

**DEVELOPING A HUMANE ETHIC TOWARDS PEOPLE, OTHER ANIMALS AND  
THE ENVIRONMENT IN 18- TO 36-MONTH-OLD CHILDREN:**

**A HANDBOOK FOR PARENTS**

An Independent Learning Project

Presented by

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To

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## Abstract

The purpose of this Independent Learning Project is to develop a handbook for parents of young children, age eighteen to thirty-six months, who wish to raise them with an awareness of social justice issues. Research regarding the moral development of children is examined, including the work of Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg. Also discussed is research concerning creativity and critical thinking and how these skills can be developed in children. Autonomy Supportive Parenting, which encourages independent thinking and problem-solving among children, is discussed along with techniques for constructive limit-setting. The roles of electronic media and the sharing of cultural values are investigated with an eye towards the portrayal of ethnically-diverse humans, individuals with disabilities, the environment, and non-human animals.

The handbook “Developing a Humane Ethic Towards People, Other Animals and the Environment in 18- to 36-Month Old Children: A Handbook for Parents” guides parents, other family members, and other caregivers through the five elements of Humane Parenting, namely the gathering of accurate information concerning the environment, cultural issues and consumerism, human rights and animal protection; the three Rs of reverence, respect and responsibility; the three Cs of curiosity, creativity and critical thinking; the modeling of positive choices; and parenting respectfully. Specific techniques for dealing with common parenting concerns such as food choices, gift-giving occasions, literature and media selections, and teaching children about diversity are given. The handbook concludes with a list of suggested books, periodicals, weblogs and organizations that parents are encouraged to consult for more information.

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## Chapter I

### *Rationale*

As a humane educator, I struggled with the decision to bring children into the world. I recognize the drain that overpopulation places on our resources, and that my family, by virtue of where we live in the world, places a greater burden than most on the planet despite our best efforts to live lightly. While I already tried to live as humanely as possible, I was humbled by the responsibility of not only embodying my values in my own day to day existence, but also of imparting those values to a new generation. I wondered if I was up to the challenge.

For those who are concerned with the issues of humane education, namely animal protection, the environment, human rights, and the negative impact that our consumer culture has on our planet and our lives, enduring criticism from friends, family, and sometimes even strangers is something to which we have become accustomed. Since our ideas are often outside the mainstream, our interactions with others can range from curious to concerned to hostile, and we need to develop strategies for managing these sometimes unpleasant exchanges. However, I was completely unprepared for the fact that, once I became a parent, these conversations would increase in both frequency and intensity.

While the people in my life had previously come to accept my choices regarding issues like diet, clothing, and purchasing habits, once my daughter was born they began to question me with renewed vigor. I was often told that it was unfair for me to impose my values on my daughter. My response that we all impose our values on our children whether those values consist of consumption or frugality, convenience or health, “fitting in” or living consciously, generally fell on deaf ears. Since a number of my friends who shared my ideals had chosen to remain childless, and many of those who had children had found it difficult to sustain their

commitment while fulfilling the responsibilities of their everyday lives as parents, I felt very isolated and unsupported as I tried to navigate new parenthood with few resources and even fewer role models.

There are many people who are not concerned with issues of social justice and sustainability. These people have little concern for the welfare of non-human animals, or for the environment, or for other people. Despite their previous disinterest in these issues, though, some of these people become instant environmentalists, pacifists, or activists once they have a child. Issues that formerly seemed unimportant or distant begin to take on some urgency when they are no longer viewed through the lens of one lifetime, but of the lifetimes of their children and grandchildren.

Regardless of the path we were on before having children, many parents have a shared interest in building a peaceful, beautiful, diverse and sustainable world. We are faced with a task that is daunting to most parents, namely raising happy, healthy, and responsible children. Additionally, we are looking for ways to accomplish this while causing the least harm to our surroundings and the beings who share them with us, both human and otherwise. The biggest difference is that parents who are new to the ideas explored in humane education do not have the background of information and inquiry that I had when I became a mother. While they are adjusting to the challenges of parenthood, they are also trying to educate themselves and make significant lifestyle changes which can seem overwhelming. Therefore, it is especially important that they have role models who can guide them through the process of gathering information and support them through the transition to a more humane lifestyle.

All parents have dozens of decisions they must make for and about their children every day. Some of these decisions are big, such as where to send them for childcare or school and which healthcare provider to use. Some decisions are small, such as whether to pack an apple or an orange in their lunches or whether to dress them in the yellow or the green shirt today. When the intention to make the best decisions for children is complicated by a commitment to make the best decisions for the planet and all her occupants, the process of decision-making can become paralyzing. If one considers the lack of time that most people, but particularly those who have young children at home, struggle with every day, it is easy to understand why some parents' dedication to humane principles can become more relaxed over time.

Reasonable people can, and often do, disagree about the best way to do anything, and this includes living a humane life and raising children. Parents are surrounded by "experts" who offer advice in books, in magazines, on television, on the radio, and on their websites how to raise children who are kind and compassionate, or who are critical consumers of media, or who love the earth. Parents are given the well-intentioned guidance of other parents and community members who believe that their own child care experience and philosophies qualify them to give expert parenting advice. However, all the input that we have at our fingertips is not always in line with what we are trying to accomplish as parents. As our children get older and more mature, the way to teach them about the issues addressed by humane education often becomes clearer. We can talk to them, help them to critically evaluate news items, give them strategies for resolving conflict non-violently in their own lives, or involve them in service learning projects. Unfortunately, there is a real lack of information about how to best work with younger children so that the stage is set for these later lessons to be taken to heart. It is important that

parents have a resource they can refer to while they try to raise their young children to be compassionate adults.

### *Goal*

Humane education is not about telling people what to think, but rather teaching people how to think critically about information in order to evaluate its accuracy and relevance. Likewise, humane parenting seeks to help parents analyze information about parenting, and about the world around them, so that they can best align their child-rearing practices with their values. The goal of this project is to create a resource for parents and other caregivers called “Developing a Humane Ethic Towards People, Other Animals and the Environment in 18- to 36-Month Old Children: A Handbook for Parents”.

Keeping in mind the four elements of humane education of providing accurate information, the three Rs of reverence, respect and responsibility, the three Cs of curiosity, creativity and critical thinking, and providing positive choices (Weil, 2003, p. 34) and in light of the research that has been to discover which parenting practices best correlate with prosocial behavior in children, I will study many resources that are available to parents today. From there, I will compile a resource guide for parents, which will include some general parenting tips, specific ideas for activities that parents can do with their 18- to 36-month-old children, and a list of further readings. My goal is to create a guide for parents that synthesizes the information available and gives them simple, easy-to-implement strategies for raising their children to be humane people.

### *Problem Statement*

The few resources that are available for parents of young children who are looking for ideas about how to raise humane children are often very narrowly focused, and do not address

the breadth of issues and the interconnections that we as humane educators study. For example, many books that claim to describe activities that will help children to “love the earth” frequently involve the disruption of the child’s surroundings in a purported effort to appreciate nature. One early childhood curriculum that is marketed as “nature-based” describes an autumn activity that involves collecting a very large number of acorns from a child’s yard or a nearby park. While this seems harmless enough at first glance, and at least gets children outside looking at the world around them instead of staring at a screen, upon further examination it is clear that this activity teaches children a lack of respect for nature. Rather than helping children to understand that acorns have a function right where they are, namely to feed animals as well as to grow into new trees to replace those that fall due to disease or destruction (by humans or the forces of nature), this activity encourages them to see everything in our environs as a resource that is there for the taking.

Similarly, parents know how important it is to read to our children in order to instill in them a lifelong love of literacy and learning. However, it can be extremely challenging to find books that address any of the topics we are looking to examine, namely human rights, environmentalism, animal protection and cultural issues. Those books that do address one of these issues often fall short in another. It is not uncommon to read through a book that seems like it is going to be a great choice for my children, only for me to get to the last page and find the main character eating a steak or shopping at a mega-mart. Furthermore, multiculturalism is all but absent in most of children’s literature; it is rare to find a compelling, well-written and beautiful book for preschoolers whose main character, or indeed any character at all, is not able-bodied, heterosexual, middle-class and Caucasian.

The challenge for parents who want to raise humane children, then, is to sift through all the information available to them, and decide what fits their needs and goals and what does not. However, short of becoming an expert in child development, poring over countless volumes on child-rearing, and examining every picture book from cover to cover before reading it to a child, it can be very difficult to separate the nuggets of useful information from the rest. Often resources that seem promising end up being disappointing, and there will be only one or two ideas in a book that are applicable to a parent looking to instill in their children an appreciation of diversity or respect for all life. Other times, ideas that seem valuable on the surface really are not as good as they first appeared once we think them through or even put them into practice. Therefore, it is vital that the task of finding and evaluating information be simplified and made more manageable for parents.

