

# Taking Back CHILDHOOD

A Proven Road Map for  
Raising Confident, Creative,  
Compassionate Kids

NANCY CARLSSON-PAIGE, Ed.D.



A PLUME BOOK

## TAKING BACK CHILDHOOD

NANCY CARLSSON-PAIGE, ED.D., is a professor of early childhood education and conflict resolution at Lesley University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Her work has been featured in *Time*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *USA Today*, and on NPR, the Discovery Channel, and ABC. Visit her at [www.nancycarlssonpaige.org](http://www.nancycarlssonpaige.org).

“*Taking Back Childhood* brims with practical advice for the challenges parents face today. Nancy Carlsson-Paige speaks with emotional wisdom.”

---

—Daniel Goleman, author of the *New York Times* bestsellers *Emotional Intelligence* and *Social Intelligence*

“Practical advice for parents who want to build better—nonviolent, caring, creative—relationships with their children.”

—*Publishers Weekly*

“If you are like most parents, you’re worried about the new realities of childhood—violence, sexualization, the speed-up of daily life, materialism—topics that are not adequately covered in the classic parenting guides. Nancy Carlsson-Paige’s brilliant new book shows parents how to navigate the treacherous waters of our culture. As you read it, I suspect it will not only profoundly affect how you parent, but also how you live your own life. *Taking Back Childhood* deserves to take its place among the classics, read and reread by parents everywhere.”

—Juliet B. Schor, author of *Born to Buy*; professor of sociology, Boston College

---

# Taking Back CHILDHOOD

A Proven Road Map for  
Raising Confident, Creative,  
Compassionate Kids

NANCY CARLSSON-PAIGE, Ed.D.



A PLUME BOOK

PLUME

Published by the Penguin Group

Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, U.S.A. • Penguin Group (Canada), 90 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 700, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4P 2Y3 (a division of Pearson Penguin Canada Inc.) • Penguin Books Ltd., 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England • Penguin Ireland, 25 St. Stephen's Green, Dublin 2, Ireland (a division of Penguin Books Ltd.) • Penguin Group (Australia), 250 Camberwell Road, Camberwell, Victoria 3124, Australia (a division of Pearson Australia Group Pty. Ltd.) • Penguin Books India Pvt. Ltd., 11 Community Centre, Panchsheel Park, New Delhi – 110 017, India • Penguin Group (NZ), 67 Apollo Drive, Rosedale, North Shore 0632, New Zealand (a division of Pearson New Zealand Ltd.) • Penguin Books (South Africa) (Pty.) Ltd., 24 Sturdee Avenue, Rosebank, Johannesburg 2196, South Africa

Penguin Books Ltd., Registered Offices: 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

Published by Plume, a member of Penguin Group (USA) Inc. Previously published in a Hudson Street Press edition.

First Plume Printing, March 2009

Copyright © Nancy Carlsson-Paige, 2008

All rights reserved

 REGISTERED TRADEMARK—MARCA REGISTRADA

The Library of Congress has catalogued the Hudson Street Press edition as follows:

Carlsson-Paige, Nancy.

Taking back childhood : helping your kids thrive in a fast-paced, media-saturated, violence-filled world / Nancy Carlsson-Paige. p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN: 978-1-101-21392-6

1. Children and violence—United States. 2. Mass media and children—United States. 3. Video games and children—United States. 4. Play—United States. 5. Toys—United States—Psychological aspects. 6. Child development—United States. I. Title.

HQ784.V55C375 2008

649'.70973—dc22

20070424

Without limiting the rights under copyright reserved above, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form, or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise) without the prior written permission of both the copyright owner and the above publisher of this book.

#### PUBLISHER'S NOTE

While the author has made every effort to provide accurate telephone numbers and Internet addresses at the time of publication, neither the publisher nor the author assumes any responsibility for errors, or for changes that occur after publication. Further, publisher does not have any control over and does not assume any responsibility for author or third-party websites or their content.

The scanning, uploading, and distribution of this book via the Internet or via any other means without the permission of the publisher is illegal and punishable by law. Please purchase only authorized electronic editions, and do not participate in or encourage electronic piracy of copyrighted materials. Your support of the author's rights is appreciated.

#### AUTHOR'S NOTE

The actual names of the parents and children whose stories and quotes fill this book are used whenever possible. In some cases, however, to respect the preferences of the individuals mentioned, names have been changed.

BOOKS ARE AVAILABLE AT QUANTITY DISCOUNTS WHEN USED TO PROMOTE PRODUCTS OR SERVICES. FOR INFORMATION PLEASE WRITE TO PREMIUM MARKETING DIVISION, PENGUIN GROUP (USA) INC., 375 HUDSON STREET, NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10014.

To the memory of Jesse McKie,  
and his spirit of creativity, humor, and love,  
alive in every child.

---

# Acknowledgments

---

Writing a book is a collaborative venture and I have many people to thank. I am deeply grateful to all of the parents who generously agreed to be interviewed for this book and who so willingly shared their personal stories and reflections on the challenges of raising children in these difficult times.

I am grateful to the countless children I've worked with and observed in classrooms and families over the course of my career, and the many in my large extended family—I have learned from all of you, and to those whose stories and examples fill these pages, I am especially grateful. Most profoundly, I thank my grandchildren—Jackson, Miles, Alexia, and Isabella—you are the backbone of this book and without you, it wouldn't exist. For over a decade, our interactions—intimate, sometimes challenging, always precious—have allowed me to see, with the widened lens and open heart of a grandparent, how an approach guided by child development and creative conflict resolution insights bears positive fruit. Thank you for agreeing so generously to be in this book (and to your parents for their permission).

To my sons, Kyle and Matt, you have always been my greatest (and toughest) teachers, and your wives, Lori and Luciana, I thank each one of you for supporting my work and this book. I am so grateful that you trusted me to tell your personal stories where I saw fit.

I want to express my deep appreciation to my agent, Todd Shuster, who envisioned this book before I did and stuck with it from months into years, helping to shape and hone it into a cohesive form with infinite patience. You set the bar high and held to it, always with kindness and encouragement; I am sure this book would not have reached fruition without you.

I also want to express my gratitude to those who read early drafts of specific chapters and gave me their feedback and encouragement—Lynne Hall, Ethel McConaghy, Joyce Shortt, and Roslyn Zinn. I am especially grateful to Betty Burkes and Lynne Hurdle-Price for reading the chapters pertaining to discipline and culture and engaging in a dialogue about them that without doubt resulted in a better and more inclusive book.

