 'not-me'. She is absolutely dependant, both physically and emotionally. She is in a state of 'unintegration'. She has no sense of herself. She does not know where she begins and ends. The inside sensations and the outside happenings all merge. She needs to be contained by someone who knows her. She is hungry; she cries; the breast appears, she sucks and the hunger goes away. This happens as if she created it all. She has a sense of omnipotence! As she develops she becomes less dependent and experiences occasional moments of separateness, 'I am' moments, and begins to recognize familiar faces, particularly her mother's. With the special care that the ordinary mother provides Susie starts to experience life as predictable. As her brain develops, she has memories of her needs being addressed and she develops a sense

of urgency, she has the power to make things happen. She begins to trust her environment. Susie has a sense of 'continuity' of going on being. Her mother's reliability, her warmth and devotion give Susie a sense of who she is. When she looks at her mother, she sees herself mirrored in her mother's eyes and smile, and knows that she is valued.

## ***Mother and baby form a unit***

Mother and baby form a unit. For the last few weeks of pregnancy and the first few months after the birth, it is normal for a woman to be pre-occupied by her baby. Nature has provided that she is specially tuned in and can identify with her baby's needs and desires and confers meaning on them. The mother is uneasy if her baby is not with her and feels that something, someone, is missing. She is very protective of her baby. She carries her baby in her consciousness. It is only gradually that her baby separates from her. Because she is in love with her baby she

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provides a safe, reliable, continuous physical and emotional environment. Winnicott refers to this as the function of 'holding'. Her strength and reliable care allow her baby to feel safe and not spill out in those times of 'unintegration'. Her baby feels held by her voice, by her eyes, by her smell, by her touch. Mother can show Susie that she is in tune with her pain and anger. She is still there, even when Susie is enraged, still loving her and caring for her. She has been able to survive Susie's love and hate and this gives Susie a sense of continuity, security, and well-being.

Just as a woman is stretched physically when giving birth, so she is also stretched emotionally as she makes room in her heart and life for this new human being.

***The father also has an important role to play***

The father also has an important role to play, particularly in supporting the mother emotionally, so she can develop her maternal role safely and with balance. Father relates differently to baby from the way mother relates to her. Mother tends to provide an environment that contains baby when she is interacting. Father is more likely to play heightened stimulating games with her, exciting her. He provides a base from which play can emerge. Baby quickly learns to distinguish between the two. The two different sets of responses will enrich baby's cognitive and affective experience of her world.

Having a baby and caring for it is a great challenge for parents. It is not all

sweetness and light. Feelings of ambivalence are normal. All parents know about interrupted sleep and fatigue. All mothers know the feeling of uncertainty, sometimes verging on panic "what is the matter with this baby? Why is it crying? Has it had enough to eat? Why won't it go to sleep? Why won't it leave me alone? I just want

a few hours to myself. This baby has taken over my life!" Although a baby is totally dependent, it is certainly not powerless. Its penetrating cry is meant to distress the parents so that they will re-

spond quickly.

When a new baby comes, all the relationships in the family undergo change. Fathers often feel jealousy, a stranger has taken over their partner and they feel displaced. They no longer have a lover! Mothers can feel unsupported and put upon and can easily start to resent the baby. Just as a woman is stretched physically when giving birth, so she is also stretched emotionally as she makes room in her heart and life for this new human being. When parents can recognize and acknowledge these ambivalent feelings, they can start to deal with them.