### *Population*

My hope is that this project, “Developing a Humane Ethic Towards Other People, Animals and the Environment in 18- to 36-Month Old Children: A Handbook for Parents” will benefit all people, other animals, and the planet by giving parents and caregivers specific ideas, techniques and resources that will help them raise their children to be humane. This project is designed to be used primarily by the parents of children ages 18 to 36 months. However, it could also be of interest to other groups. This handbook will articulate the goals of humane parenting as they apply to young children, so it might be of interest to grandparents, aunts and uncles, and other family members and caretakers who are trying to understand this style of parenting. It also would be of interest to early childhood educators who are looking to incorporate humane education into their classrooms and curricula. Lastly, any parent who is trying to help their

children develop the 3 Rs and the 3 Cs, regardless of whether they consider themselves to be practitioners of humane parenting or not, will find useful ideas in this handbook.

### *Methodology*

There seems to be a recent interest among psychologists in studying different parenting styles and the correlations parenting style and children's behavior. I will examine the research that has been done to determine the best way to raise children who are self-confident, motivated and compassionate; in other words, the type of children that humane parents are aiming to nurture. I expect to find several resources that contain suggestions and strategies that help parents to practice this approach to parenting, which used to be referred to as "authoritative" but is now commonly referred to as "autonomy supportive."

Though there are resources for teaching animal protection, human rights, critical consumerism and, especially, environmental ethics to older children, I expect to find very few that are applicable to toddlers. I will evaluate some of the resources that are available and make suggestions as to which ones best teach the qualities that we as humane parents seek to inspire in our children, as well as provide strategies for assessing the usefulness of new resources. Additionally, I anticipate that this project will involve modifying strategies intended for older children, as well as a great deal of creativity in developing original strategies. There are some curricula that are intended for use in early childhood learning centers that I foresee as being useful resources for this project.

Since it is inadvisable to introduce the issues of environmentalism, animal protection and human rights to very young children in any detail (Sobel, 1996, p. 2), these topics will primarily be addressed from the perspective of a parent's self-education. However, some suggestions will be included for ways to introduce these concepts in an age-appropriate way. "Developing a

Humane Ethic Towards Other People, Animals and the Environment in 18- to 36-Month Old Children: A Handbook for Parents” will be organized around the elements of humane parenting: reverence, respect, responsibility, creativity, curiosity, critical thinking, offering positive choices, and parenting respectfully. There will also be a section that gives a brief overview of child development during these years, as well as a discussion of everyday issues that come up in parenting young children, such as television viewing, gift-giving occasions, dietary choices, and navigating relationship with friends and extended family members.

## Chapter II

### *Introduction*

This literature review will discuss the research that has been done concerning moral development in children and parenting practices that support moral development. It will also consider studies that have been done to determine the best ways to cultivate creativity and critical thinking in young people. Lastly, it will examine the effect of media on children's attitudes towards stigmatized groups such as people of color or individuals with disabilities.

### *Moral Development of Children*

Jean Piaget, one of the first people to make a systematic study of developmental psychology, saw human moral development as being divided into three stages (Piaget, 1997, p. 86). Babies are viewed as being amoral and asocial, purely sensorimotor beings. After infancy, people enter a stage of egocentrism where they begin to recognize the boundaries that exist between themselves and the world around them while remaining unable to interpret the world from any perspective other than their own due to immaturity and lack of experience, and the unequal distribution of power between adults and young people (pp. 35-36). Eventually, humans enter the third stage, that of mutual respect and cooperation (p. 86).

Piaget's view of egocentricity remains influential in developmental psychology theory today, though some question the validity of generalizing the conclusions he drew from testing young children's understandings of concrete physical concepts to abstract social interactions (Lee, 1989, p. 388). Based on an extensive review of the relevant literature, Patrick C. Lee argues that children are actually sociocentric and have a fundamental understanding of differences in perspective among themselves and other people. For example, children as young as eighteen months frequently point to objects of interest in order to call a caretaker's attention to

them, indicating that they are aware that the caretaker is not seeing the same thing that they are (p. 379). In fact, the vast majority of babies in one study of twelve- to fourteen-month-olds were able to visually locate an object that was simply being looked at by an adult (p. 378).

Additionally, young children are able and motivated to attend to the perspective of other people in order to attain conversational coherence by such techniques as offering clarification of a previously misunderstood statement (p. 386). Lee argues that the tasks on which Piaget based his assessment of children's egocentricity were too concrete, and that when given a more socially relevant task, young people are able to exhibit a much higher degree of perspective-taking.

Lawrence Kohlberg has put forth a widely-accepted theory of human social development that outlines six stages through which human beings can progress (Kohlberg, 2008, p. 9). These levels are as follows: 1. punishment and obedience orientation; 2. naïve instrumental hedonism; 3. interpersonal concordance/"good girl-nice boy" morality; 4. authority maintaining morality; 5. morality of contract and of democratically accepted law; and 6. morality of individual principles of conscience.

Further, Kohlberg outlines the motivational and cognitive aspects of morality that are associated with each stage (2008, p. 10). At Stage 1, the individual really has no concept of "rights" and is motivated by fear of punishment. Desire for reward characterizes Stage 2, where rights are understood as related to ownership. At Stage 3, individuals are motivated by a fear of disapproval and a belief that people have the right to do what they want with their possessions as long as they are not harming someone else. Fear of authorities as well as of guilt feelings typifies Stage 4, at which point rights are viewed as being a legitimate expectation – for example, payment for work. Individuals in Stage 5 recognize some degree of universal rights along with particular rights that belong to those of a certain status or role, and are motivated by respect for

community. Lastly, at Stage 6, respect for individual rights is accompanied by a reluctance to betray one's personal conception of right and wrong.

In a study of both urban and rural residents of Turkey, Nisan and Kohlberg (1982) found that moral development continues at least into the third decade of life. It was found that individuals progress through the stages of moral development sequentially, but that not all individuals reach the highest level of moral judgment. In fact, the people who were studied who belonged to more traditional cultures showed a tendency to stabilize and remain in Stage 3, a finding which is supported by evidence gathered from other tribal social groups. The authors hypothesize that

stage 3 is a necessary and sufficient level of functioning in societies having a social order based on face-to-face relationships and a high level of normative consensus . . . In the absence of external stimulation to question the normative system, and in the presence of high pressure to adhere to it, one would expect less accommodation of moral concepts, and hence less differentiation and integration of moral reasoning (p. 875).

Among urban-dwelling individuals who have much less personal contact with the people in their communities, a higher level of moral reasoning is necessary in order for society to function well.

Moral development, therefore, differs from physical development in that the latter proceeds to a predetermined endpoint given that certain basic conditions are met, whereas the former can stop at any point on the continuum. In their review of moral development research, Kohlberg & Hersh (1977) offered a theory to explain the reason individuals achieve different levels of moral reasoning:

Thus moral development results from the dialogue between the person's cognitive structure and the complexity presented by the environment. This interactionist definition of moral development demands an environment which will facilitate dialogue between the self and others. The more one encounters situations of moral conflict that are not adequately resolved by one's present reasoning structure, the more likely one is to develop more complex ways of thinking about and resolving such conflicts (p. 57).

However, moral judgment is not seen as being the sole determinant of one's actions, as such factors as particular circumstances, emotional state, and general sense of will also play a part.

Of particular interest for the purposes of this project is the affect parents have on the moral development of their children. In a study of the relationship between children's level of moral reasoning and that of their parents, Haan, Langer and Kohlberg (1976) found that there is a "relationship [between parents' and children's level of moral reasoning] which decreases with age for the sons and their parents and a lack of relationship between the daughters and their parents" (p. 1206). However, it was found that the moral reasoning of the offspring frequently exceeded that of one or both parents, leading the investigators to conclude that children's moral levels are not necessarily limited by those of their parents.

In an effort to understand the link between parental behavior and children's moral reasoning, Walker and Hennig examined children's responses to a number of moral dilemmas and how they related to various types of verbal interactions among family members (1999). Verbal interactions were categorized in the following ways: 1. operational (designed to affect another person's reasoning); 2. representational (designed to further comprehension of another);

3. informative; 4. supportive; 5. cognitively interfering; 6. conflictual (indicating negative affect); or 7. miscellaneous. The investigators found that minimal moral development in children was associated with parents who display particular patterns of communication, namely highly operational and informative, or highly informative, cognitively interfering and conflictual. On the other hand, children who showed considerable moral development had parents who displayed highly representational and supportive interactions.

In a second study, the authors replicated these results while also finding that minimal moral development was associated with poor ego functioning on the part of the parents. Walker and Hennig conclude that “effective parents are more child-centered and scaffold their child’s development by eliciting the child’s opinions, drawing out the child’s reasoning with appropriate probing questions, and checking for understanding; all in the context of emotional support and attentiveness and with the challenging stimulation of more advanced moral reasoning” (pp. 370-372).

