

How to Raise a Happy Child

(and be happy too)



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Preface

“There is an instinct in a woman to love most her own child—and an instinct to make any child that needs her love, her own.”

—Robert Brault, writer and blogger

It was more than a dream. It was more than a passion. It had to happen. I lined up my dolls as a small child and practiced. I dedicated all my education, energy, and effort to it.

I knew what I was born to do: *Teach children.*

My dream became a reality. When I was just 21 years old, I opened See World Learning Center, a unique preschool. I named it “See World” because I wanted the children to *see* a different world—a world where they are safe, their opinion matters, they are loved, they are valued, and they are equal. I wanted them to *see* a world of possibilities and wonder. I wanted them to *see* their own greatness.

We teach what we need to learn the most. I soon realized that I was actually learning more from the children than I was teaching them. I now know that the children had much more wisdom than I had originally thought.



I always believed that children were amazing, beautiful gifts. For years, I was “schooled” in the belief that we have to “teach” children—especially young ones—how to “be” (e.g., teach them to be nice, share, be a good friend, and have good manners).

I quickly learned that children already have these qualities. My job as a teacher is to remind, encourage, and support the children of who they really are: amazing little souls on this planet who came here to explore, expand, and love.

See World Learning Center was different. Our focus was far from lesson plans, learning the ABCs and 123s, saying sorry, or being nice to each other. Posters in typical preschools say, “A is for apple.” Our posters said, “Stand up for what you believe in, even if you are standing alone.”

My favorite poster—“I believe I am”—had a home in every classroom, and the name soon became our pledge. We didn’t pledge our allegiance to the United States. It was not for lack of love for our country; it was because I felt that it was more important for my children to pledge allegiance to themselves . . . *first*. They can’t be anything for their country if they are not that for themselves. I wanted every child to leave my preschool remembering, feeling, embracing, and knowing the mantra, “I believe I am.”

We didn’t follow a strict plan for the day; instead, we rolled with it on a day-to-day basis. We had the normal times in school (e.g., story time, naptime, snack time, outside time, and free time); however, if the “planned schedule” was not working, we changed it.


It was more than a school. It was a place for children to *be*: Be happy, be mad, be crazy, be sad, be excited, be tired, be silly, be bored, be yourself, and be alive.

Our school was decorated with spirit. We had a rainbow of handprints on the outside of the building. (Yes, it was my idea to do this in the middle of the summer in Las Vegas at approximately 107 degrees F.) I thought it would be awesome to have all the kids put their hands in paint and make a rainbow on the outside of our school. We went through an entire bulk box of popsicles that day, but we did it! We also decorated a hallway with the handprints of each child who came to the school. They picked the color and the handprint went


I Believe I Am...


a unique  and precious human being

my own best friend  and my

 own worst enemy

a loveable and  loving person

capable of realizing my  potential

 self respecting

responsible for my own behavior

learning from my  mistakes

 creating a joyful life

an important part

of the universe!



I
love
mySelf!




I LOVE ME.

on the wall. Each handprint was unique; some used one color and others used every color.

Our school was decorated inside and out with spirit and love. At the time, I thought it would be cute and fun. I now know that it was actually a brilliant idea. The children knew that they were valued and important enough to put their handprint in permanent paint on the wall—on the inside, for everyone in the school to witness, and on the outside, for the world to know that this was their school, a place where they were valued, appreciated, and, more importantly, a place where they mattered.

We were invested ... invested in each other.

We were learning ... learning from each other.

We each had a purpose in this experience together. The children were here to remind me of all the lessons that adults “forget” as we get wiser with age. I was here to show the children how to communicate and cooperate in this society without losing their sense of self (e.g., self-worth, self-esteem, self-value, self-awareness, and self-confidence).

We each had a purpose in
this experience together.

I have learned from the best teachers in the world: our children—over 30,000 of them! For the past 25 years, I have practiced how to communicate and connect with children from every culture and every age.

“When you learn, teach. When you get, give.”

—*Maya Angelou, American author and poet*

I have learned. I am excited to teach. I have been given so much by so many. I am excited to give you the love, value, and truth that these 30,000 children have given me.

How to raise a happy child ... and be happy too!



Introduction

“Certain things in life simply have to be experienced—
and never explained. Love is such a thing.”

—*Paulo Coelho, best-selling fiction author*

I had to decide: Do I want to live or die?