I feel particularly indebted to three colleagues who, through collaboration and friendship, have influenced my view of the world and my work. Diane Levin, my first source of inspiration about the thrilling potential of progressive education, who later joined me to build a perspective on media's power in children's lives and pen countless pages, makes an immeasurable contribution to this book. My deep thanks to Linda Lantieri, who has stretched me to see how children's social and emotional learning extends into brain activity and spirituality, and who repeatedly challenges me to transcend the limits of my own thinking and being. Thanks also to you, Linda, for reading and commenting on [chapter 8](#). I am also grateful to William Kreidler, under whose tutelage I first witnessed the powerful techniques of creative conflict resolution. Bill—we are carrying on your inspired work that was so ahead of its time.

I wish to thank Joel Segel for his invaluable role in helping to structure the ideas in this book into a coherent whole. And I am truly grateful to Chris Kochansky, whose editing skill, as well as friendship and wisdom, eased me through the final stages of producing a manuscript. And for their help in tracking down specific studies and background material, I would also like to thank Joanne Cantor, Josh Golin, Susan Linn, and Juliet Schor.

I am grateful to Luke Dempsey, editor in chief at Hudson Street Press, for his support and enthusiasm for this project, and to Danielle Friedman, for her skilled and sensitive editing and careful

guidance throughout production. It has been a pure pleasure to work with you both. I also appreciate the contributions of ~~Melissa Jacoby, Abigail Powers, Susan Schwartz, Liz Keenan, Marie Coolman, and Clare Ferraro~~. My sincere thanks go to all of you.

For many years I received financial support from Zell Draz that allowed me to do the research and thinking that are foundational to this book. I miss you, Zell; you'd be thrilled to see this book come out.

I thank my sister Judy whose moral support, so freely given and unbeknownst to her, came at critical moments during the evolution of this book.

My deepest thanks go to my husband, Doug, grounded and wise adviser and spiritual guide. No one else read every single word of every single draft of every single chapter for more than three years running and no one has ever believed in me as you do. As I've heard you say (and who knows better than you when a Bob Dylan line is needed?), "He not busy being born is busy dying."



# Contents

---

*Acknowledgments*

*Prologue*

Chapter 1: Taking Back Childhood

*What Our Kids Are Losing—and How to Get It Back*

Chapter 2: Through Their Eyes

*Child Development Theory in a Nutshell*

Chapter 3: Building Blocks, Dress-ups, and Kids' Own Stories

*Reclaiming Play and Imagination*

Chapter 4: No More Time-Outs

*Sharing Power with Kids*

Chapter 5: From *Spider-Man* to *Smackdown*

*Countering Media Violence and Stereotypes*

Chapter 6: All Ads, All the Time

*Teaching Your Kids to Talk Back to Consumerism*

Chapter 7: Might Does Not Make Right

*Resolving Conflicts Creatively*

Chapter 8: Love Above All

*Encouraging Empathy and Caring*

Chapter 9: When to Step In

*Helping Your Kids Build Positive Relationships*

Chapter 10: When Real Life Intervenes

*Nurturing Children's Sense of Security and Hope about the World*

Chapter 11: Small Acts, Big Changes

*Taking Action in the Wider World*



# Prologue

---

*I'm riding on the subway with my son Kyle and his two sons—my grandsons, Jackson and Miles, who are seven and four years old. We're on our way to the Garden of Peace in downtown Boston, a memorial established to commemorate victims of homicide. Today we'll attend the dedication ceremony. I turn to Kyle and ask, "Do Jack and Miles know where we're going?"*

*"Yes," answers Kyle. "I've told them we're going to a special place to remember people who've died."*

*"Do they know about Jesse?" I ask.*

*"Yes," says Kyle. "I've told them all about him."*

Jesse was my older son's beloved high school friend, who spent almost every afternoon at our house often sleeping on Kyle's floor at night. The two were inseparable, clowning and cavorting together in a way that made parents, teachers, and friends double over with laughter at their antics. One year Jesse came with us on our family vacation to New Hampshire. After we arrived, I had to go to the grocery store for provisions, and Kyle and my younger son, Matt, wanted to come with me, but Jesse chose to remain behind. When we got back an hour later we couldn't find him anywhere, and I was beginning to worry. But then we heard a commotion from high in a treetop, and when we looked up we saw Jesse perched on a branch, wearing a loincloth and covered in decorative body paint, hooting like a tropical bird. This was Jesse being Jesse—master of the unexpected, exhibiting once again his original, creative, and always hilarious wit.

Late one January night when Jesse was twenty years old, he was walking home from a friend's house in our neighborhood in Cambridge, Massachusetts. A van carrying five young men pulled up, and they told Jesse to give them his leather jacket, which he did. They then proceeded to stab him over and over again and left him to die in a snowbank. The lives of Judy and Todd, Jesse's wonderful parents, my life, my sons' lives, and the lives of everyone else who loved Jesse would never be the same. Now, fifteen years later, I open the newspaper in the morning and read about violent deaths by car bombings, terrorism, and war, and I know that every single death described on that one-dimensional page of newspaper holds a full-blown story of grief and lifelong sadness for family and friends just like us.

*We're getting off the subway now and walking to the Garden of Peace. Miles is asking me questions about Jesse: "Is his body lying down?" "Are the people who killed Jesse in jail?"*

*I feel grateful for my many years of study in early childhood development, which have taught me to answer Miles in concrete terms that will help him make better sense of things. And I know that behind Miles's question about whether Jesse's killers are in jail there might lie some anxiety about his own safety, so I reassure him that they are definitely in jail and not coming out.*

When I received the phone call telling me what had happened to Jesse, I was in the middle of a research project on conflict resolution among elementary school children. Since then, I've spoken with children in El Salvador who have not only lost family members in that country's bloody war but also witnessed the killings firsthand. I've visited with children in South Central Los Angeles who have seen shootings on the streets right outside their homes. I've conducted studies on violence in the media and how profoundly it affects children's play and social growth. And I've written five books and numerous articles on all of these subjects, which have occupied my mind and heart for more than twenty-five years.

Though I had begun studying children and violence long before Jesse's murder, it was his death that gave my work a new, more urgent and personal meaning. From that fateful day on, I've continually looked back at my work as a researcher and educator and asked, How did the young men

who killed Jesse come to do what they did that night?