A relationship between parental values and their offspring’s prosocial behavior has even been seen in children as young as three years old. Eisenberg, Wolchik, Goldberg and Engel (1992) videotaped parent’s interactions with their children at one to two years of age, and then videotaped these same children playing with a peer approximately two years later. Parents were also asked to rate how much they valued different characteristics in their children, including how much they valued compliance and consideration of others. While parents’ prosocial values were found to have no relationship to their children’s prosocial behavior, there was a negative relationship between maternal valuing of compliance and spontaneous prosocial behavior. The authors conclude that “parental emphasis on compliance engendered social inhibition and low levels of social responsivity, which, in turn, discouraged the peer from interacting with and

requesting assistance from the child” (§ 25). In other words, the effect that parents have on children’s moral development may be more related to their influence on the child’s social style than to the actual transmission of values.

### *Creative and Critical Thinking*

If achieving high-order moral reasoning is considered a cognitive skill, parents must ask how they can best cultivate this skill in children. Children who think with depth and flexibility will be better equipped to consider issues of conscience in a more thorough and proficient way. Therefore, it is important to consider how children can be taught to think critically and creatively.

Teresa M. Amabile, a leading researcher on the topic of creativity, defines a solution to a problem as creative if the solution is both novel and appropriate (1989). She outlines several necessary conditions for creativity to thrive, including intrinsic motivation, competence, self-determination, love and dedication to the task, ability to concentrate on the task, and seeing the task as a combination of work and play. In fact, she maintains that creativity is most likely to occur in what she calls the “creativity intersection,” which is where a child’s domain skills or specific abilities, creative thinking, and intrinsic motivation all overlap (p. 63).

In her book *Growing up Creative: Nurturing a Lifetime of Creativity*, Amabile reviews the research that describes practices that are most consistently exhibited by the parents of creative children (pp. 103-107). The relationships between parents and creative children are characterized by respect, an emphasis on values rather than rules, independent and active parents, appreciation of creativity, humor, and by placing importance on achievement as opposed to grades. On the other hand, parents of less creative children tend to overstructure and control tasks, provide specific solutions, behave with hostility towards the child, criticize and reject the

child's ideas, engage in power struggles with the child, pressure the child, lack patience, and give up easily on difficult tasks (p. 122-123).

One study of 6- and 7-year-old children shows that play can have a positive impact on creativity when compared with a highly structured task (Howard-Jones, Taylor and Sutton, 2002). Two groups of children were given either a chance to play freely with salt dough or a handwriting task, and then were asked to prepare a collage. The next day the same procedure was followed, except that the conditions were switched so that the salt dough group was given the handwriting task and the handwriting group was given the free play opportunity with the salt dough on the second day. When the creativity of their collages was measured using a system where the collages were given subjective ratings by "expert" judges, as well as by counting the number of colors used and pieces of paper used to create the collages, it was found that the children who were permitted to play showed higher creativity on the subsequent task when compared to those who performed the structured task.

During their examination of the effects of different school environments on children's creativity, Thomas and Berk found that children in formal school environments exhibited relatively low levels of creativity (1981). Children in intermediate and informal school environments tended to be more creative, with the children in the most informal educational settings showing the greatest creativity on the dimensions of originality and flexibility. The investigators concluded that the factors that influence creativity are complex, and can be attributed to interactions between type of school, sex of the child, and the aspect of creativity that is being measured. The authors do not discuss the effect of home environments on children's creativity, or address the fact that the differences among students in different settings may be due to selection factors. Perhaps parents who place a relatively low value on creativity and high

value on compliance tend to send their children to more formal schools, whereas parents who see creativity as important tend to select more informal schools for their children.

Many creativity theorists believe that it is possible to explicitly teach creativity and its various components. Conversely, studies indicate that “extrinsic constraints can decrease creativity and/or quality of artistic productions” (Koestner, Ryan, Bernieri and Holt, 1984, p. 236). Some researchers suggest that creativity can be encouraged by rewarding children for exhibiting variable behavior (Saracho, 2002, p. 532), though others argue that doing so damages children’s intrinsic motivation, and therefore their creative tendencies (Amabile, 1989, p. 73). When creativity is viewed as a “complex or syndrome which emerges from cognitive, affective, social, and physical realms,” (Saracho, 2002, p. 433) it is clear that attention needs to be given to each of these elements in order to maximize creativity. By simply giving children ample opportunities to physically handle objects, they are likely to conceive of new and novel uses for these objects over time (p. 435). Additionally, the act of using the imagination to assimilate new experiences is, in and of itself, pleasurable for young children (p. 434). Furthermore, creativity can often be a social act, as when teachers or parents facilitate its development (p. 436).

Like creativity, educators and researchers have been looking for ways to teach young people to think critically. One model of training breaks critical thinking down into three cognitive components: task definition, strategy formulation, and monitoring the thinking process (Hudgins, Riesemmy, Ebel and Edelman, 1989, p. 328). Once a child is able to accurately define the task at hand, it seems that the ability to create a strategy follows naturally from that, and monitoring involves continuously keeping the task in mind and redefining it if necessary. This is a creative process which requires children to examine a body of information, consider it carefully, and prepare an appropriate response (p. 329). The goal of critical thinking instruction

is to develop in the child the habit of “consciously, deliberately, and consistently” using the model “when he or she is confronted by a body of data from which a conclusion or solution must be derived, or by an argument of a third party who wishes the thinker to accept a predetermined interpretation, point of view, or conclusion” (p. 330).

### *Autonomy Supportive Parenting*

In addition to being a cognitive skill, higher levels of moral judgment require confidence, intrinsic motivation, and a tendency towards prosocial behavior. Ultimately, the goal of parents is to not only teach their children about the values the parents consider important, but “having the children ‘own’ those values and attitudes” (Grolnick, Deci and Ryan, 1997, p. 135).

Autonomy supportive parenting, which is defined as parenting where “parents value and use techniques which encourage independent problem solving, choice, and participation in decisions versus externally dictating outcomes, and motivating achievement through punitive disciplinary techniques, pressure, or controlling rewards,” (Grolnick and Ryan, 1989, p. 144) has been shown to be effective at cultivating these qualities in children.

Autonomy-supportive parenting, which is an outgrowth of Self-Determination Theory, holds that people need to feel competent, related, and autonomous in order to achieve optimal functioning (Ryan and Deci, 2000, p. 68). The authors have found that intrinsic motivation thrives when people feel capable, self-sufficient and safe in their environments. They have also discovered that people are more likely to act in prosocial ways when their needs are being met, which allows them to internalize and integrate their values into their own sense of self. “In fact, recent research in Korean and U.S. samples has found a more positive relationship between autonomy and collectivistic attitudes than between autonomy and individualistic attitudes” (p. 74). When studied in a school setting, autonomy supportive parenting was also found to be

strongly correlated with feelings of competence and greater self-regulation among children (Grolnick and Ryan, 1989, p. 149). In addition, ten- to twelve-year-old children who exhibit more autonomous regulation also tend to be more empathetic, more mature in their moral reasoning skills, and more likely to have positive relationships with others (Grolnick et al., 1997, p. 143).

Since children must be given some direction regarding safe and appropriate behavior, Koestner et al. (1984) investigated the impact of imposing external controls on children's creativity and motivation. All external events have two elements, the controlling aspect and the informational aspect. If the controlling aspect is most prominent, the child will feel pressured or forced to do something, but if the informational aspect is more prominent the child will feel as though they have control over the situation and will therefore be more likely to be intrinsically motivated. Koestner et al. gave three groups of children a painting task, with one group receiving no limits, one group receiving controlling limits (i.e., "You have to keep the paints clean" [p. 239]), and one group receiving informational limits (i.e., "I know that sometimes it's really fun to just slop the paint around, but here the materials and room need to be kept nice for the other children who will use them" [p. 239]). The paintings were then evaluated for creativity using Amabile's rating system, and it was found that there was no difference between the no limits and the informational limits group, but the controlling limits group spent less time painting and scored lower on quality ratings. These results suggest that "it is not the fact of constraints per se but rather the psychological and affective meaning of those constraints that predicts their impact" (p. 247).

### *Cultural Values and Media*

It has been found that mothers who are warm and autonomy supportive tend to have children who put importance on satisfying their own intrinsic needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy, whereas mothers who are cold and controlling or who place a high value on financial success tend to have children who focus on external rewards such as material acquisition (Kasser, Ryan, Zax and Sameroff, 1995, p. 912). Another factor that contributes to a focus on materialism is children's exposure to commercial media (Ryan and Deci, 2000, p. 75). According to Grolnick et al. (1997),

because financial success, fame, and physical attractiveness are culturally advocated values (at least within the ubiquitous media), the socialization of children within our culture could easily result in their strongly holding these aspirations. However, the data indicate quite clearly that when these values are particularly strong within one's overall value configuration, individuals are likely to have poorer psychological adjustment (p. 144).