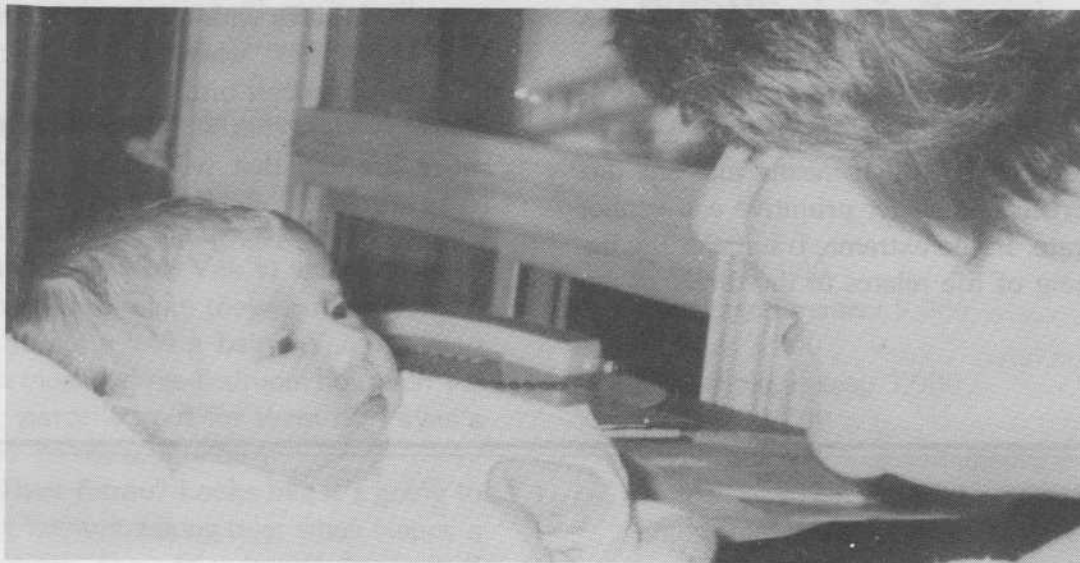
They learn about themselves as nurturers as they respond to and interact with their new infant. However, if the parents were not adequately cared for as in-

fants themselves, they will find it more difficult to cope with their own baby. If their own infant cries went unheeded, their baby can be experienced as another persecutor, as another uncaring person in their world and can be resented.

***What does the baby bring to this relationship?***

What does the baby bring to this relationship? How does she contribute? A newborn baby looks appealing to her parents, with her big eyes and little face. The distance the baby can focus her eyes is about twenty five centimeters, so when she is feeding at the breast, she seeks out her mother's face, especially her eyes, and looks at her. A newborn baby can recognize her mother's smell and her father's smell as different. She knows her moth-

er's voice and is more readily soothed by her, and soon learns to recognize her father's voice. Her cry is powerful and stirs up strong emotions in her parents. Baby communicates her needs through crying, when she is hungry, uncomfortable, lonely, bored. By about six weeks baby can smile and often initiates interactions. A typical interaction may go like this; baby smiles and mother smiles back, speaking softly in a voice that is specially modulated for her, then baby makes her little noises. They take turns and mother learns when to stop, when baby has had enough. This rhythmic interplay is specially suited to baby's needs. Baby and mother are getting to know each other. Baby feels part of this person, understood and 'held' by this person. She feels loved and therefore lovable. Gradually through many such



If the parents were not adequately cared for as infants themselves, they will find it more difficult to cope with their own baby.

experiences baby grows in this knowledge of herself and a sense of security in the predictability of her world.

***If the total care is not good enough***

If the total care is not good enough the baby has a very different experience. If Susie's mother cannot protect her, cannot provide adequately for her needs, or is constantly not there when Susie cries, Susie feels abandoned. Her world disintegrates. Infants have no sense of time and if an 'object' including a person is not seen it ceases to exist. If there is no one there to 'hold' her, to keep her together, to prevent her from spilling out, to contain her anxiety and rage, the continuity of her being is interrupted. She has to react by developing ways of holding herself that she is not ready for. She has no words for this awful experience. If Susie is neglected or abandoned many times, or worse still if she is abused, she experiences trauma, which means that she has experiences that her primitive ego cannot tolerate. In the extreme, trauma at the beginning of life relates to the threat of an-

nihilation, the experience of 'unthinkable anxieties', of complete isolation because her communications go unheard, the sensation of going to pieces, and the terror of failing forever!

Aloneness! Aloneness! Falling! Falling! Spilling Out! A different feel. No holding! Nothingness! Fear! Fear! Fear! Screaming! Screaming! Badness, badness everywhere! Exhaustion! Screaming! Screaming! Exhaustion! Silence!