My parents have done their fair share of making—what seemed to be at the time—mistakes with me. My father would choose to watch television instead of interact with me. My mother would have meltdowns and breakdowns frequently. They chose to get a divorce against my wishes. They neglected their own needs and health, and they died too early (at least for me).



Death is an interesting process. The only death I experienced as a child was the death of PaPa Bill (my mother’s father) when I was 11 years old. He had massive strokes and was bedridden for over a year before he passed away. I remember it as a terribly difficult time for my mother, and so much indescribable pain lingered in our home for much longer than I wanted.

In the last 12 years, we have lost 13 family members. My husband Brian and I had our first miscarriage, which started the chain of “death” events. Within

a couple of years, we were blessed to get pregnant again—this time carrying twins—and, within a few months, they decided to leave my body. A couple of years later, my beloved Grandma Hazel (my mother’s mom) left. Within 11 months of her passing, my mom Mary passed at 52 years old. Shortly after, Grandpa Ralph (my father’s dad) was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease and passed within a few months. Brian’s vivacious Grandma Marge died shortly after. Brian’s Aunt Hannah left the planet three months after her mom Marge. Then, we were pregnant again—twins again—gone again. The next year, Grandma Pat (my father’s mom) left her body for good. Within 11 months, my father Alan, at 61, decided to leave this planet.

I never anticipated losing
my entire family—and
future family—so quickly.

I never anticipated losing my entire family—and future family—so quickly. I barely had time to breathe between each passing. I would get up and start going, only to be knocked down again and again. I lost every family member I had in those 12 years. It feels so strange to live here, on this planet, feeling like I am all by myself.

My husband Brian always says, “What am I? *Chopped liver?*”

Of course not. It’s just odd to have everyone who mattered in my life—the people who knew me and loved me anyway—leave so quickly.

It was very difficult to live with so much pain and loss. I felt like a failure as a mother, incapable of providing a safe, nurturing womb for my children. I felt like an ungrateful grandchild; I didn’t call my Grandma Pat and thank her for the fruitcake she sent me before she died. I felt like a failure as a daughter. Maybe I could have done more, such as helping my parents get in shape. I felt lost. I felt alone. I couldn’t imagine living this life, here on Earth, without the love of my family. I was dying physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

I had to decide: live or die ... literally. I was about 265 pounds, eating my way through each crisis. I had diabetes. I was losing feeling in my feet. I had eye problems from the complications of diabetes. I had high blood pressure. I had kidney problems. I was 36 years old and dying.

The signs are there.

I had to look beyond the physical. I had to look deeper for the love that I thought I was missing. I had to love myself enough to look for it and believe it.

One day, while I was driving, and when Grandma Hazel was sick, I asked for a sign from the universe—God—to know if I should visit her in Texas. (I lived in Las Vegas at the time.) I pulled into a Burger King drive-through and there was a car in front of me with a Texas license plate. This was the sign I was asking for, and it showed up within minutes of my request.

My mom was very spiritual but not so religious. She said that she would always be with me, and she was right. She knew the license-plate story about Grandma Hazel and, close to her passing, she told me to look for, be aware of, and pay attention to the signs.

She said, “I will always be with you, Heather. All you have to do is pay attention and feel the love.”

Shortly after her passing, I was flooded with Texas license plates. They were everywhere and I was in Nevada! I started getting mail, addressed to my mom, at my home. I got mail from a Catholic Charities organization but not just any Catholic Charities. It was from Sacred Heart Catholic Charities. (PaPa Bill was an architect who built Catholic churches throughout Texas. One of the churches and schools he built was Sacred Heart, where I attended school as a young girl.) I still get mail addressed to my mother—three moves and 12 years later! I feel her with me. I feel her presence. I feel her love.

I shared the mail and license-plate experiences with my dad. He thought I was crazy. He said it was just a coincidence and had no meaning whatsoever. He often laughed, made fun of, and mocked it. However, when he was in hospice, after his “day of enlightenment” (you will hear all about that in *Chapter 1: How Do You Define “Success” As a Parent?*), he looked at me.

“Heather, I don’t think I will be able to do the mail thing like your mom, but I think I can do the license-plate thing. So, when you see a Nevada license plate, know that I am there with you.”