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that children under the age of two watch no television at all, and that television and media time be limited to no more than one or two hours per day for children older than that (2001, p. 424). However, research shows that parents are not heeding this recommendation (Zimmerman, Christakis and Meltzoff, 2007, p. 475). Zimmerman et al. (2007) in their examination of television viewing habits among young children found that by three months of age, approximately 40% of children are watching television, DVDs, or both (p. 475). The median age at which children start viewing media is nine months, and by twenty-four months of age, over 80% of children watch media (p. 476). Most parents cite the perceived educational value of the programs their children watch as their

primary reason for permitting their children to watch, with other reasons including the fact that their children enjoy television and parents use these activities to occupy their children while performing other tasks.

At least two extensive reviews of the research concerning the effects of television on very young children find little empirical support for the APA recommendations regarding television viewing and children (Guernsey, 2007; Thomas, 2007). In fact, there is little research done on the effect of television on children under age two, and much of the research that has been done was performed as market research and is therefore not available for public review. Research that has been done examining family television usage shows that on average, a television is left on but is unwatched almost 15% of the time (Anderson, Lorch, Field, Collins and Nathan, 1986, p. 1028), but that increased attention to the television does not necessarily increase comprehension (Lorch, Anderson and Levin, 1979, p. 724) indicating that children could still be absorbing the content of television programs that are playing in their environment even if they appear to not be watching.

Children with siblings tend to watch less television than those without siblings, though when they do watch television they tend to watch more programs with children's non-educational content and fewer educational programs or baby DVDs (Zimmerman et al., 2007, p. 476). Early exposure to violent and non-educational content is positively associated with later attention problems while educational content shows no such relationship (Kirkorian, Wartella and Anderson, 2008, p. 45). Additionally, early television viewing of any kind has been linked to decreased academic performance, which could lead to decreased feelings of competence (p. 48).

Some of the research that has been done calls into question young children's ability to comprehend images they see on television at all, showing that children are not able to readily make the cognitive leap from images on a screen to the three-dimensional objects they represent, referred to as the "video deficit hypothesis" (Guernsey, 2007, p. 62). Other research shows that children under the age of five years are unable to discriminate between commercials and regular programming, or if they are able to discriminate they are not able to understand the persuasive intent of advertising (Kirkorian et al., 2008, p. 43).

Since television can be such a big part of young children's lives and can profoundly impact their values and attitudes, it is important that parents select viewing content carefully to ensure that it reflects appropriate messages. The agenda-setting concept of social communication theory holds that "the mass media establish what people think about, if not what they in fact think" (Strodthoff et al., 1985, p. 136). However, current television programs as well as children's books show a lack of diversity and respect for non-traditional lifestyles. Though recent multicultural education and efforts to include diversity in media have been well-intentioned, they are often watered down through a failure to examine the social, political, and economic issues that cause certain populations to become stigmatized (Hurtado and Silva, 2008). One program that looks to implement critical multiculturalism is *Little Bill*. The series was created by Bill Cosby, and seeks to portray a multi-generational inner-city African-American family as loving, gentle and intelligent. In episodes that address many different stigmatized identities, "the *Little Bill* series captures the social reality essential to understanding oppression and stigma: individuals are presented in their everyday lives experiencing their social identities as fluid and overlapping, not as one social identity at a time" (p. 24). This program promotes

resistance to stigma by encouraging viewers to follow Little Bill's example and look for ways to adjust their environment to reduce group stigma.

It is not only racial groups that suffer from stigmatization; other groups also lack accurate and natural representation in media. An informal survey of the children's section in my own public library revealed that almost all of the volumes containing human characters featured Caucasian, middle-class, able-bodied people living within a nuclear, middle class, heterosexual family. I was able to find a handful of books that featured characters that do not fit that description, but most of those come from an educational angle rather than featuring them as people just living their natural day-to-day lives. Research "has suggested that the early years are critical for promoting an understanding of disability" (Matthew and Clow, 2007, p. 68). Given this information, it is vital that parents interested in teaching their children about many different ethnicities, abilities and cultures consider ways to incorporate diversity into their lives, particularly if they do not live in diverse communities.

The group Scope, which advocates for people with disabilities in the United Kingdom, has started a project called In The Picture in an effort to increase the representation of people with disabilities in the media (Matthew and Clow, 2007). This project has three main thrusts: stories, images, and guidance. Within this framework, the organizers have created story writing workshops, an image bank including pictures of individuals with a range of disabilities, the creation of story books, computer games, and other multimedia materials, and consulting with authors and publishers about ways to incorporate people with disabilities into children's media. Out of this project, Scope has created a list of Ten Guiding Principles which apply not only to persons with disabilities, but also to other stigmatized groups.

1. Books should be created with all children in mind, for all children to share and enjoy.
2. The point is not that [children with disabilities] should be the prime focus of stories or pictures: simply they should be there, a natural feature of every child's landscape.
3. Images of disability should be the norm...
4. Images of [children with disabilities] should be used casually or incidentally, so that [children with disabilities] are portrayed playing and doing things alongside their [able-bodied] peers.
5. [Children with disabilities] should be portrayed as ordinary – and as complex – as other children, not one-dimensional.
6. [Children with disabilities] are equals and should be portrayed as equals – giving as well as receiving.
7. [Children with disabilities] should not be portrayed as objects of curiosity, sensationalized or endowed with superhuman attributes.
8. Stories should not have “happy ever after” plots that make the child's attitude the problem.
9. It is society's barriers that can keep [children with disabilities] from living full lives.

10. We should always remember that [children with disabilities] are children first and like all children have hopes and aspirations just like their [able-bodied] peers (pp. 71-72).

In addition to humans, and stigmatized groups of humans in particular, media representation of non-human animals and environmental issues is cause for concern among humane parents. A study of non-news programming on the four major television networks revealed that in a six-year period, one half of one percent of programming time was used to address environmental issues, despite the apparent increase in public interest in all things “green” (Corbett, 2006, p. 126). Further, when nature or non-human animals did appear, they were often in the background or were used as shorthand to convey some sort of message (i.e., wolves represent wildness and danger, while bald eagles represent freedom), as opposed to being an integral part of the story.

In her examination of environmental messages in the media, Julia B. Corbett (2006) identified a number of hierarchical and homocentric themes related to non-human animals and the environment that can frequently be found in films which include:

1. humans as both destroyers and saviors of nature
2. science can solve and can save
3. nature as a human test
4. natural events as demonic other
5. boundaries between animals [*sic*] and humans are important and should be enforced
6. nature battles as allegories of progress

7. it's how the West was won
8. the tribal is synonymous with the natural
9. animals [*sic*] starring as humans (pp. 130-134)

With few exceptions, according to Corbett, “ ‘nature’ movies support the dominant social paradigm: humans are superior to the rest of creation and are necessary to save, manage, or study the natural world” (p. 134).

On a more hopeful note, there has been some research which details how the media can promote positive values and images, including those related to the environment. Strodthoff, Hawkins and Schoenfeld (1985) have outlined a model of “ideology diffusion” by which various social movements enter the mainstream media and gain a foothold among general audience outlets. The three stages of ideology diffusion theory include: 1. disambiguation, which is a process during which the basic tenets of an emerging social cause are clarified, 2. legitimization, which is the stage where “gatekeepers” in various organizations begin to recognize the legitimacy of the cause, and 3. routinization, during which the cause becomes a part of media programming on a regular basis (p. 135). According to Strodthoff et al.,

serious attention will not be given to the concerns of a gestating social cause by general audience channels until the basic tenets of the movement have been substantially disambiguated, the related issues are perceived as sufficiently salient, and a degree of legitimation [*sic*] has occurred in the perceptions of the gatekeepers for the general audience media organizations (p. 138).

*Conclusion*

This review of literature shows that, while extensive research has been done on moral development and how it can be affected by different parenting styles and cultural influences, little of this research has specifically studied young children. Since children grow and mature so quickly, what is applicable to a child of even five or six years of age is not necessarily applicable to a child of two or three.

Additionally, the research offers generalizations and broad-stroke pictures about how parents can promote a humane ethic and high levels of moral development in their children, but the step from theory to practice is nearly absent in the literature. This Independent Learning Project, “Developing a Humane Ethic Towards People, Other Animals and the Environment in 18- to 36-Month Old Children: A Handbook for Parents” will extend the body of knowledge on this topic by bridging the gap between current research and daily living by suggesting ways that parents can incorporate human rights, animal welfare, environmental responsibility and media literacy into their everyday interactions with their children.

Chapter III

Developing a Humane Ethic Towards People, Other  
Animals and the Environment  
in 18- to 36-Month Old Children:  
A Handbook for Parents

By Kelly Coyle DiNorcia

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## The Whats and Whys of Humane Parenting

If we define the word humane as “having what are considered the best qualities of human beings (3)”,<sup>i</sup> then we can consider what these qualities are. What characteristics do we most value in other humans and want to instill in our children? According to Zoe Weil in her book *Above All, Be Kind: Raising a Humane Child in Challenging Times*,<sup>ii</sup> the most commonly cited traits are a willingness to choose and change, kindness, compassion, honesty and trustworthiness, generosity, courage, perseverance, self-discipline and restraint, humor and playfulness, wisdom and integrity. All parents will have their own items to add to this list.