Our work as Family Support Workers and Foster Care Workers is with an environment that is not good enough, hence the need for intervention. Sensitivity to the emotional needs of the infant is of paramount importance; infants and small children require nurturing and love, consistency and permanency and reliable opportunity to identify with a responsible adult. Let us remember "when babies enter families either through birth or adoption relationships begin that will shape the baby's entire life and that will change parents' lives forever". (Goldberg, R.L. & Klerman, L.V. 1999) ●

**First Three Years --- Next Three Generations**



# Broke, not Broken

*Gayle MacDonald*

While the well-off run themselves ragged and go deep into debt to finance the 'good life,' many people are making do cheerfully with incomes well below average — some by choice, some by necessity.

What do they have in common?

They know 'simplicity' doesn't come by mail order.

Ellie and Steve Zavitz live on less than \$25,000 a year. In their late 20s, they've been married for four years, and both are university graduates with two degrees. They met at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay. Ellie's at home with a 13-month-old named Jacob. Steve's enrolled this year in teacher's college in Thunder Bay. By any definition, this couple is flat-out broke.

But they don't feel hard done by. They have no debt. In fact, they give \$4,800 — one-fifth of their income — to charities, including monthly cheques to two foster kids.

If you believe what you read, see and hear, the Zavitzes should not exist. Everywhere we turn these days, we're bombarded with examples of conspicuous wealth, and waste — people who, thanks to a robust economy, have multiple cars, multiple homes, multiple families, multiple bank accounts, and multiple neuroses. Magazines and newspapers (including this one, several weeks ago) have run stories about people earning hundreds of thousands of dollars a year yet failing to get by, financially or emotionally.

Experts such as Alan Mirabelli, at

the Vanier Institute of the Family, say the Canadian family unit is in critical condition. "My father could support a family on 40 to 45 hours a week," says Mirabelli. "Now the same family supports themselves to the same standard of living on 65 to 85 hours a week.

"So inflation doesn't just come in monetary terms. It comes in terms of human energy. What families now share is leftover time, leftover energy and leftover commitment."

Pundits generally agree the gotta-have-it-all generation that rose in the nineties is now desperate to get back in touch with what's really important — family, health and happiness. Problem is, they haven't a clue how to go about it.

Yet the Zavitzes don't think the concessions they make are big ones. "We don't go to movies very often, and we don't go out to dinner," says Ellie. "I didn't play on the 'A' hockey team — I played house league — because we didn't have enough money." She shops at consignment shops, and they've taken in a boarder to help pay the \$1,020 rent for their three-bedroom duplex. Earlier this year, they had to cash in \$10,000 in GICs,

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but once Steve gets a teaching job, they're confident those savings will be restored.

When school is out, they both work for an adventure-travel company that gives bike tours and hiking trips. And, while their middle-class families help out when times get really tough (they lived with her parents in Ottawa for awhile before the baby was due), most of the time they're self-reliant.

On \$25,000, they pay tuition, insurance, food, clothing and the lease on a red Tercel. "I like my life," says Ellie. "We don't feel like we're missing anything." Some day she plans to go to teacher's college, but more kids are a priority. She's considering home schooling.

Isn't there anything the Zavitzes regret? "If we had more money, I'd love to take piano lessons, and Steve would like to play the guitar."

The trendy cure-all today for the harried and harassed is "voluntary simplicity," dubbed the first great trend of the new millennium. The movement advocates paring down, stripping away ambitions and possessions to make life less stressful.

Paradoxically, though, the concept is being popularized in glossy magazines, like *Simple Life* and *Real Simple* — which espouse the simple virtues of walking in the rain (with a Land's End jacket and designer galoshes), cleaning your closets (while you wear Banana Republic) or pay-

ing your bills (kept in your leather-bound daytimer).

A closer look at Canadian households shows that simplicity — voluntary or not — rarely comes mail-ordered. The average household income in this country is roughly \$52,000 a year. At that level, or less, most people have to pare down some — but that doesn't mean they're uncomfortable, especially in their own skin.

Pundits generally agree the gotta-have-it-all generation that rose in the nineties is now desperate to get back in touch with what's really important — family, health and happiness. Problem is, they haven't a clue how to go about it.

Arlen and Cynthia Odegard have four strapping, rambunctious boys aged 6 to 15. They live in a three-bedroom home in Edmonton, where Arlen operates a small saddlemaking and luxury leathercrafts business out of the basement. The boys are home schooled, enrolled in Internet courses through the public board. As

Arlen says, they "eat like kings and sleep like rocks" on \$30,000 a year. Many years, it's been far less.