~~There are many factors that lead young people to use violence. Some of these relate to the social and economic inequalities in our society that predispose certain of our youth to anger and conflict. But there are other factors, too. A colleague who works with me in peace education told me that the urban kids she was working with, who genuinely wanted to change their environment and their lives, had asked her *sincerely*, “If we don’t act violently, what do we do instead?”~~

To turn away from violence, we have to know what to put in its place. What these young people were asking for is the same thing that all children, regardless of their circumstances, need to know: how to think creatively, how to communicate with others effectively, how to see things from another point of view, how to work out conflicts without using coercion or force, how to build relationships based on empathy and love. But there are trends in contemporary society that are making it very difficult for all children to learn these things. We have seen many worrisome examples in recent years of young people who shoot classmates or inflict pain on others without any apparent feelings for them. In this book I offer a view of how these social trends are undermining childhood today and of what you can do—the many steps you can take—to counteract them and give all children a better chance at living healthy, creative lives. And as you consider these ideas, I hope you will see that the prescriptions for “taking back childhood” are the same ones that will help bring into being a more just and peaceful world for all people.

# Taking Back Childhood

*What Our Kids Are Losing—and How to Get It Back*

From where I am sitting today, I am profoundly concerned about our nation's children. Life is far more challenging for children and parents than it was only a generation ago, when I was raising my kids. These days, a host of social forces and trends is putting tremendous pressure on children and their parents: Entertainment media are too often replacing active, child-centered play and social time with peers and family. Constant depictions of violence, aggression, and disrespect toward others are immersing kids in a world where "might makes right." Exposure to frightening news reports that only seem to confirm the violent messages pervading kids' entertainment leave many children fearful and insecure. Aggressive marketing campaigns aimed at kids are pushing a host of products, toys, and values on children, teaching them to value "having" over "being" from an early age. Economic and time pressures on parents are leading them to quick-fix approaches to discipline and to rely on "electronic babysitters" like TVs, Game Boys, and Xboxes. An overemphasis on standardized tests in our schools is robbing children of genuine learning opportunities and resulting in the loss of unstructured play, arts activities, and social time, all of which are essential to their well-being. Childhood as we know it is being stolen from our children, and it is time for us, as concerned parents, grandparents, and citizens, to take it back.

This book will explore how the social currents described above are threatening three basic needs of childhood—children's need for *creative play*, for *security*, and for *positive relationships* with adults and other children. It will also offer many steps we adults can take to restore these essential building blocks of healthy child development. I will share my years of experience as a child development professor and lifelong observer of children—not only of my own, but also children in classrooms and communities across the nation and the globe. I will also present stories from the many parents I interviewed for this book over the course of two years, beginning in June 2003. These moms and dads—racially and ethnically diverse, young and older, from urban, suburban, and rural areas—told me about the challenges they face as parents in today's world. I gained much insight from these conversations and have many stories to share in the pages ahead—stories that I hope you will find helpful and relevant to your own experiences raising kids.

Many of the parents I interviewed described the world they grew up in as remarkably different from the one their own kids face today. Rob, a forty-five-year-old father from New York, said he played outside "all day long" as a child: "We had a neighborhood gang. We all played together—mostly I remember a game we made up called 'Capture.' The rules kept changing, but basically you had to hide and then run like heck if someone found you." Mary Kay, a mother from Connecticut with four daughters, told me how she loved walking home from school because she could "process the day and unwind. I remember the trees," she said, "when the leaves would change—and the dogwoods—when they bloomed they made a beautiful umbrella over me." J.B., a dad who grew up in Florida, said "We played in the streets. I don't remember watching TV when I was young. Our family played games at night after dinner." And David, who drives a cab in Boston and has two sons a generation apart

(Errol is forty-two years old and Malcolm is thirteen) said, “My older kid roamed and ran outside, chased garter snakes and grasshoppers. Kids would come to the house and they’d want to go outside. But now kids want to stay inside! They aren’t connecting to a lot of things. They’re being fed through a screen. They want to be on the computer all the time. What the TV says, they think that’s what it is.”

Just as David and so many parents realize, today’s fast-paced technology- and media-saturated society is undermining an integral part of childhood, namely direct experiences with the real world—with peers, with adults, and with activities of all kinds. In order to learn and grow, children need to connect—to their own creativity and initiative, to each other, to family, and to nature. When Rob and his pals played “Capture,” they were inventing and negotiating the rules of their game, problem solving, and using their imaginations. New developments in brain research suggest that neurons grow and connect in the brain as children actively engage in this kind of play. Science, therefore, confirms what we know intuitively: that creative play is essential to the development of healthy minds.

But what specific kinds of experience are beneficial for our children? And how can we know how to meet our children’s needs in these challenging times? In my view, the answers lie, above all, in the rich body of child development theory and research—from Jean Piaget’s work on play and learning to Mary Ainsworth’s ideas on attachment to Erik Erikson’s articulation of the stages of life—that have guided me for over thirty years as a parent, teacher, and now grandparent. The pioneering work of these and other theorists has shown that there are universal, predictable sequences of growth and change that occur in children during the first decade of life. Of course each child is also a unique person with an individual personality, temperament, learning style, and cultural background. But knowledge of the developmental changes that occur in children can be a tremendously valuable guide in our dealings with individual kids. This child development perspective has taught me how to talk to children about difficult subjects like violence, death, and divorce. It has helped me understand why a two-year-old might be throwing a tantrum over putting on her shoes and what might help her cope; why a five-year-old is having trouble separating from his mom in kindergarten and what he might need to feel comfortable without her; why an eight-year-old is slinging insults at her friend without apparent empathy and what might persuade her to stop. Knowing more about *children’s development* can be a great resource for you, too. It’s not a cookbook kind of knowledge, but instead is information that will help you understand how children see the world and what they need to thrive in it. You can interpret and use the ideas differently depending on your family, culture, and personal situation. But just like the Chinese proverb says, “Give me a fish and I eat for a day. Teach me to fish and I eat for a lifetime,” these are ideas that can guide you in the moment-to-moment decisions you make and actions you take with children every day.

## **The Need for Creative Play**

When I begin to examine what’s missing from contemporary childhood, the first thing I note is the absence of creative play. All of the great child development theorists, from Lev Vygotsky and Jean Piaget to Anna Freud and Erik Erikson, saw play as vital to children’s social, emotional, and cognitive growth—and perhaps the most important tool our children have to work through new experiences, ideas, and feelings. Over the course of my career, I’ve witnessed hundreds of children using play as a vehicle for making sense of the confusing world around them. One of the most striking examples that comes to mind involves a kindergarten student I taught twenty-five years ago named Ruby. In the second half of the school year, Ruby fell ill with spinal meningitis (or “spider meningitis,” as she would later tell her classmates), and was out of school for at least three weeks. Upon her return to the classroom, she headed straight to the dramatic play corner where I had set up a “hospital,” put on a

white coat, and was soon leaning over Sam, one of her favorite play partners and now her “patient.” I remember Ruby listening to his heart with a stethoscope, giving him a “shot,” and directing him to eat some “medicine”—a bowl full of plastic cubes she’d mixed up just for him. And I remember her spending much of the next few weeks in the same play area, hovering over one willing patient after another. Finally, very slowly, Ruby began spending more time in other parts of the classroom, much as she had before she got sick.