Humane parents recognize that a humane life may start at home, but in order to live in a way that is truly compassionate, we must consider the impact of our actions on people, animals, and the planet in the broadest sense possible.

Humane parents aim to incorporate these values into their lives and their parenting in a deep, wide and meaningful way. They recognize that a humane life may start at home, but in order to live in a way that is truly compassionate, we must consider the impact of our actions on people, other animals, and the planet in the broadest sense possible. How can we do the most good and cause the least harm to ourselves and other humans, to other animals, and to the Earth?

Before I had children, I was very interested in living a humane life. I believe that we have a responsibility to live in the most compassionate and sustainable way possible, but more than that, I find great joy in helping others and living in integrity. I went to great lengths to educate myself about the issues and carefully considered the impact of my actions. It was hard work, and I often felt isolated and frustrated by the difficulty of finding like-minded friends as well as explaining and defending my choices to others.

Once I had my daughter in 2005, I was no less interested in living compassionately, but I found that the difficulty of doing so had risen exponentially. I was acutely aware that I was having a huge impact on the planet simply by choosing to put another person here and felt weighed down by the responsibility. The energy and time it takes to care

for a newborn and young child is overwhelming, and left me less able to invest in educating myself and seeking out humane options. In addition, there were many new choices to consider: diapers, feeding, transportation, clothing, equipment, education, electronic media, toys, books, and the list goes on and on. Social pressures also changed and intensified when I became a parent, so that I no longer had only my own choices to justify but also those I was making on behalf of my child.

When I began searching for resources to help me navigate this new journey I had undertaken, I found few. Many of the people I knew who were interested in humane living had chosen to remain childless, and those who had children often found it difficult to sustain their commitment in the face of the pressures of parenthood, so I had few role models. Most of the resources I could find focused on older children and were not particularly relevant for a new parent. Environmentalism had become trendy by then, so there were plenty of “green” products and guides to choose from, but I was concerned that they often simply substituted slightly less harmful products and practices for the old ones without ever questioning the basic ideas of consumerism. Books and articles proposing to give ideas for “nature activities” parents can do with children often failed to show respect for the natural world, instead encouraging activities that harmed plants, non-human animals and the planet. Finding children’s literature that adequately addressed the issues of environmentalism, human rights, animal protection, or consumerism – or indeed, that involved any characters who were not Caucasian, heterosexual, middle-class and able-bodied – required an exhaustive search and yielded sparse results. Authors of parenting books, as well as most of the armchair experts I came across, each had their own ideas that were not necessarily in line with my personal parenting goals, and their conflicting advice left me more confused than if I hadn’t done any research at all. This handbook represents my efforts to create the resource that I wish was available to me as a new parent.

## The Goals of this Handbook

Some parents are interested in the issues of humane parenting (namely environmentalism, human rights, animal protection, consumerism and cultural issues, and compassionate communication) before they have children. Other people become motivated to learn about these issues after they begin to have more of a vested interest in sustainability, peace and justice upon becoming parents. All parents are faced with the daunting task of raising happy, healthy and responsible children. It is important that humane parents and other caretakers have support while they go through the process of gathering information and endeavoring to live a more humane lifestyle.

The goal of this handbook is to provide the type of resource I wish had been available when I was a new mother. I aim to share some of what I have learned about how we can raise our children to bring about a peaceful, beautiful, diverse and sustainable world. Some of the ideas and information will be useful to extended family members, teachers, and others who work with or care about children and their futures. All of the ideas and information are intended to help people treat themselves, other humans, other animals and the environment with love, compassion and respect. I will share some of the strategies I have developed for dealing with common concerns such as food choices, and gift-giving occasions, as well as media and consumerism.

Humane parenting is not about telling people what to think and do, but rather teaching people how to think critically about information to evaluate its accuracy and relevance, and to make decisions based on the information they collect.

Humane parenting is not about telling people what to think and do, but rather teaching people how to think critically about information to evaluate its accuracy and relevance, and to make decisions based on the information they collect. Unfortunately, a thorough examination of the issues and research would take volumes and is well beyond the scope of this handbook; instead, I aim to provide a basic framework for thinking about humane parenting as well as some suggested resources for anyone looking to delve more deeply into a particular topic. I hope that readers will come away

from reading this handbook feeling prepared with some useful tools and confident that they know where to look for more answers and information to help them on their humane parenting journey.

## About the Author

I am a mother, writer and humane educator living in northwestern New Jersey with my husband John, daughter Bess (5/05), son Harry (5/08) and various four-legged family members. We share four wooded acres with assorted deer, foxes, coyote, bears, birds, squirrels, chipmunks, and creepy-crawlies, whom we enjoy watching and learning about.

My concern for animal protection issues brought me to humane education, but over the years I have also become active in the areas of environmentalism, voluntary simplicity, the local food movement, nonviolent communication, and issues of economic justice. As my children have grown, I have become very interested in educational alternatives in an effort to make well-informed choices for our family. I have always believed that the key to building a more humane future is to teach children respect for themselves, other people, other species and the planet from the time they are very young, so that they would have the tools and motivation in place to tackle difficult issues creatively and comprehensively as they grew older. Since becoming a mother, I have come to realize that in order for this to happen, we need to empower parents and give them the tools to examine their parenting and lifestyle choices and model compassionate, conscious living for their children.

I have travelled internationally to facilitate workshops on humane parenting and various other social justice topics. I am a chapter co-leader for the Holistic Moms Network and Attachment Parenting International. I blog at *AhimsaMama* (<http://ahimsamama.blogspot.com>) and *Rhythms, The Blog of Wellspring Community School* (<http://wellspringcommunityschool.blogspot.com>), as well as writing for *Your (Wo)Man in Washington* (<http://yourwomaninwashington.blogspot.com>), the blog of Mothers Ought To Have Equal Rights (MOTHERS), an organization that fights for economic justice and security for mothers and other caretakers. My posts have also appeared on the blogs of MomsRising and Fem 2.0. I have had my writing published in *Mothering*, *Natural Life*, and *The Attached Parent*.

I graduated summa cum laude from Seton Hall University with a B.A. in Experimental Psychology and a minor in Liberal Arts. I went on to enroll in a neuroscience Ph.D. program at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey where my research focused on learning and cognition and the effects of stress on these processes. I completed Master's level studies and decided to leave the neuroscience program in order to pursue my M.Ed. in Humane Education at Cambridge College.

## The Elements of Humane Parenting

Zoe Weil in her book *Above All, Be Kind*<sup>iii</sup> recognizes four essential elements of humane education and, by extension, humane parenting:

- Providing accurate information
- The Three Rs (Reverence, Respect and Responsibility)
- The Three Cs (Curiosity, Creativity and Critical Thinking)
- Offering positive choices

In addition to these, I add one more:

- Parenting Respectfully

This handbook will examine each of these elements and describe the ways they apply to parents and caretakers of young children. Following the discussion of the five elements of humane parenting, I will include some insights into the more common questions asked at the parenting workshops I facilitate, as well as a list of suggested resources the reader can consult for further information.

Every effort has been made to use inclusive, non-biased language in this handbook. This sometimes leads to clumsy and cumbersome phrasing (for example, the term “non-human animals” and the use of gender-specific pronouns), but I believe such attention to the use of language is necessary for keeping in the spirit of humane parenting. Likewise, the resource section concentrates heavily on resources that relate to mothering (as opposed to fathering) and environmentalism (as opposed to other social justice issues addressed by humane parenting). This does not reflect a bias on my part towards mothers and the environment, but is simply a reflection of the greater availability of resources in these areas. In order to keep this handbook manageable, I had to leave out a great deal of useful information, and chose to only include resources that were very comprehensive or specifically geared towards parents. The Institute for Humane Education ([www.humaneeducation.org](http://www.humaneeducation.org)) maintains an exhaustive list of

resources on many different social justice topics, and interested readers are encouraged to consult this list for more information.

## Accurate Information

We all know that different people have different perspectives, and while the idea of “providing accurate information” may seem straightforward at first, it is really quite complicated. For example, newspapers and television newscasts are supposed to be unbiased but the people who write and report the news obviously have biases and beliefs, though some are better able than others to put those aside. Something as simple as deciding which news to report and which to ignore reflects bias on the part of those whose job it is to provide the public with information. Therefore, it is incumbent upon humane parents to pay careful attention to where we get our information and how we provide information to our children.

When I refer to providing accurate information, I am primarily talking about parents and other adults. According to environmental educator David Sobel in his book *Beyond Ecophobia: Reclaiming the Heart in Nature Education*,<sup>iv</sup> children go through three

It is best to spend the pre-adolescent years developing a deep bond between children and their environments so they are motivated to take action when they are older.

developmental stages as they bond with the Earth. The first stage, *empathy*, occurs from ages four through seven. (Sobel is primarily concerned with teaching about the environment in schools; when talking about humane parenting I would argue that the empathy stage is really from birth to age seven.)