How do they do it? Most they say, blind faith. It's a credo that drives their respective families nuts. But the couple, both 33, doesn't care. "I don't want to be like everyone else," says Arlen.

"In the morning, when everyone else is scrambling to get their kids off to school, themselves to work, pulling their hair out, we all go to the park for a walk. Then we come home. The kids get on the computer and I head down to my office. It's real nice."

Arlen, whose dad was a pastor and

mom was a schoolteacher, says there have been many years when his family income has been below the poverty line, particularly for a family of six. Still he adds, "my life is as good as it can possibly be," he says. "I'm doing what I want. I'm a creative person and I get to express that creativity in so many ways. When I get up, I'm allowed the choice of what I want."

Like the Zavitzes, the Odegards are fortunate, however, that sometimes family pitches in. Arlen's mom once covered a way-overdue phone bill (\$500), and her family's donated a computer and supplied the six-year-old minivan when their last son was born.

Most times, however, they make ends meet on Arlen's sporadic income. "Look, we pull our hair out sometimes," says Arlen "But for a different set of reasons than other people. We've had close calls with the bank, threatening to foreclose on our mortgage. That's a price we pay for this lifestyle. But we see our kids, and we don't work insane hours."

The Odegards bought their house 13 years ago for \$51,000. It's now worth more than double that. It's their only equity, but the couple never plans to move. To pay for a sewing machine, they took out a second mortgage (still sitting at roughly \$50,000). They have no savings.

The secret, Arlen explains, is that "we do most things ourselves." He does

all car repairs, they both do home renovations (including installing a new furnace), and Cynthia bakes non-stop, going through a 20-kilogram bag of flour every six weeks.

"My wife's the best cook I know," he says. "Sometimes we eat pancakes for dinner, but then I'll get a whack of orders, and we may have steak and vichyssoise. We live like paupers at times, and other times we eat like kings."

Arlen's the first to admit his lifestyle requires a certain personality type. "You've got to be comfortable with your choices and happy in your own skin," he says.

Keeping priorities straight this way requires a courage of conviction that Mirabelli believes most people lack.

"When you ask the families the question, what's the most important things in their lives, they always say, family," says the Vanier Institute director. "The truth is, though, their behaviour [long hours spent at work] often doesn't correspond to that."

Ruth Berry, a professor of family studies at the University of Manitoba, says voluntary simplicity, as a lifestyle, has many merits but can't be bottled as a concept, put on a shelf, and sold. "When it comes right down to it, a simplistic approach to life is all attitudinal," says Berry. "It comes from inside. It's all about your life and family values."

Diane Marshall, a family therapist in

Everywhere we turn these days, we're bombarded with examples of conspicuous wealth, and waste — people who, thanks to a robust economy, have multiple cars, multiple homes, multiple families, multiple bank accounts, and multiple neuroses.

## "I have trouble relating to people who tell me their financial woes when they have more money than me."

Toronto, says money is the biggest source of conflict for her clients, and most of them are looking for ways to pare down their lives.

John and Jean Kulmala, aged 62 and 60, quit high-powered jobs in Toronto to move to a log cabin in a tiny hamlet — with the Thoreau-appropriate name of Walden — just west of Sudbury. Now they only work half-time, spending the rest of their hours on volunteer work and hanging out with new chums and neighbours. And they don't miss the bright lights of the big city. Not, at all.

John, formerly head furrier for Eaton's in downtown Toronto, says the grind of dealing with "bitchy customers" wore him to a frazzle, and earned him an ulcer. Jean, a former customer service rep for a lighting firm, was equally fed up with the pace of their lives, racing to work, racing home, dropping dead into bed, only to start the same routine over the next day.

"That ulcer cleared up in less than a year after we moved here," says John, who adds they fish for food off their lakeside dock, use a wood-burning stove for heat, an outhouse when nature calls. "We're never lonely. It helps that my wife and I are darn good friends."

Adds Jean, the key for them was physically removing themselves from the temptation to fall back into the fast-paced trap. "When you transplant yourself," she says, "you can leave behind a lot of stresses. And a lot of the possessions that clutter your life. You get out of the trap of trying to impress everybody."