Ruby’s dramatic play during this period was vital for helping her work through her hospital experience. Real play is remarkably creative: a child can be playwright, actor, and director all in one. Every child’s play is different, because every child’s life experience is different. As she played, Ruby was using scenes she remembered from her actual hospital stay, but mixing them with ideas from her own imagination. Ruby’s play was completely original. Only she knew what she needed to do, and only through this particular play could Ruby gain a sense of mastery over what she had been through, restore her inner balance, and find her confidence once again.

Though we may barely notice it, this is ideally what children are always doing in play. They are taking aspects of their experience and transforming them into something new, moving in the direction of equilibrium and healing throughout the process. As they create their own scenarios and narratives, they come to understand and integrate what they’ve already experienced in life.

Given the vital importance of play in allowing children to make sense of an increasingly frightening world, it is particularly troubling that it has become so rare today to find a child who uses her imagination the way Ruby did in the hospital corner. Along with my research partner, Professor Diane Levin of Wheelock College in Boston, I have conducted three separate studies polling hundreds of teachers across the country, and all have shown that starting with the deregulation of children’s television in 1984 (more on this below) and continuing apace, kids’ play has become far less creative with children mimicking what they’ve seen in the media, rather than coming up with it by themselves.

That play is no longer the personally inventive process it once was is no surprise when we consider just how much time children spend absorbing media of all kinds. According to a national Kaiser Family Foundation survey completed in March 2005, today, eight- to eighteen-year-olds spend an average of nearly six and a half hours per day consuming media. Even kids in the two- to seven-year-old age group now average about three hours per day of “screen time.” And even though the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children under the age of two not watch television at all (because of concerns that TV affects early brain growth and the development of social, emotional, and cognitive skills), a 2003 Kaiser survey found that in a typical day, 68 percent of all children under two use screen media—for an average of just over two hours. Twenty-six percent of these under-tuos have TVs in their bedrooms.

But it’s not just the quantity of media, and television in particular, that has changed from the previous generation to this one. When my sons were young, there were federal regulations that protected kids from the overcommercialization of children’s television. It was illegal to market toys and products linked to television shows, so there weren’t any “single-purpose” toys like action figures and props that are wired to say or do the very same words or actions kids have seen on the screen (which can greatly inhibit creative play). Advertising on kids’ TV was regulated as well, so that the typical child was exposed to far fewer than the current average of forty thousand commercials per year. In 1978, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) even decided to ban advertising to children under the age of eight altogether, but that same year, Congress, reacting to pressure from corporate lobbyists, voted to remove the FTC’s regulating power altogether. And soon after, in 1984, came the final nail in the coffin: the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) under President Reagan rapidly removed all of the regulations it had put in place over earlier decades to protect children from overcommercialized TV. Thus were born countless popular TV shows that ultimately served as ads for

entire lines of toys and products—like *G.I. Joe*, *Care Bears*, and *Transformers*.

By the mid-1980s, then, businesses were freely selling to kids through TV and profiting handsomely from it. Since then and with virtually no federal regulations since, marketing to children has escalated exponentially and is now channeled through Hollywood movies, video and computer games, fast-food chains, and even schools. Today six media conglomerates own most of the media we consume and exercise almost unlimited control over the images children are exposed to. Corporations spend \$15 billion annually on marketing targeted at children—about two and a half times more than they spent in 1992. Huge marketing campaigns are tied to single themes that push a single set of characters, scripted dialogue, and mindset to children across all of the major media sectors. As my research has shown, it has become increasingly difficult for children to discover their own imaginations and create their own play in a childhood culture so dominated by these media and marketing forces.

Zoe, a young mom in a suburb of Boston, recently described to me the way she felt that consumer culture had affected her children's ability to think creatively and individually. After Zoe took Sophia, four, and Charlie, seven, to see the movie *Finding Nemo*, they encountered the film and its products everywhere. "We saw *Finding Nemo* posters on the bus, *Finding Nemo* toys, backpacks, books, coloring books, stickers; we went to *Finding Nemo* birthday parties." Zoe paused for a minute. "There's a part of you and your children that is in danger of being sucked into this machine that is going to feed you the movie, give you the hat and the T-shirt, buy you the toy, and then show you how to play with it. And that is what you are going to do—have this prepackaged experience. It will make the children less flexible thinkers. It will limit their imagination." As Zoe spoke, I thought to myself, "It may also undermine their academic progress and stymie their development into healthy, freethinking adults."

Unfortunately, if parents like Zoe turn to the school system to foster the type of imaginative play that is being stamped out by so many of the media and products marketed to children today, they may be sorely disappointed. As a professor of early childhood education who has spent twenty-five years helping dedicated people learn how to teach and encourage children, I am truly shocked by what is happening to primary education in America today. The federal government now mandates that all ninety-one thousand public schools in the United States be rated on the basis of their students' standardized test scores. Schoolchildren from grades three through eight are required to take these tests, which are tied to harsh penalties if district scores fall below a certain level. This emphasis on tests has changed the focus of our classrooms from creativity and independent thinking to rote memorization and regurgitation.

Facing overwhelming pressure to raise scores on these tests, our teachers today too often resort to "teaching to the test," a classroom strategy that ignores the aspects of learning that matter most—higher-order thinking, problem solving, creativity, and the all-important social and emotional components that are intertwined with learning. I recently met with a roomful of second-grade teachers in a large Miami public school who told me they had no choice but to spend all class time drilling kids in scripted lessons that cater to Florida's statewide standardized test. The focus on academic skills and scripted teaching, alarmingly, has pushed down even to preschools and kindergartens, where valuable experiences like play, arts-based activities, and social interactions are disappearing.

My friend Roz stopped by my house the day she decided to stop teaching kindergarten in the Boston public schools after more than thirty years. As she burst through my front door, Roz said, "I quit today. I can't stand to see what's happening to kids. Kindergarten is nothing like it used to be. The blocks, water table, science corner with birds nests and feathers are all gone—there's no time. It all learn the alphabet and reading and writing."