The second stage, *exploration*, is from ages eight to eleven, and the *social action* stage is from twelve to fifteen. In other words, it is not until adolescence that children possess the necessary level of emotional and intellectual sophistication to understand the complexity and abstract elements of global issues and activism. Young children see the world in black and white, but the big problems of our day are painted in many shades of gray. Therefore, it is best to spend the pre-adolescent years developing a deep bond between children and their environments and teaching by example so that they are motivated to take action when they are older.

If we introduce children to the huge problems of the adult world before they are ready, this can lead to a feeling of apathy and dissociation, similar to the way that children exposed to media violence become immune to all violence, including that

occurring in real life. "If we prematurely ask children to deal with problems beyond their understanding and control, prematurely recruit them to solve the mammoth problems of an adult world," says Sobel, "then I think we cut them off from the possible sources of their strength (5)."<sup>v</sup>

Think how fearful and hopeless you may sometimes feel when thinking about big global issues like climate change, and then try to imagine how hopeless a child might feel given the fact that her or his capacity for understanding and power to affect change is in its infancy. This is not what we want for our children. What we want to do is empower them to, in Sobel's words, "take a vested interest in healing the wounds of past generations while devising feasible, sustainable practices and policies for the future (ix)."<sup>vi</sup> The way to do this is to provide our children with "immersion, solitude, and interaction in a close, knowable world (12)."<sup>vii</sup>

Clearly children need to be given words and concepts to be able to effectively communicate with others, but these words can be given to children during exploration of their immediate, knowable world. I try to ask three questions to every statement/answer I give to my children. This can be done even with very young, pre-verbal children. Instead of treating life as one big vocabulary lesson, where parents point to a non-human animal and provide the label "bird", for example, you can talk to your child and describe what you see whenever possible. "Wow, do you see the red bird in the tree outside? I wonder what she eats. Her beak looks small and strong, like it might be good for cracking open seeds. Do you see her feet? Are they webbed like the duck we saw swimming at the park the other day? No, her feet look like they are good for sitting on branches. Doesn't that bird have a pretty song? I wonder what she is trying to say with her song. Maybe she is calling her friends to let them know she has found some good food in our feeder."

Humane parents should consider the interaction between many social justice issues when evaluating information and making informed lifestyle choices. We recognize the interconnections among all social justice issues, and recognize that solutions are not viable unless they bring justice to all humans, all other animals, and the environment.

For example, one cannot address issues of the environment (clear-cutting rainforests resulting in lost biodiversity and carbon dioxide storage) without also addressing human rights (slave labor used to clear the forests in South America), cultural issues (public land sold to private landowners by the government to pay international debt), and animal protection (cattle raised on this land and sold to fast food restaurants for cheap hamburgers).

### *Environmentalism*

Environmentalism is becoming a popular topic among the media. There are thousands of organizations, websites, blogs, books, magazines, and other media that are devoted in part or in their entirety to an examination of environmental issues, which makes it both easier and more difficult to find and evaluate information for accuracy and comprehensiveness.

Despite the increased visibility of environmental issues, there is still disagreement over how these issues should be addressed. Some people believe that global climate change is nonexistent, while others think it is a natural process that has nothing to do with human activity. Other people believe that it is real and is our fault, but that we will be able to develop the technology to overcome it, and still others think that it is a crisis that could mean the end of human civilization. Many businesses are working on finding more sustainable ways to make their products, while many people recognize that all products no matter how “green” require energy and resources to produce and these individuals therefore choose to abstain from purchasing new possessions. Large agribusinesses argue that the only way to feed a growing population is through the use of high-yield genetically-modified organisms (GMOs), while many activists argue that these organisms harm the environment and that organic farming is ultimately the only sustainable way to raise food. Hybrid cars are becoming popular, but still require fuel from dwindling reserves, causing some to argue that biofuels (fuel made from renewable resources such as corn or soybeans) are a more environmentally responsible choice. Other people think that using potential food for fuel will result in higher food prices for poor and starving people, and still require a huge input of water and energy to produce, leading to a preference for less energy-intensive travel such as walking, bicycling, and sometimes public transportation. A true understanding of environmentalism requires a thorough examination of these and many other issues.

### *Cultural Issues and Consumerism*

Cultural issues can be difficult to see and understand because they are a part of our everyday experience. It can also take quite a bit of courage to critically examine our assumptions and beliefs to see if they are consistent and valid. However, it is impossible to critically evaluate our choices if we do not first look at the way we have been influenced by our collective history and attitudes.

One area in which our cultural beliefs may be at odds with the goals of humane parents is with respect to consumption. The entire Western capitalist society is built on the idea that more, bigger, faster, and newer is always better. The health of the United States economy in particular, but also the economies of many other industrialized nations, is determined in large part by the Gross National Product (GNP) and Gross Domestic Product (GDP), in which illness, pollution and war are counted as positives because they add to the money-producing capabilities of an economy. Shopping is seen as a patriotic duty as well as a great pleasure and privilege. Advertising has pervaded every area of our lives and has an impact on everything we do including the way we dress, the cars we drive, the homes we live in, and the way we identify ourselves.

However, many are embracing the idea that corporations, whose sole reason for being is to make as much money as possible, have too much power over our lives. People are choosing a simpler lifestyle where they minimize their exposure to media and advertising and choose to consume fewer products. Some people buy only used items, or choose not to buy any consumer goods at all. Other people are moving to downsized homes and growing much of their own food.

Cultural issues extend far beyond the influence of the media to include all the collective thoughts, actions and assumptions that are often taken for granted among a population of people. Most of the decisions a society makes are based on these assumptions, and differences in cultural beliefs often lead to misunderstandings, disagreement, or even violence towards people, other animals and the planet. Therefore, it is vital that humane parents have the courage and insight to examine this very important area of our lives.

## *Human Rights*

Many improvements have been made in the area of human rights throughout recorded history, particularly during the last few centuries. However, there are still many areas in which much more work needs to be done. Genocide and war claim countless victims around the globe. Billions of people live in unsafe and unsanitary conditions without access to adequate food, clean water or sufficient shelter, never mind electricity or indoor plumbing. Slavery is on the rise, with people being tricked or sold into a life of unpaid labor. Many other people are forced to work in poor conditions for unfair pay because it is the only work they can find. In many places children are denied an education because their families cannot afford clothing, books, tuition and transportation, and instead these children often find themselves engaged in backbreaking labor. Other children die or are orphaned because of illness that is preventable or treatable but their families were unable to pay for the necessary medication or equipment.

These human rights violations sound like they only go on in undeveloped or developing countries, but in the developed world many people are also denied basic human rights. Women, children, prisoners, people with disabilities, people who are gay, bi-sexual, transgendered and transsexual, people who are under- or unemployed, homeless or otherwise unable to support themselves financially, people who are elderly, and people of color are regularly treated poorly or subjected to unfair assumptions based on their appearances or lifestyles. Humane parents make every effort to ensure that their choices support the rights of people everywhere to safety, health, security and happiness.

### *Animal Protection*

Whether or not we choose to have non-human animals as a part of our immediate families, there are beings all around us who are affected by every lifestyle choice we make. Some of these beings may lose their homes when land is cleared for buildings or farms. Others are raised for food on CAFOs (Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations) or on pastures, or are hunted or fished in their native homes. People wear clothing made from the skin, fur or fleece of other animals. Many beings are used in laboratories to test products such as cleaners, personal care items, or medications. When land, water and air is polluted, non-human animals may become ill or die, or may be unable to successfully reproduce. Some non-human animals live in captivity for human entertainment in zoos, circuses, and aquariums.

It is nearly impossible to live a life that does not bring any harm to any other animals, but humane parents consider the impact of their actions and choices on all beings, human and otherwise. We consider the message we send to our children when we harm other beings for our pleasure or convenience, or make choices that are respectful of the lives and interests of non-human animals.

## The Three Rs: Reverence, Respect, and Responsibility

The Three Rs are the heart and soul of humane parenting with young children. If we can inspire our children to feel reverence about, respect for, and responsibility towards themselves, other people, other animals, and the natural world around them, then children will be motivated to seek out information and make humane choices when they get older. Unfortunately, this is an area where many parenting resources fall short.

I used to receive a newsletter from a writer of “nature-based” homeschooling curricula for young children. In one issue of the newsletter, the author mentioned that she and her girls had collected bagsful of acorns, and offered to ship them to anyone who wanted them and could not find them in their area of the world.

If we can inspire our children to feel reverence about, respect for, and responsibility towards themselves, other people, other animals and the world around them, then they will be motivated to make humane choices when they get older.

At first glance this seems innocuous enough. Gathering acorns gets children outside and paying close attention to their surroundings. Perhaps it even inspires a conversation about botany and life cycles. However, from the perspective of humane parenting, there are a couple of issues that need to be considered.