For many people, though, it's not a

choice. The richest 20 per cent of families in this country control about two-thirds of all wealth, and according to Calgary researcher Roger Sauve, the economic boom we've heard so much about has been in very limited sectors.

Indeed, Sauve's 1999 report on the current state of Canadian family finances found that most households have experienced an "incomeless" recovery from the recession of the early 1990s. Poverty rates have increased, yet spending keeps rising too — total debt accumulated per household in 1998 was equal to 114 per cent of after-tax incomes, compared to 92 per cent in 1989.

Nancy Hawkins, a 34-year-old single mom with a 5-year-old daughter named Hannah, knows all about tough choices. She's got the simplicity lifestyle down to an art, but it's no spiritual nirvana. The Halifax native is the first to admit she'd have cracked long ago without the help of her dad, four brothers and friends.

She makes about \$12,000 a year, and shells out \$500 each month for a one-bedroom flat above a Dairy Queen. Another \$400 goes to subsidized daycare. She gets back some GST and \$100 in child tax benefits. There's enough for food, but very little more.

If she goes out, her friends often pay. Her 75-year-old father drives her to and from work (she can't afford the bus). And her brothers have been known to chip in to keep the lights on or the phone ringing.

Hawkins wishes her finances weren't so stretched, and she dreams of the day she'll make \$20,000, hopefully once she earns commission from her advertising

sales job at the Coast, an alternative weekly publication.

She gets depressed, but mainly when she hears others complaining. "I have trouble relating to people who tell me their financial woes when they have more money than me," says Hawkins, who went to Dalhousie and St. Mary's but didn't finish her fine-arts degree.

Does she like her life? "I don't feel bad about it at all," she says. "My daughter's really happy. She loves where we live. To me, that's all that matters."

Denis Grignon, 35, and Nancy Payne, 33, would be the first to agree. They say the daunting, demoralizing spectre of racing-to-keep-up is what convinced them to pack in great jobs two years ago and move to a farm in Lindsay, Ont.

Before that, they had a comfortable existence, making \$110,000 between them a year. Both worked as radio producers for the CBC, and Denis also worked as a stand-up comic. They were comfortable, sated and dissatisfied. "I can't really explain it," says Denis. "I just kept saving, socking money away, afraid it was going to get pulled out from under me. I was a wreck."

Now they freelance, Denis does the odd comedy gig (to the green bean growers instead of Yuk Yuk's) and they make roughly half what they earned before. They recently had a baby, Yannick, and built a modest three-bedroom house on 1.5 acres, parcelled out for them by Payne's parents on the family farm.

Their future? Looks like it's going to be hog fanning, taking over when Nancy's dad retires. Their friends and family still can't quite believe they're settled — happily — in what Nancy's brother calls "this low-overhead lifestyle." This young cou-

ple, though, has no regrets.

Their mortgage, at \$63,000, is manageable on their income. They have no debt. "We haven't seen a huge change in our lives," says Denis, barely intelligible on the phone over the din of Yannick banging the kitchen pots. "We didn't live extravagantly before, so it's not a huge struggle."

So why'd they up and do a Green Acres? "The truth is, we're lazy," deadpans Denis. "I don't want to travel two hours a day. I want to read, go for bicycle rides, and spend time with my son.

"Too many people draw two lines through the's' in success," Denis adds. "Life's too short to run on a treadmill you don't really want to be on."

### **TIGHT MONEY, TIGHTLY MANAGED**

The yearly budget for Edmonton's Odegard family.

#### **INCOME**

Basic Income 30,000

Variable business income and Tax credits approx. 6,000 (Extras often come as gifts or help from extended family)

#### **EXPENSES**

Food \$ 12,000

Mortgage Payment 9,000

Utilities 3,800

Household upkeep 3,000

Clothing 2,700

Van insurance, fuel and upkeep (no loan payment) 2,000

Entertainment (dinners out, movie rentals, etc.) 1,200

Misc. 2,500

Total 36,200

# How Children Learn to Resolve Conflicts in Families

*Susan Crockenberg*

A parent says to her two-year-old child, "Eat your dinner," and the child says, "No". Events such as this one are ubiquitous in the lives of parents and young children, and serve as windows to family relationships. In studying them, however, researchers, myself included, have taken a characteristically linear approach, focusing on who will prevail, and more specifically, on whether and how quickly the child will comply. As researchers interested in how children become socialized, we have asked, "What control strategies are most effective in eliciting compliance from the child", "What parental behaviors give rise to a defiant response from the child"? These are important questions to parents and researchers alike. Parents have an immediate and legitimate interest in knowing how best to encourage their children to modulate their own interests and goals in ways that allow other family members to pursue their interests and meet their goals. Whether children bear the primary responsibility for achieving this family goal, as the targeting of their behavior implies, is open to debate.