What is fueling this revamping of our nation's schools is a drive to close the "achievement gap"—



the disparity in test scores between blacks and Hispanics and their white and Asian peers—which so many of us want to make into a thing of the past. But we can't close the achievement gap by taking from children what we know they need for healthy development and academic success—approaches that have proven successful through decades of compelling research and experience that are now backed up by findings from neuroscience about how the brain works.

Many of the parents who participated in my recent study told me upsetting stories about the stress their children feel in this climate of high-stakes testing. Luisandra, the mother of six-year-old Beatriz, told me that the Miami public schools had informed her that Beatriz would have to begin her first-grade school year in mid-August, two weeks earlier than usual, because they needed more time to get kids ready for standardized tests.

Nothing has made sense to Beatriz and it has been almost a month of school. My mom took Beatriz to school the other day and they were having a spelling test that day. Beatriz can't spell. She can't even read or write. How can they give a spelling test to a child who doesn't know how to read and write? When my mom turned to say good-bye to Beatriz, she saw her eyes were filled with tears. She was scared, just scared. She said, "I don't want to go in there. I don't remember anything. I don't remember any of the words." She is six and she is terrified of a spelling test.

Others parents talked about the inordinate amount of homework their kids are typically assigned—an endless assortment of drills and exercises like the ones they have to do in school. Hannah's son Warren is in the fourth grade and she said this:

Every day it's the same. We pick Warren up at "after school" at six o'clock, come home, have dinner, and then from seven to eight it's a scene—a horrible scene. He doesn't want to do the homework—he's had no downtime, he's tired. We have to make him do it. Then he starts saying, "I can't do this! I hate math! I'm stupid!" (That's the part I feel the worst about . . . he keeps saying he's stupid.) Then he runs into his room and cries and cries.

Warren, like other children, needs school programs that nurture his mind, heart, body, and spirit. Kids need active learning approaches; they need to build, draw, and play together and to develop the many social skills critical to success in this life.

Contemplating the disappearance, in district after district, of art, play, music, recess, and field trips, I think about my two sons, both now grown and making their contributions to the world as artists: one as a sculptor, one as an actor. In first grade, Kyle brought home his drawings every day: fantastic, vibrant designs and images, many of which I've kept all these years. Matt spent much of kindergarten in the dramatic play area of his classroom, putting on dress-up items and acting out all sorts of pretend scenarios. I wonder now how they would have fared in today's schools, most of which are stripped of play areas that encourage the visual and dramatic arts. If my sons attended public schools today, they would learn that their talents are not valued; they'd also have a much harder time bringing their creative light into the world.

For years now I have been saying in my books and presentations that children's play has become "an endangered species." The play that Ruby invented—a healing kind that sprang from her own imagination and needs—has become a missing resource in most kids' lives today. Fortunately, you can do so much—when you know which toys, materials, and conditions best stimulate and inspire children's minds—to reclaim this missing resource for your sons and daughters. In the chapters ahead I will suggest many steps you can take to help children rediscover their capacity to cope—and to thrive—through rich and imaginative play.

## **The Need for Security**

A second bedrock of healthy childhood development is every young person's need to feel secure.

Absolutely critical to children's well-being, a sense of security is rooted in the trust that babies develop from the first days of life when they learn that they can count on their caretakers. In his theory on the stages of life, Erik Erikson put trust at the very center of development—kids really can grow and develop fully if they don't trust that adults can care for them and that they are safe and secure.

Even when children have a basic sense that they are loved and cared for, life events can shake the sense of security. I remember Gretchen, a five-year-old in my kindergarten class in the late 1970s whose parents went through a divorce. The normally effervescent Gretchen began coming to school reluctantly, crying and clinging to her mom. She was withdrawn and uninterested in the painting and building she normally loved to do. When our class planned a field trip, Gretchen didn't want to go—she preferred to remain back at school rather than venture outside and onto the bus. The world that Gretchen depended on, like that of so many kids who go through a divorce, was turned upside down for a while. Her sense of security was temporarily disrupted and she needed a lot of extra reassurance and support at school.

Of course, most children experience life events—a death, a parent's depression, the loss of a friendship—that may rattle their sense of security. But in my view, there's a toxic source of distress in the life of every child in America today: their incessant exposure to violent and scary media images, in both entertainment and the news media.

In the 1970s, violence on television was so minimal that I rarely had to worry about what my children might see on the small screen. They watched shows on public television like *Sesame Street*, and cartoons about superheroes like Superman, Shazam, and Wonder Woman, who used their super powers to rescue people. Yet today, a study by the American Medical Association confirms that 75 percent of parents in our nation are concerned about the abundance of violence shown on children's television. And it's no wonder: Kids are exposed to more violent content in children's programming than adults are in all of prime time, according to a 2006 Parents Television Council report. The PTC analyzed entertainment programming for five- to ten-year-olds and found an average of 7.86 violent incidents per hour (as compared to 4.71 violent incidents per hour in adult prime-time programming). Analysts even separated out the "cartoony violence" many kids grew up on a generation ago (like an anvil falling on Roadrunner's head) from other types such as "physical violence" and "use of weapons." And still, even after removing the cartoon violence, they were left with an average of 6.30 violent incidents per hour on kids' TV. And it's worth repeating here that the problem today isn't just that there's more violence on children's television. It's also that the violence kids see on the screen gets a firmer, deeper grip on their psyches because it's replicated in the toys and products they interact with in their everyday lives.

When I see the extent of media violence that children are exposed to on a regular basis—through TV, movies, video and computer games, and weaponlike toys directly linked to violent media—I feel enraged that this could be happening, when there is no question that it robs children of one of their most basic needs. If only the adults who make and market these shows could understand that children don't view the violence they see on the screen as adults do. Violent and scary media are particularly detrimental for young children because during the early years, as child development theory explains, children don't clearly distinguish between fantasy and reality. They cannot be sure that what they see on the screen won't really happen to them—that the monster or the bad guy leering at them won't come right off the screen, if not now, maybe later. And especially before the age of seven or eight, it's very hard for children to understand the violence they see in a larger context of character, motive, and plot, so its impact on them is far more graphic and immediate than it is on us—and also, more lasting. Knowing this must be part of what has led Dr. Alvin Poussaint, professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, to say that exposing children to violent images can have a similar impact to "physic

abuse or living in a war zone.” “None of us,” he says, “would willingly put a child into those situations, yet we do not act to keep them from watching movies about things we would be horrified have them see off the screen.”

There is a growing body of research showing that viewing frightening media can cause increased fearfulness and mistrust in children, and this often extends well beyond the time of viewing. A random national survey conducted in 1999 reported that 62 percent of parents with children between the ages of two and seventeen said that their child had been frightened by something he or she saw in a TV program or movie, and this fear, according to other studies, can last for days, months, or even years.