My first question is, why not just look at the plants and non-human animals who are native to your part of the planet rather than shipping nature in from another place? Forming a deep and meaningful relationship with your particular place is more important than glimpsing many different places, especially when we are talking about young children who are in a developmental phase that is very focused on themselves and their immediate surroundings.

That is not to say that we should shelter our children and fail to expose them to diversity – quite the contrary, it is important that children be surrounded by a variety of people and ideas. However, if we want our toddlers and preschoolers to truly develop an appreciation of diversity, it is vital that we expose them to a wide range of experiences in a very personal and hands-on way. Rather than talking about people

who live in other places, make sure there are people in your child's life who have had different life experiences and encourage these friends to talk with your children about their experiences. Instead of reading about exotic animals, show your child how to carry an insect out of the house to safety. In lieu of ordering acorns, take your child outside your own home or to a park and look at the trees and plants you find there. If you happen to be traveling, then it's fine to examine the differences between the natural surroundings you are familiar with and those in your new location, but try not to push it. There will be plenty of time to talk in abstractions later when your child is ready to understand.

Getting back to the acorn example, my second question is this: what are you teaching a child when you collect hundreds of acorns for no reason other than because you want to? Children can be compulsive about picking objects up when they are outside, and this is good. We want them to look at nature closely, to touch nature and smell it, to form an intimate relationship with it. However, my policy for my children is that we put all objects that we find outside back where we found them, because everything has a job to do right where it is. When we remove objects from their surroundings, we give the message that these objects exist for our purposes alone, and that we are free to do what we want with them. However, in the acorn example, I think it is more in line with a humane parenting philosophy that we teach our children that the acorns are there for the squirrels, chipmunks and other small animals to eat, and that some of them will be buried and maybe will grow into new trees to replace the ones that have fallen due to disease, storm, or human activity. Pick up the acorn, look closely at it, touch it, smell it, and put it back.

At their heart, the Three Rs describe the way we want our children to treat themselves, other people, other animals, and the environment. In order to achieve our goal of raising children who act respectfully and responsibly, we need to examine the way that human morality and pro-social behavior develops. Researcher Lawrence Kohlberg has put forth a popular theory that outlines six stages of moral development through which people can progress: 1. desire to avoid punishment, 2. desire for reward, 3. fear of disapproval, 4. guilt and fear of authority, 5. respect for community and

recognition of universal individual rights, and 6. individual principles of conscience.<sup>ix</sup> Not everyone achieves the highest level of moral reasoning, but Kohlberg's research shows that people progress through these stages in order, and that moral maturity may not be achieved until well into adulthood.

The first two stages in which people are motivated by a fear of punishment or a desire for reward is where most young children are. After that, individuals may progress through different stages of wanting to be perceived as "nice" or "good," being motivated by guilt and authority, and respecting community. The sixth stage, where an individual is motivated by a desire for integrity and a personal commitment to her perception of right and wrong, is one that many people never achieve.<sup>x</sup>

Kohlberg has found that people who live in traditional cultures progress sequentially through these stages but often tend to stabilize at Stage Three, while individuals who live in more complex urban environments usually progress to higher stages.<sup>xi</sup> Kohlberg's explanation for this is that the high degree of moral complexity and ambiguity that drives people to reach more advanced levels of moral reasoning is absent in small societies where there is a lot of face-to-face contact. It is only when society must function in the absence of interpersonal relationships among its members that higher levels of moral reasoning are required.

Though a child's moral development is not necessarily limited by that of his or her parents,<sup>xii</sup> researchers have found that parenting styles have an impact on children's pro-social behavior. One study examined the style of communication parents commonly used with their children and correlated this information with the children's responses to various moral dilemmas on a questionnaire. They found that the children who exhibited the highest degree of moral development were those whose parents took the time to explain things to them (termed "highly representational" communication) and those who supported their children as they tried to reason through problems themselves.<sup>xiii</sup> Other research has found that children of parents who place a high value on compliance tend to exhibit fewer pro-social behaviors towards their peers.<sup>xiv</sup>

The research yields two lessons for parents who wish to encourage their children to achieve high levels of moral development. The first lesson is that patience is crucial. Children, even those who will eventually reach the sixth stage of moral reasoning, must still progress through the other stages which take time and experience. The second lesson is that in order for our children to reach their highest potential as ethical beings, we must meet them where they are and gradually guide them toward a greater understanding of their responsibilities as respectful and compassionate individuals.

## The Three Cs: Curiosity, Creativity, Critical Thinking

As important as helping our children to develop inspiring emotional connections to their world is teaching them how to think about problems and develop innovative solutions. Once our children are motivated to help solve the many troubles in the world, these children need the tools that will help them understand the problems, evaluate the reasons these problems exist, think of innovative ways to address the problems, and finally, our children will need the tools to decide which of these solutions are worth pursuing. The Three Cs of curiosity, creativity, and critical thinking help them to do this.

Again, modeling is a crucial element of developing these qualities in our children. However, many of us inadvertently thwart opportunities in our everyday lives to help our

Parents of creative children treat them and other people with respect, emphasize values rather than rules, are independent and active, and display an appreciation of creativity and humor.

children cultivate their minds. When my daughter was about two years old, she and I were taking a walk with a friend and her son. My daughter was distracted by the sound of frogs and walked over to see several of them by the edge of the water.

“Look at the frogs by the pond!” she exclaimed excitedly, to which my friend replied, “That’s not a

pond, that’s a vernal pool.” Perhaps I should be embarrassed to admit this, but I had no idea what a vernal pool was any more than my daughter did. In fact, even after looking it up, I’m still not exactly sure. I realize that my friend, a devoted naturalist and environmentalist, was trying to help my daughter widen her knowledge of the natural world. However, what happened was that my young child was confused and distracted from what I consider the important part of the experience, which was admiring the frogs and their beautiful songs.

While curiosity is something that must be nurtured, researchers believe that creativity and critical thinking are cognitive skills that can be explicitly taught. Leading creativity researcher, Teresa M. Amabile, outlines several conditions that must be met if creativity is going to thrive. These include intrinsic motivation, competence, self-determination, love and dedication to the task, ability to concentrate on the task, and seeing the task as a combination of work and play.<sup>xv</sup> The most creative work occurs

where a child's specific abilities, intrinsic motivation, and creative thinking overlap, which Amabile terms the *creativity intersection*.

Research shows that play seems to get children's creative juices flowing.<sup>xvi</sup> Parents of creative children treat their children and other people with respect, emphasize values rather than rules, are independent and active, and display an appreciation of creativity and humor.<sup>xvii</sup> On the other hand, parents of less creative children tend to over-structure and control tasks, give up easily on difficult tasks, provide the child with specific solutions, behave with hostility towards the child, criticize and reject the child's ideas, engage in power struggles with the child, pressure the child, and lack patience with the child. As children get older, this trend continues, with children in highly structured school environments showing less creative thinking than those in more informal educational settings, though this may be a cause rather than an effect.<sup>xviii</sup> In other words, parents who value creativity may choose to send their children to less structured schools, while those who value compliance may select educational settings that are more structured.

Given that children must be shown some direction regarding safe and appropriate behavior, how parents can communicate these limits while encouraging children's creativity and motivation is an important consideration. Studies have found that if the controlling aspect of limit setting is emphasized (you need to keep the paints clean), children often feel inhibited and are less likely to be creative. However, if the informational aspect of limit setting is emphasized (I know it's fun to slop the paint around, but we need to keep the paints nice for the other children who will use them), the child will have a feeling of control over the situation and will therefore be more likely to be creative and motivated.<sup>xix</sup>

Educators who study ways that we can teach children to think critically define three components of critical thinking: defining the task, formulating a strategy, and monitoring progress.<sup>xx</sup> If children are able to clearly and accurately define a task, then it becomes much easier to come up with a creative strategy and to determine whether or not their strategy is helping them move toward their goals. As parents, we can help our children

develop this skill by talking through our thought process with them, as well as encouraging them to verbalize their own thinking.

### Offering Positive Choices

Modeling positive lifestyle choices for our children is the most powerful and straightforward way we can teach them about what we believe in. This is where we put our money where our mouth is, so to speak. No amount of lecturing and learning about the issues of human rights, consumerism, environmentalism and animal protection will do much to influence our children if we do not put our knowledge into action. Many parents would agree that charity starts at home with watering the neighbors' plants while they are on vacation, shoveling the driveway for a friend who is in ill-health, or preparing meals for someone in the community who is having a difficult time. Humane parenting asks us to look beyond traditional ideas about community service, finding ways to also serve the global community through our everyday actions.

When we act as passive bystanders who have no control over what happens around us, we pass that attitude down to our children. When we act as educated, powerful contributors who can use our dollars, our votes, our choices and our voices to change the world for the better, then that is the attitude that our children learn from us. We want them to care about people, other animals and the planet and to feel empowered to live their values.