HEATHER

I laughed, smiled, and cried. Not a day goes by that I don't see at least one Nevada license plate; usually, there are three to four a day. I feel him with me. I feel his presence. I feel his love. Love is constant. It continues on, without the body.

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Love surrounds me.

The more I pay attention, the more I am aware of the love that surrounds me, embraces me, and fills me each and every moment.

The love I have felt and experienced from the children in my life has carried me through every challenge. They remind me of the love that is hidden to me but so obvious to them.

They remind me to love myself. They remind me of the true meaning of life. Like the license plates, the more I look for the love in each child—in their eyes, in their words, in their heart, in their actions, and in their spirit—the more I know why I am here.

I am here to experience and feel love.

I am here to love and be loved.

I am here because I have purpose and value to add to this planet.

I am here.

I matter.

*"This is no ordinary love."
—Sade, Grammy Award-winning artist*

Life Lesson #1: There is one constant in my life: a knowing that has never been questioned. I was and I am loved. It's not unconditional love. It's genuine love. Compassionate love. True love. Abundant love. Powerful love. Meaningful love. Authentic love.

“Believe nothing, no matter where you read it or who has said, not even if I have said it, unless it agrees with your own reason and your own common sense.”

—*Buddha, spiritual teacher*

Over the years, I didn’t consciously think about how I communicated or connected with children, and I didn’t have a desire to explore it. I felt that it was a special gift with which I came to this world. It seemed very natural and, moreover, intuitive. I felt like an artist with an empty canvas, a chef with raw ingredients, or a gardener with a bunch of seeds and acres of land to fill.

I am at home with children. I feel at peace in their presence. I feel like the world is the way it is supposed to be when I see it through the eyes of a child. Children remind and encourage me to see the wonder in small things, feel pure joy, and look at each experience in life with fresh eyes, an open mind, and a loving heart.

I met Taryn Voget, cofounder of the Everyday Genius Institute, several years ago. Her sisters have small children, and she would often call me up and ask for parenting advice on behalf of her sisters.

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“What do you do when your child bites you?”

“What do you do when your child refuses to pee in any toilet except for the one near her room?”

“What’s your opinion on giving sugar to kids?”

... and on and on. I loved sharing all of this advice.

One day, Taryn asked if she could formally interview me and deconstruct how I get such great and consistent results with children. That is how this book began.

A new approach to parenting is revealed.



The truth is that I honestly never considered the idea of doing an Everyday Genius Institute project on parenting. I couldn't fathom the possibility of finding a "model parent" whose strategies would work for any parent on the planet with any child. It seemed impossible. Then the universe chuckled at my limited thinking and, one day, I "found" Heather.

We started off as friends. As Heather mentioned, I kept calling her for advice as my sisters would share the latest developments with their small children, my beloved nieces and nephews.

Two things always amazed me. The first was Heather's advice, which was completely counterintuitive to what I would have done. Secondly, it *always* worked—and she had never even met my nieces and nephews! I was simply fascinated at how she thought. Everything she did was rooted deeply in the universal human emotion of love. Being a person who notices brilliant strategies when I see them, I picked up right away on the genius of her communication style and approach.

One day, we had a particularly fascinating conversation where I said, at least a dozen times, "Wow! Let me wrap my head around that. I never really thought about it *that* way before."

At that moment, I knew that we had to share a revolutionary new model—a new way of thinking—with parents and families everywhere.

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I never knew there was a method to my madness.



As Taryn and I deeply discussed and explored my unique ability to understand children—regardless of age, language, or cultural differences—she recognized a specific pattern of communication that I was using. I was completely surprised. In fact, I initially argued that I did not have a “gift” but just an intuitive and unexplainable ability to talk with kids. After many hours of conversation and examples, she discovered a pattern of specific strategies that I use without conscious awareness.

Taryn began to deconstruct each example and define individual strategies that I had mastered over the past 25 years to get the desired results in any given situation with any child. She explained how, over time, I would “test” different techniques until I eventually found the pattern that offered consistent results. Put another way, she figured out what I do, step by step, which always works.

Eventually, I saw the patterns she saw and understood the structure of my intuition. The number of years invested, and the sheer volume of children with whom I have been lucky to work, provided the opportunity to practice and master the art of communication, connection, and cooperation with children.

We all have the answers inside.

I also believe there is a sprinkle of intuition—a gut feeling—that I take into account when working with each child. We all have the answers inside. When I am quiet, patient, and willing to listen, I can tune into that “inner knowing” and experience the desired result every time.