I have spoken with countless children who seem upset and scared by something they’ve seen in the media, whether real or pretend. My own grandson Miles, who otherwise has every modicum of security in his life that I would wish for every child, has told me about TV images that frighten him. Here’s what Miles told me one day when he was four years old about *Digimon*, a children’s cartoon full of shooting and fighting that airs on the Cartoon Network:

Miles: Have you seen *Digimon*?

Me: No, tell me about it.

Miles: It’s very scary.

Me: Why?

Miles: A bad guy has arrows that shoot out of his hands. It’s scary because it has too much scary things. It has fire, and a Digimon gets stuck. When he’s attacked, he jumps in the air. The lasers are very gold and on the tip it’s very sharp.

Me: So it has a lot of scary things like fire and sharp lasers. . . .

Miles: When I’m in the hall, I see little footprints and when I go upstairs, I run to get my plastic sword.

Me: Why?

Miles: To fight the bad guys when I’m up there. They only come at night. They don’t like the morning.

For Miles, the “too much scary things” on the cartoon upset him partly because, from his perspective, these “bad guys” aren’t just contained inside the TV: they can come out of the television set and into his house at night. Miles’s feeling of security is threatened by something as seemingly innocent as a cartoon, and his experience is by no means unique.

Many of the parents I interviewed in connection with the research for this book described specific instances of media violence that frightened their children. Luisa, a twenty-nine-year-old mother from Miami, told me about her seven-year-old daughter, Raquel, who was watching a children’s program on TV when an ad for a horror movie for adults came on. According to Luisa, Raquel immediately became obsessed with the ad. She would sit at the top of the stairs every night, unable to go to sleep because she was afraid of the “creepy, scary voice” she heard and “the screaming.”

Another parent, Jonathan, a forty-one-year-old television executive who lives in New York City, told me that his five-year-old daughter, Eliza, began having “frightening nightmares” after seeing the movie *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. “There’s a scene in the movie where squirrels devour a little girl named Veruca Salt,” said Jonathan. “A couple of days after seeing the movie, Eliza woke up in tears saying, ‘I dreamed about squirrels, Daddy. I dreamed that I was Veruca Salt and that there were squirrels running all over me and hurting me everywhere.’” When I asked Jonathan how this made him feel, he told me, “I felt so bad that I had brought my daughter to a G-rated film in which the characters seemed indifferent to the violent things happening around them.” As Jonathan knows, even G-rated movies can be violent. Indeed, a recent study from the Harvard School of Public Health found

a “ratings creep” in movies rated by the Motion Picture Association of America: today’s PG-13 movies, for example, actually have the same amount of violence as R-rated movies from a decade ago.

Even when we do succeed in shielding our children from violent pop culture, its influence can often be felt through other children. Dawn, a forty-five-year-old mom who lives in a suburb of Boston, told me about five-year-old Donte, a classmate of her son, Rodney. Donte, she explained to me, is “obsessed with the movie *The Matrix*.”

His parents work and his teenage sister takes care of him; she rents and watches the *Matrix* videos over and over again. Donte is wound up, like a spinning top—he’s a nervous, obsessed child. . . . He clings onto Rodney and tells him all the time about *Matrix*. Rodney gets upset that Donte won’t leave him alone and he gets scared by what Donte tells him.

While there are complex reasons why kids today are exposed to so much violent media, changes in family patterns over the last generation play a large role. When I was a working mom in the 1970s, 6 percent of mothers stayed home full-time. By the year 2000, in contrast, two-thirds of the children in America had working moms. Between then and now, as hundreds of thousands of American women entered the workforce during the 1980s and 1990s, no parallel government programs emerged to support two-income families. Unlike many western industrialized countries, the United States has no system of quality national childcare or after-school care. In the hours they spend without parents, many children have to fend for themselves, filling empty hours with screen activities, unmonitored by an adult. Eliza, a third-grade teacher in a low-income community in New Mexico, had the kids in her class make charts of the TV shows they watch every day. “All of the kids in my class have working parents,” she told me. “They watch five to six hours of television a day, seven to eight hours on weekends.” This means, of course, that the kids in Eliza’s class, like so many children in homes across America, are viewing multiple incidents of violence as they sit for long hours in front of the TV.

While it’s our poorest children who are watching even more TV than the average child, more affluent parents in our country now increasingly pack their children’s schedules with activities and classes from after school through dinnertime. Diaries of children’s daily activities reveal that American children ages twelve and younger now spend almost twice as much time in supervised, structured settings as did children two decades ago. Many kids are therefore leading exceedingly hectic lives with very little room for unstructured activities that aren’t driven by an adult agenda. These planned activities often replace “downtime”—quality daily time to play, draw, act, and re-create their experiences, feelings, and fears through symbolic play that our children need to rebalance themselves emotionally and physically (as explained in the previous section), and thus support their overall sense of security.

When parents finally do get home from work, they are often exhausted and yield to the screen to occupy their children. Betty, who for many years directed a Massachusetts elementary school, recently told me, “What parents don’t have is *time*. They have no time to reflect, to take care of themselves. They are under so much pressure. They need the TV to get a break, to make dinner, to entertain their kids while they get things done.” Many of the parents I interviewed for this book told me that because of their overburdened work lives, not only do they need the TV to occupy their kids, they often can’t take time to monitor what their kids are watching—programs that too often entail depictions of coercion and violence.

Then, too, this prevalent reliance upon media in our homes—the television that is on during mealtimes for 63 percent of American families—and in so many of our public spaces means that kids are also constantly hearing news about frightening real-life events in the world. I was present in a classroom in Boston in 2001 when a child blurted out to the whole class, “Did you know that a boy in the first grade shot a girl in his class with a gun?” One of the parents I interviewed for this book, Lataria, a Boston bus driver and mother of five kids under the age of ten, said she and her kids were

shaken by a recent news report of a bomb threat in the subway. Her daughter Alexis was supposed to go on a school field trip on the subway and began to ask, “Mommy, should I really be getting on a train after what happened? Why do people do stuff like that? What happened to the World Trade Center?” Lataria told me, “I didn’t tell her [this], but I was thinking, ‘Should I really let her go on a train?’ The things that my kids see, it bothers them and it has them wondering. I don’t want them to worry. I should be worried for them.”