When a parent issues a directive, or makes some claim on the child's time or behavior, there are several possible outcomes. The child may comply, that is, she may simply do what the parent wants. In most families, this is the most frequent child response. It is also common, especially during the second and third years of life, for children to say, "No," or to otherwise indicate that the proposed plan of

action is not to their liking. When this latter response occurs, the parent and child have a conflict. Their goals are incompatible; one person wants one thing, the other wants something else. As is the case in any conflict, resolution requires that one or both of them give up or modify their goals. Viewing parent-child interactions of the sort described above as conflicts and their outcomes as conflict resolutions shifts our perspective of these events in significant ways. Most notably, it introduces the possibility that both parent and child may modify their goals in an effort to achieve a resolution.

## *Parent-child interaction as conflict resolution*

In a 1957 treatise on the question of "yes and no," Spitz recognized the significance of negation, describing it as "the most spectacular intellectual and semantic achievement during early childhood (p.99). He identified the acquisition of "No" as an indicator of a new level of autonomy that accompanies the child's increasing awareness of the "other" during the second half of the second year of life. Spitz noted, moreover, that with the child's assertion, the process of negotiation begins. In response to the child's assertion, the parent may alter her approach, perhaps explaining to the child why he or she should comply, or attempting to persuade him or her to do so. She may attempt to engage the child in the task by making it

*Reprinted from Zero to Three, Vol.XII, No.4, April 1992, published by the National Center for Clinical Infant Programs. Susan Crockenberg, Ph.D. University of Vermont*

When mothers combined control (that is, a simple directive) with guidance (that is, an explanation, persuasion, or enticement), children who had initially refused a maternal control attempt were more likely to comply than when mothers used any other strategy.

attractive, or she may put it off temporarily. The child may respond by complying, possibly to a much modified directive, or by rejecting the parent's overtures with another "no," in which case the parent may persist in the first response or try another. There is empirical evidence that this pattern of reciprocal interactions characterizes many parent-child exchanges.

### *Pick Up the Toys!*

One of the most startling observations we made in the course of our study of 95 mothers and their two year-old children (Crockenberg & Litman, 1990) was the frequency with which negotiation occurred in the context of a parent's expressed desire that the child pick up the toys scattered around our laboratory playroom and put them in a basket. When children refused, or indicated their reluctance to pick up the toys by continuing to play with them, mothers sometimes repeated their directives, and at other times escalated their demands by increasing the loudness or abruptness of their verbal delivery, or by moving the child bodily first to a toy and then to the basket. Often, however, mothers modified the way they attempted to enlist the child's cooperation so that both mothers and children could

obtain their goals. One way they did this was to explain why the pick-up was necessary ("We need to clean up for the next little boy or girl.") or appeal to the mutuality of the relationship ("Could you do it for mommy?") Another approach was to integrate play with toy pick-up. A mother might encourage the child, or participate in "driving" the cars and trucks into the basket, in tossing the block into their container, in placing puzzle pieces into the puzzle, in putting the dolly to bed in the basket and the animals to sleep in the farm. Similar exchanges occurred at home. When a child refused a mother's directive to, "Eat your dinner", a mother might respond with a modified proposal that the child, "Have a bite of hot dog." What each of these strategies has in common is that they combine a statement of the parent's goal with some recognition that the child has a different goal and needs to be invited or enticed to respond to the parent's wishes.