The first time a child hit me, spit on me, kicked me, cursed at me, ran away from me, threw a shoe at my head, threw my computer monitor across the room, heaved an office chair across my office, bit me, pinched me, ignored me, or colored on the walls, it gave me a chance to practice one more time. The first time leads to the second, and continues forever!

Professionals know best ... right?

At the beginning, I tested every method suggested by the “professionals.” I was young and not extremely confident in my abilities. They offered step-by-step directions for success with any child in any given situation—a formula to follow, guaranteeing success for every child.

The promise was, “This is the right way to ... educate/discipline/praise [fill in the blank] your child.” In other words, “If you do what I say, and do it right, it will work for every child.” The flaw in this theory is that most of the “expert” parenting methods are based on external forces (e.g., bribery, rewards, punishment, shaming, comparing, and time-out) to get the desired results.

Fortunately, I attracted kids to my school who would challenge the system and eventually disprove every method of discipline and communication suggested by the experts.

At the time, I was not thankful for the child who threw his shoe at my head. I didn’t understand why he wouldn’t conform to the standards. Why couldn’t he just behave? Why wasn’t he a good boy? Why couldn’t he be like all the other kids? Why can’t he just go with the flow?

When I look back, many of the suggestions didn’t feel good or resonate with me intuitively, but I was taught—*convinced*—that this was the right way to raise these children. I reasoned that they were the professionals; they knew what was best for the children.

The answers are always inside.

The children at See World Learning Center helped me own my greatness. They helped me get in touch with the natural intuition we all possess inside. It is a knowing that, when something doesn’t feel right, is not working, or just doesn’t feel good, there are other options. It is the courage and strength to seek these other options out, practice them, and often get results that are considered “miracles,” “chance,” a “gift,” or “luck.”

My kids offered many opportunities to seek alternatives to the typical child-rearing advice. The alternative methods that we offer in this book will shift your experiences from “behavioral problems” to “successful communication and cooperation.”

Although I will map out a path to success, please keep in mind this has been my path. Each of us is on our own journey, gathering support and love along the way. If these ideas feel good, take them, use them, and embrace them. If you like certain parts, and do not like other parts, take the parts you like and modify it for yourself and your experience so it feels good to you. This book is offered as an alternative and something different. We all ultimately know what is best for us in any given moment if we just trust the voice inside. The children always let me know what was best for them, one way or another.

This book is offered
as an alternative and
something different.

It took me a long time, a lot of children, and many modifications to trust *myself* over what the authorities or professionals said. I wasn't proud of every interaction I had with every child. I would constantly beat myself up. I would replay situations in my head and get frustrated with how I handled them, how I could have said something better, how I may have hurt the child's feelings, or how I may have hurt their development in some way, shape, or form. At the time, I thought I was a perfectionist; now, I know that I was just learning, growing, and expanding.

I am now more kind, patient, and gentle with my spirit. I know that I am doing my best and can see an opportunity for growth when I make a mistake. When I am easier on myself and my own expectations, it trickles down to the children. It makes it easier on all of us. I am doing my best, and that's all I can do. I believe that we are all learning and growing, albeit some faster and more diligent than others.

I am a work in progress. I am always looking for better ways to communicate and cooperate in love. Each challenge is another opportunity to do it better than the last time. It will never be done. The learning continues. By the time I leave this planet, I hope that there will be a 100th edition of this book. I am alive, aware, and always ready to raise happy children and be happy too!

Kid whisperers see the world differently.



When I research and write about someone's strategy, I literally have to *become* that person and see the world through their eyes. It's more than just writing out the steps of a strategy; it's also understanding the worldview in which the person operates. This has been easy for me as I have written about study strategies of top students, marketing strategies of top marketers, and copywriting strategies of top advertisers. These are all topics I innately understood; the topic of parenting with Heather was different.

In working with Heather, I realized that she sees the world of adults and children completely differently than most of us do. She sees the world between parents and children as a dance—a co-creation—where both parties are equal in their right to create and express themselves in the relationship and in the world.

She sees herself as a parent, walking hand in hand alongside her child and enjoying the ride next to them. She sees children as even more capable than adults, here to teach us and not the other way around. She doesn't believe in punishment, rewards, time-outs, or the use of the word "no" with children. She has far more effective ways of creating the experiences she wants with them.