Such exposure to real-world violence can be particularly detrimental to kids’s sense of security because kids tend to think of it in an egocentric way. I often wish I could impress this upon adults: children do not see what we see when they watch movies or TV. When adults hear news of a stabbing or a car bomb, we can think logically about the likelihood of these things happening to us. Children, in contrast, can easily imagine that these scary and dangerous events are imminently threatening to them. They can’t reason about their own safety in a larger context or separate themselves completely from what they’ve just seen or heard. In the next chapter, we’ll discuss children’s development in more depth, along with how it can shape kids’ perceptions of the world at different ages.

Finally, what also exacerbates the fear-invoking media images kids constantly see is their growing inability—or lack of available time—to use imaginative play to make sense of what they’ve just encountered. It’s a vicious cycle, with the media suppressing children’s creativity and then filling their heads with violent imagery that can only be interpreted sensibly through the very cognitive process—i.e., symbolic play—that it is replacing. In the chapters to come, I will suggest many everyday steps that we can take—from restricting screen time to supporting play, from “active” listening to trying better to view things through children’s eyes—to bolster the basic sense of security that our kids need to flourish even in our all too violent and frightening world.

## **The Need for Positive Relationships**

The final essential building block of healthy childhood development is positive relationships with adults and other children.

Decades ago, the Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget, in the course of outlining his theories about children’s intellectual development, recognized that children need healthy, positive social relationships in order to learn and grow into competent adults. More recently, proponents of “attachment theory” have focused in particular on the bonds that form very early on between an infant and his or her primary caregiver—most often the mother. From the first moments of life, say the attachment theorists, children seek nurturing relationships with their caregivers, and the strength of these relationships significantly shapes the way each child develops. These researchers have presented evidence that infants who don’t have strong attachments to their mothers, for example, explore and play less than those who do.

Based on my own research documenting the increase of violence in children’s behavior since federal deregulation of children’s television, I believe it has become increasingly difficult in today’s media-saturated culture for kids to create positive relationships with their parents and peers. Children today spend less time interacting with others at home and at school, and much more time absorbing antisocial messages from television programs and films, which too often glorify relationships built on coercion and force rather than on empathy and love.

I recently visited a home in Boston where two young children, having just finished breakfast, stood mesmerized a foot from the TV screen. The show that so captured their attention was *Power Rangers*, which portrays, on average, more than two hundred violent acts per hour. The boys, enthralled by the constant fighting and too young to clearly distinguish the difference between pretend and real

violence, were learning some powerful lessons from this show: that violence is a normal part of your life—you eat breakfast and then you watch people fight; that violence is how you settle conflicts; that the world is made up of “good guys” and “enemies”; that not only is hurting others okay—it’s entertaining and fun. Children are active learners: they take what they see and they try it out for themselves. So it’s no surprise that hundreds of teachers in my research have described kids reenacting with their peers the karate chops, pushing, and fighting they’ve seen on the screen. All too often, kids’ social relations spiral downward as they repeatedly use the negative behaviors they’ve seen and naturally want to try out.

Indeed, research conducted over the course of four decades has overwhelmingly shown a positive relationship between watching violent entertainment and real-life aggression. In its current policy statement on media violence, the American Academy of Pediatrics states that out of 3,500 research studies examining the relationship between violence in the media and violent behavior, all but 18 have shown a strong correlation. Other professional organizations such as the American Medical Association and the American Psychological Association have issued warnings: viewing entertainment violence increases aggression and antisocial behavior and desensitizes children to violence, hardening them to the pain inflicted on others. Nonetheless, even with these powerful findings, the media culture continues to barrage children with images and models of violence on a daily basis, and their social relationships are suffering as a result of it.

Studies show that violent video games, just like violent television programs, also serve to undermine children’s ability to form meaningful relationships. Yet an estimated 70 percent of children ages two to eighteen have access to video games at home, and the Kaiser Family Foundation survey found that half of all four- to six-year-olds have played them, a quarter of them regularly. Not surprisingly, many of the most popular games are violent. Julia, who is a first-grade teacher in Cambridge, Massachusetts, can tell that the six-year-old boys in her class play violent teen-oriented video games. “I find it a lot in their writing,” she said. “For example, Jeremy will write, ‘Michael came over my house to play and we played video games. I was Blood Master and he was Dragon Fly and I opened the dungeon and I took the sword and I killed him.’”

I was in a third-grade classroom recently when the subject of violent video games came up. The children started rattling off the names of the violent games they’ve played: *Dynasty Warriors 5*, *Helioattack II*, *Battlefront*, *Conquer*, *Warsmuggler*, *3 Foot Ninja*, *James Bond*. Excitedly, they described the games: “When you hit someone, their arms come off—or their legs or their head!” “You slice their legs and their stomach is cut open.” “The person goes splat and it’s bloody.” “The kid has a sword and slices other kids.” Eight of these children had seen *Grand Theft Auto III*—a “Mature”-rated first-person shooter game where players can shoot victims up close in the face or set them on fire with gasoline and watch them scream as they burn.

Arguably, video games foster aggression in kids even more than viewing violence on television because children playing video games are actively engaged in committing the violence. And through studies done at Kansas State University using magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), scientists have shown that playing video games alters brain chemistry: the brain treats entertainment violence as something real; it senses danger and activates the “fight-or-flight” response. In addition, the brain actually stores the violence in long-term memory, which may produce lasting ill effects on children’s minds—and on their ability to form lasting, meaningful relationships.

It is no accident, of course, that entertainment geared for teenagers and adults often finds an eager audience in young children; in fact, this entertainment is often marketed directly to younger kids. In September 2000, the Federal Trade Commission published a landmark report that exposed how the movie industry routinely uses countless unethical marketing practices to advertise to children under the ages considered appropriate by the industry’s own rating system. One common strategy to bring i

young children is to promote highly enticing violent toys, which are linked to movies—for teens and adults—rated PG-13 or R. The big media companies used this approach successfully with *Star Wars*, *Spider-Man*, *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Mummy*, *Tomb Raider*, *Starship Troopers*, and *X-Men*, to name just a few. I sat in a kindergarten classroom recently next to a little boy who ate a sandwich while gazing at the lurid image on his lunchbox: the character of Wolverine from *X-Men*, with his big muscles, sneering expression, and long, curving knife blades growing out of his hands.

Many of the parents I interviewed for this book say they feel discouraged by having to fight the media culture's influence on their children; they feel as if they are living in a society that is working not for, but against them and their kids. Lee, who lives in rural New Hampshire, described the violent video games, toys, and movies that pervade her eight-year-old son's peer culture. "It's too big a force for me to go against," Lee said. "Wherever Dylan goes, he has access to everything, and I can't control it. He's playing adult video games at other houses. It makes me really sad. I feel like I'm this tiny little island in a huge sea."