Two points are noteworthy about the strategies just described. The first is that they were effective in achieving the mother's goal of having the child put the toy in the basket—our definition of compliance. When mothers combined control (that is, a simple directive) with guidance

**Neither control nor guidance alone was as predictably related to child compliance under these circumstances as was their combination.**

( that is, an explanation, persuasion, or enticement), children who had initially refused a maternal control attempt were more likely to comply than when mothers used any other strategy. Neither control nor guidance alone was as predictably related to child compliance under these circumstances as was their combination. This was so, we think, because control alone emphasizes only the mother's wishes, and guidance alone conveys to the child that an invitation has been issued which can be accepted or rejected at will. When they occur together, they convey that both the adult's wishes and the child's wishes are important. The second point is that in explaining, persuading, and accommodating to their children, they conveyed information to them 'about the way conflicts with others can be resolved.

### *How conflicts affect children's development*

Since children learn relationship skills in families, there should be a long-term developmental payoff for children when parents adopt negotiation as an approach to resolving conflicts between themselves and their children.

The process of conflict resolution serves as an arena in which children learn to balance the achievement of their goals with the desires of others to achieve theirs. Relationships in which children are involved with important others over a significant period of time are the most likely contexts for this learning to occur because conflicts inevitably arise, and patterns of interaction around these conflicts will be repeated many times. The achievement is both behavioral and attitudinal. Behaviorally children learn that if another person does not share your goals, you can

negotiate—listen to what they want, suggest modifications of what you want that approaches what they want, or simply incorporate what you think they want with what you want. Much of the negotiation that goes on between young children is of this latter type. Like the mothers whose behavior they imitate, the children determine what others want by observing their behavior, and adapting their response accordingly. Thus, a child who wants to play blocks observes that the peer who ignores his overtures is flying an airplane noisily around the room, and she entices him to join her activity by building an airport. Children who exhibit this skill are more effective in entering new groups, and are selected as playmates more frequently than their peers. Attitudinally, children learn from negotiated conflicts that equity in relationships is desirable.

That conflict may have desirable developmental outcomes is not an entirely novel idea, although until recently conflict has been widely viewed as a totally negative event (Hocker & Wilmot, 1985). In a 1989 chapter, Shantz and Hobart proposed some ways conflict might function in the development of social relationships and in the development of self. Following Sullivan (1953) and Piaget (1932), they argued that when conflicts between peers include discussion, argument, negotiation, and compromise, they produce more satisfying and enduring relationships because they are based on mutual consent, rather than on submission to authority. I am extending their argument to parent-child relationships. The likelihood of children negotiating with peers is enhanced when their family relationships offer a model of conflict resolution characterized by direct expression of one's own desires, attentiveness to the expressed desires of others, and verbal and nonverbal compromises



that allow each member of the dyad or group to achieve their goals to some extent. Family relationships give rise to child peer relationships of a certain character, and children's ongoing experience of both types of relationship shape their relationships with their adult partners and ultimately with their own children. From this perspective, the potential influence of conflict experiences on the child's behavioral development and life course is substantial. The nature of that influence depends, of course, on the way conflict is expressed and resolved in families.

Although conflict need not be synonymous with aggression and hostility, there is considerable anecdotal and empirical evidence that within as well as outside families individuals often attempt to ensure that their position will prevail over others, or that their goals will be achieved, through the use of coercive and even violent tactics. The high incidence of spouse battering and child abuse in this country, and the related estimate that approximately 3.3 million children witness their parents' marital violence annually (Carlson, 1984) illustrate this reality. Verbal coercion is also pervasive, both between marital partners (Gottman, 1979) and between parent and child (Crockenberg & Covey, 1991). Thus, what children learn from their experience of family conflicts depends on the specific behaviors to which they are exposed in their own family relationships.

Since children learn relationship skills in families, there should be a long-term developmental payoff for children when parents adopt negotiation as an approach to resolving conflicts between themselves and their children.

### *Implications for family intervention and research*

If family conflicts serve as arenas in which children learn relationship skills, there should be a long-term developmental payoff for children when parents adopt negotiation as an approach to resolving conflicts between themselves and their children. It follows that one way professionals who work with families may further the development of children is to help par-

ents develop negotiation skills they may not have learned in their own previous relationships. How this would be done depends on the context in which the work is taking place. Thomas Gordon's books, *Parent Effectiveness Training* and *Teacher Effectiveness Training*, are excellent sources of information about the skills necessary for adult-

children negotiation, and parent-education classes, in which adults role-play conflicts they are currently engaged in with a child, are useful vehicles for helping ordinary parents and other adults develop negotiation skills. The fewer the skills an adult has, and the more firmly established are alternate strategies (e.g. power-assertive or violent approaches to conflict), the more intensive the intervention will need to be in order to effect change.