This book is the result of hundreds of hours of interviewing, discussing, and understanding how Heather approaches children. It took over a year to create—by far the longest it has taken to complete any of the other books on "genius strategies" that I have written.

It took a long time but not because it was hard to understand *what* Heather did. I had to completely shift how I viewed the relationship between adults and children so I could communicate it effectively to you. I had to change my worldview so I could truly see things through Heather's eyes. I had to reprogram just about every belief I had acquired around parenting and build a new model for how to view parents and children. I can honestly say that I love Heather's worldview so much more than the one from which I was initially operating.

For example, I was interviewing Heather one day and trying, for the dozenth time, to understand what she meant by a phrase that she had said over 100 times in the past few days:

“I always hold children in their greatness. I remember who they really are.”

I quizzed her by asking, “Heather, how can you hold a child in their greatness when they haven’t yet achieved anything that would make them great?”

In my mind, “greatness” was reserved for people like Walt Disney, Mother Teresa, or Steve Jobs—people who had made great contributions and achieved something on this planet.

“I always hold children in their greatness. I remember who they really are.”

Heather looked at me and answered simply, “Do you think greatness comes from achieving; that once you’ve achieved something, then you are great? I look at children as great and, because they are great, they are able to achieve things.”

I was speechless.

It was the smallest reframe, and yet it completely changed my whole worldview in an instant. I had it backwards the whole time! In working with Heather over the past year, I have had this experience over and over again. She would say something small that would shift how I was raised to think.

Since meeting Heather, I have probably uttered these words a thousand times: “You know, I never really thought of it *that way* before!”

How does this book work?

The following chapters break down the strategies step by step, and give explanations and examples to offer you the opportunity to explore and sample techniques that might help you raise a happy child ... and be happy too!

This information is offered so you can try it on, test it, explore it, and modify it to fit your needs and situation—all with a desire to ultimately help make

the parenting and child-rearing experiences fun, lighthearted, meaningful, and expansive. These techniques and suggestions have been practiced (and perfected) for years and with many children.

While reading this book, my great hope is that you will have many moments where you get a chance to think differently and try on another way of viewing the world and children. You may find that, like me, your belief system and how you view the world is different from Heather's. I invite you to ask yourself which belief would feel better to hold: hers or yours. In every instance where I asked myself this question, I decided that it felt better to share Heather's belief and view of the world, so I shifted my thinking.

Parenting is a large topic. Our goal is to provide parents everywhere with a model of parenting—an approach—that will work with every child, in every situation, every time. This book is about the *ingredients* that every parent can bring to every parenting situation. It's kind of like Mexican food, where the same five ingredients can be mixed a thousand ways to get totally different recipes.

Heather cooks with five ingredients in every parenting situation and combines them differently based on the scenario or situation:

1. Choose the Energy You Bring to Every Situation
2. Honor Your Feelings First and Then Your Child's
3. Focus on What You *Do* Want
4. Honor Every Choice Your Child Makes
5. Remind Your Child of Their Greatness ... Always

We've organized this book into four parts:

- In *Part 1: Decide Who You Are as a Parent*, we set the stage for parenting and offer an opportunity to really think about what you want your role to be in your child's life.
- In *Part 2: Discover the 5 Ingredients for Parenting Success*, we look at each ingredient to bring to every parenting moment with your child.
- In *Part 3: Put Happiness into Action*, we'll combine all of the ingredients so you can see them in action (and we'll give you a few staple phrases that can be used in many situations).

- In *Part 4: Feel Like a Parenting Pro with These Proven Scripts*, we'll share 22 specific scenarios—with carefully honed scripts—that you can use with your child to get amazing results.

After working with over 30,000 children for 25 years, I've discovered that Heather has mastered the words, the body language, the tone of voice, and the approach. I've tested her techniques with my own nieces and nephews and, when I used the exact techniques, I got the same results as she gets.

This is a different kind of parenting book. Heather and I invite you to share in a new model for parenting—one where old ways of discipline are tossed out the window, and where love and innate greatness trumps all.

Meet us!

We've shared many step-by-step techniques and scripts, and included links to videos to see them in action. You can click on this Quick Response Code (using a code reader on your phone) or follow the URL link to our site to see the videos.

Check out this Introduction video



or visit

www.raiseahappychild.com/intro-video