Sadly, it isn't only the violence absorbed through toys and media that threaten the positive relationships children need—it's also what kids are missing out on when they're glued to the screen. At my mother's eighty-fifth birthday party three years ago, I witnessed firsthand just what is lost when children become absorbed in screen time, whether violent or not. For the first time in over a year, all of my mother's children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren gathered in one place. It was a rare opportunity for the seven great-grandchildren to play together. Two of them, boys five and seven years old, spent much of their time playing video games in front of a gigantic screen. They therefore missed out on much of the social exchange that was going on among the cousins—the playing, inventing, and collaborating that usually occur when children are given the opportunity to interact spontaneously with one another. They also missed the natural learning that comes automatically when peers socialize together—figuring out how to communicate effectively, adjusting to other points of view, and solving problems as a group. These are the exchanges that help kids build the foundation they need for positive relationships.

The increased work demands on parents today add to the problem our kids already have of diminishing time spent in relationships. Research suggests that parents are now working longer and harder just to maintain their living standard—and spending less time with their children. Compared to the average American worker in 1969, today's earners put in an additional 163 hours per year, which adds up to an entire additional month of work each year. Then, too, the number of earners has grown exponentially, with the influx of American women into the workforce during the 1980s and 1990s. Even as we spend more time on the clock, however, wages among the working and middle classes have effectively stagnated in the last twenty-five years—and this while we see an ever-expanding gap in the distribution of wealth. (The top 1 percent of U.S. households now have more wealth than the bottom 90 percent combined.) For our children, the effects of these changes in the workplace are profound: over a thirty-year period, parental time with children has declined by 13 percent, according to a study done by New York University economist Edward Wolff. This, when we know from volume of research that quality time with parents is at the core of a healthy childhood.

Unfortunately, I have also observed that many parents today, because they are so overworked and pressed for time, end up resorting to quick-fix approaches to discipline that inadvertently reinforce the coercion model of relationships presented in television shows, video games, and movies. Paula, a fifty-one-year-old mother from Concord, New Hampshire, told me about a recent—and typical—interaction between her husband, Jeff, and their nine-year-old son, Zach. The other night, when Jeff asked Zach to clear the dishes, Zach got mad and muttered "jerk" under his breath, Paula explained. "Then Jeff says Zach can't play his *The Lord of the Rings* video game that night. Zach gets furious and starts hitting and kicking and then Jeff says Zach won't be able to go to the movies with his friend

Paul on Saturday either. One day soon after that Zach said to me, ‘Mom, pretty soon I’m not going to have *anything* left.’”

---

Jeff was employing the time-honored strategy of trying to modify Zach’s behavior by taking away his privileges. But what Zach learns in this kind of situation is that parents use their power over children when there’s a conflict and that there are winners and losers in every disagreement. He learns that relationships are based on coercion, which happens to be the exact same model he has probably absorbed from the entertainment media—where a sword fight, rather than a discussion, is the *modus operandi* for resolving interpersonal differences.

By using his power over Zach, Jeff might succeed in changing Zach’s behavior for a short time. But Jeff isn’t teaching Zach anything new: How does Zach learn what to do instead of talking back and kicking? What should he do the next time he gets angry? While Jeff’s approach is well intentioned, it suffers from the same basic flaw as the most popular parenting approaches today: it focuses too much on punishments and rewards, threats and consequences, and not enough on helping kids learn how to build loving, respectful relationships.

At this crucial moment in time, when the best of childhood is under attack, we have the challenge of showing our kids a different and better model for how human beings can get along. As I will illustrate in examples throughout this book, we can enhance the connection we experience with our children, and help them deepen friendships with siblings and peers, by teaching our kids to handle situations of conflict in a loving mutual way, one where power is shared rather than wielded, where ending up feeling closer takes priority over winning. In the forthcoming chapters I will show you how we can foster the genuine kindness and empathy that will bring children deep satisfaction in their relationships with others, both now and for the rest of their lives.

## **Strategies for Taking Back Childhood**

Given that these basic needs of our children are in danger, I deeply believe that we, as concerned parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and educators can no longer wait for our society as a whole to become more supportive of children. Yes, we need public policies that protect kids from coercive media and marketing, including restrictions on advertising to young children and prohibitions on marketing violence to children. Yes, we need affordable national day care and after-school programs, active classroom learning approaches tailored to children’s individual interests and talents, and conflict resolution programs. But while we work toward these policy changes, we can also take a more active approach as parents and caregivers. As the adults who still wage the most important influence in our children’s lives, we have within our hands—right here, right now—the ability to restore the critical experiences and tools that society has slowly but too surely taken away from our kids.

As I have underscored above, to protect our children from the seemingly inescapable forces that threaten their most basic needs, I find great solace—and hope—in the literature of child development which provides us with a deep understanding of how children grow, how they think and feel, and what their psychological and developmental needs are. This knowledge, combined with love and caring, can give us the power we need to encourage and restore children’s healthy play; to strengthen kids’ sense of security so they can thrive in today’s often frightening world; and to teach children to create meaningful loving relationships that will help them grow and bring them deep satisfaction.

As I have stressed, one of the key insights childhood development theory provides is consideration for the child’s perspective. Throughout this book, I will encourage you to try to put yourself “inside the heads” of even the youngest children in your care. And as you do this, I hope you will begin to see how it can open up new possibilities for parenting and allow you to better meet your children’s needs.



---

sample content of Taking Back Childhood: A Proven Roadmap for Raising Confident, Creative, Compassionate Kids

- [\*\*click Awakening the Entrepreneur Within: How Ordinary People Can Create Extraordinary Companies book\*\*](#)
- [\*\*read online Quartered Safe Out Here: A Harrowing Tale of World War II pdf, azw \(kindle\)\*\*](#)
- [On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism pdf, azw \(kindle\), epub, doc, mobi](#)
- [How to Make Money With Real Estate Options: Low-Cost, Low-Risk, High-Profit Strategies for Controlling Undervalued Property....Without the Burdens of Ownership! pdf, azw \(kindle\), epub](#)
  
- <http://musor.ruspb.info/?library/Git-for-Humans.pdf>
- <http://www.1973vision.com/?library/Quartered-Safe-Out-Here--A-Harrowing-Tale-of-World-War-II.pdf>
- <http://nexson.arzamaszev.com/library/Hess--The-Last-Oil-Baron.pdf>
- <http://thermco.pl/library/How-to-Make-Money-With-Real-Estate-Options--Low-Cost--Low-Risk--High-Profit-Strategies-for-Controlling-Underval>