The ultimate goal of the intervention, of course, is to help children learn strategies they will use in their own relationships with peers and partners. When chil-

dren have grown up in families characterized by high levels of power, assertion or avoidance of conflict, they may have failed to develop appropriate negotiating skills, and interventions will need to focus on directly teaching them skills for resolving conflicts with others. One context in which such interventions may be especially useful is with children who accompany their mothers to battered women's shelters. These children have likely observed interparental violence in the context of conflict, and may have been the recipients of conflict-linked violence as well. Children need not have witnessed or experienced violent family conflicts, however, for them to benefit from opportunities to learn skills for negotiating conflict with peers. Adults who supervise children in any setting can facilitate this learning by negotiating their own adult-child conflicts and by helping children to resolve conflicts with each other. So often in child care settings teachers simply resolve the children's problem themselves ("Give her the scissors") rather than taking the time to have each child state a need and work out a resolution that is acceptable to both.

The proposed interventions are reasonable inferences from the propositions about the learning of conflict-related skills outlined earlier. However, the empirical evidence on which they rest is thin indeed. While it is reasonably certain that children are affected adversely by witnessing violence between their parents (Emery, 1989), it is unclear whether the "effects" are attributable solely to witnessing because observation and direct experiences of aggression frequently occur together in families. Thus, the impact on children we attribute to observing violent conflict may be a joint influence of observation and the direct experience of abuse. Nor do we know whether a parent-child relationship,

or any adult-child relationship characterized by respect and negotiation, can mitigate the impact on child behavior of observing violence and coercion between parents. Totally absent from the research literature, moreover, is any consideration of the way observed or experienced conflict in families characterized by negotiation and compromise influence the way children resolve conflicts with peers. It is these questions that require attention if our work with children and families is to be based on sound scientific principles.

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## **The Canadian Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children**

The CSPCC is working to change those things in Canadian society that are making it difficult for parents to give their children the care they need to grow into healthy, confident, non-violent, loving adults.

### **In general we are working for:**

- ◆ a shift from arbitrary male dominance to no-one's arbitrary dominance
- ◆ a shift from the essential beliefs of our society's consumer religion -- envy, selfishness and greed -- to trust, empathy and affection in a community-centred, sustainable society
- ◆ a shift from violence and sexism as the warp and woof of entertainment
- ◆ a shift from treating children as sinful or stupid to empathizing with them and fulfilling their expanding and particular needs

### **In particular we are working to:**

- ◆ raise the status of parenting
- ◆ implement universal parenting education from kindergarten to grade eight
- ◆ encourage parents to make their children's emotional needs their highest priority during the critical first three years
- ◆ facilitate a positive birthing experience for every father, mother and baby
- ◆ promote extended breastfeeding with child-led weaning
- ◆ make it easier for parents to meet the emotional needs of each child by encouraging a minimum three year spacing between siblings
- ◆ increase awareness of the potential long term hazards of separations between children under three and their mothers.



Recognizing that the capacity to give and receive trust, affection and empathy is fundamental to being human.

Knowing that all of us suffer the consequences when children are raised in a way that makes them affectionless and violent, and;

Realizing that for the first time in History we have definite knowledge that these qualities are determined by the way a child is cared for in the very early years.

# CREDO



## WE BELIEVE THAT:

- The necessity that every new human being develop the capacity for trust, affection and empathy dictates that potential parents re-order their priorities with this in mind.
- Most parents are willing and able to provide their children with the necessary loving empathic care, given support from others, appropriate understanding of the task and the conviction of its absolute importance.
- It is unutterably cruel to permanently maim a human being by failing to provide this quality of care during the first three years of life.

## THERE IS AN URGENCY THEREFORE TO:

- Re-evaluate all our institutions, traditions and beliefs from this perspective.
- Oppose and weaken all forces which undermine the desire or ability of parents to successfully carry out a task which ultimately affects us all.
- Support and strengthen all aspects of family and community life which assist parents to meet their obligation to each new member of the human race.