With all the talk of making responsible choices, researching options, and raising

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awareness of the atrocities that are being perpetrated on humans, other animals and the environment, humane parenting can sound like it is not much fun. I suppose that can be true, if you allow yourself to get caught up in thinking about the

negatives. For me, though, I have found this path to be one of deep joy and satisfaction, and that is what I try to impart to my children. I do feel pain and sadness when I think about what goes on around the globe. But instead of becoming hopeless and depressed, I use the sadness as a source of motivation and strength, and I am happy and fulfilled when I live the way I think is most kind.

As Zoe Weil notes in her book *Most Good, Least Harm: A Simple Principle for a Better World and Meaningful Life*, doing good is good for us.<sup>xxi</sup> People live longer, healthier, and more fulfilled lives if they give of themselves to others. This is not about being a martyr, though – no one wants a favor if there are strings attached. I cannot say for sure, but I suspect that giving from a place of expectation, where your only motivation is the promise of a return favor in the future, fails to have the same health benefits as giving for the sake of giving.

As parents, we already have the model for the type of compassion that we are looking to cultivate in ourselves and our children. Marc Ian Barasch writes in his book *Field Notes on the Compassionate Life: A Search for the Soul of Kindness*, “the type of love most often cited as an analogy for compassion is mother-love itself (17).”<sup>xxii</sup> He goes on to say that “science has recently shown how the interactions between mother and child . . . become the basis for all subsequent relatedness.” From that perspective, humane parenting becomes simple if not easy – take the love you feel for your children and try to apply it to other people, other animals, and the Earth. When we treat our children with compassion, and they watch us extend that same compassion into the world, then we are well on the road to raising children who will be the change-makers of the future.

## Parenting Respectfully

It is a cliché to say this, but parenting is the hardest task most people will ever do. It brings us up against some of our personal issues and forces us to confront some deep-running and often suppressed feelings. Sometimes this is not pleasant. We often react to our children without thinking when exhausted, ill, or distracted. Even when we are at our best, we must examine the habits that come from our past and our upbringing and decide if these habits are working for us and if we want to pass these on to our children. As we all know, habits are hard to break, even when we are extremely motivated to do so.

In order to raise our children to become compassionate adults, we must treat them compassionately. This may seem obvious, but many parents do not take the time and effort to examine what this really means. Especially when our children are young, we tend to focus on their behaviors and try to manage them, instead of examining our children's needs and motivations and trying to address these. Parents are advised to use time-outs and "naughty chairs" and to allow their young babies to "cry it out" in order to sleep through the night.

Although these techniques may be effective at changing a child's undesirable behavior in the short term, they are not respectful of the child. My personal guide is this: if I would not treat another adult a certain way, then I choose not to treat a child that way either. Most of us would not lock our partner in another room because we don't like what they are doing, or ignore a friend who is clearly distressed and crying. I therefore consider these unacceptable ways to treat a child. Clearly, if a child is endangering himself or someone else then physical restraint and separation may be necessary to maintain everyone's safety, but that is different from using these techniques as standard ways of manipulating a child's behavior.

There are a number of positive parenting philosophies, and they are all based on the belief that children learn best in an environment that is distinguished by loving support rather than punishment.

There are a number of positive parenting philosophies available for parents to choose from, including Attachment Parenting (first popularized by William Sears, M.D. and Martha Sears, R.N.),<sup>xxiii</sup> Positive Discipline (the work of Jane Nelsen, Ed.D. and colleagues),<sup>xxiv</sup> Parent Effectiveness Training (developed by psychologist Thomas Gordon),<sup>xxv</sup> Aware Parenting (the philosophy of Aletha Solter, Ph.D.),<sup>xxvi</sup> and Unconditional Parenting (described by Alfie Kohn).<sup>xxvii</sup> Each of these approaches has its own distinctive character, but they all are based on the belief that children learn best in an environment that is distinguished by loving support rather than punishment. No one approach has all the answers, and different approaches work better for different families, so parents are encouraged to research each of them and decide what works best for them. Most parents primarily follow one particular philosophy, but incorporate tools from many different approaches depending on the child and the situation.

One positive parenting tool that I have found particularly useful has been Nonviolent Communication (NVC) as described by Marshall B. Rosenberg, Ph.D. in his book *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*.<sup>xxviii</sup> NVC is based on communicating honestly and listening empathetically using the following four components:

1. the concrete actions we observe that affect our well-being
2. how we feel in relation to what we observe
3. the needs, values, desires, etc. that create our feelings
4. the concrete actions we request in order to enrich our lives (7)

For example, if we see our child taking a toy from another child, instead of ordering our child to “Share!” (a refrain commonly heard at play dates everywhere), someone who is practicing NVC might say, “It looks to me like you are not giving Billy that doll to play with. I am sad that he does not have a toy to play with because I want everyone to have fun here. Perhaps you could find another doll that he could use.” The focus is on using “I” statements (I see, I feel, I want), talking about behavior rather than the behavior, and resisting the urge to judge other people’s character and motivations.

This technique is criticized as being artificial-sounding, and when one is a beginner at NVC this type of communication can feel very contrived. However, with practice one can become very skilled at its use. If you choose not to actually say the words, it is still useful to get into the habit of thinking from the “I” perspective rather than the “you” perspective. I have found NVC to be the most effective positive parenting tool I have come across because it helps me to be very clear with my children (and myself) about what I need them to do and why I need it, and often keeps me from assigning labels to people or situations. It takes a lifetime of practice to sharpen this technique, and there are study groups across the world where you can practice using NVC among a supportive group of people.

## Afterword

There is ongoing discussion in parenting literature about the idea of “nature versus nurture.” Is character determined by a child’s genetics and predispositions, or by parenting and society, given that certain necessary conditions for safety and nourishment are met? It should be obvious that I believe strongly in the nurture end of the continuum. I think that if children are treated kindly and are raised in a family that values peace and compassion, they will grow to be adults who treat others kindly and value peace and compassion. I challenge myself, both as a person and a mother, to make the kinds of decisions that I would one day be proud to see my children make.

That said there is no denying the fact that each child possesses characteristics that are a fundamental part of them as individuals. I see it with my own children: my daughter is more like her father with each passing moment, and my son is a miniature version of me. They were this way before they were even born with my daughter in constant motion in utero and my son often so still that I worried there might be something wrong. My daughter made some of the same facial expressions that her father makes from the time she was a week old. No matter what I say or do, I find there are certain personality traits they exhibit that I simply cannot, and should not, change

I see my job as their parent as akin to that of a coach. My role is to lovingly accept my children for who they are and give them the tools to become who they want to be. Few characteristics are either good or bad, but can be helpful or harmful depending on the circumstances. For example, my daughter at four years old is strongly attached to her point of view, which can be seen as either bossiness or as leadership. My job is to help her to view that as a positive characteristic while also helping her to recognize when it might be more appropriate to take a step back and let someone else take the reins.

I must admit that the question has crossed my mind: given my commitment to the nurture perspective of parenting, if my children grow up to have completely different values from mine, if they reject me and the values I hold most dear, does that mean that

I have wasted my time as a parent? If they live lives that are unfulfilling and unhappy, does that make me a failure? Where does my responsibility end and theirs begin?

I suspect that this may become clearer as they get older, but maybe it will never be completely clear. The relationship between parent and child is complex and defies description. It starts with the child's innate being, which interacts with that of parents and caregivers and is influenced by circumstances to provide a wide range of outcomes. Most of these variables are beyond our control, but it is our responsibility to control those things we can: to continue to think, and learn, and research, and push ourselves to be the best we can be to raise our children to lead lives of peace, love, hope and fulfillment.

## Tips for Humane Parents

Pursue a Lifetime of Learning (Adapted from blogger Tsh, 8 Ways to Pursue a Lifetime of Learning, <http://simplemom.net>)<sup>xxix</sup>

1. **Read.** It seems like a tall order for parents and caregivers, especially those with young children at home, but be sure to make a real effort to read something every day. If you can get through a chapter a day after the kids have gone to sleep, good for you! If you, like me, leave your reading in the bathroom and get through a page or two a day, then that is good too. Just be sure to always be feeding your mind. Get to know your librarian, and make good use of books on CD, which can be a great way for busy parents to keep current with their “reading” lists.
2. **Read quality.** If you are going to take the time to read, make sure you are reading something that will expand your mind. Some non-fiction books read like novels, so choose a topic you want to learn something about and ask your librarian to recommend the most popular or readable book on that topic. If you prefer fiction, you can re-introduce yourself to the classics or choose a novel that will teach you something about history or another culture while it entertains you with a good story.
3. **When you do watch TV, watch quality.** There are worthwhile, educational programs on television that are worth watching. There is nothing necessarily wrong with unwinding in front of a fun, frivolous show at the end of a long day. However, try to make sure you choose what you watch instead of sitting down and watching whatever is on the television. When your program is over, turn off the TV and move on to something else.
4. **Surround yourself with other learners.** The importance of surrounding yourself with smart, interesting and engaged people cannot be overstated. It is difficult to learn and think in a vacuum, so having friends who will take an interest in your ideas is crucial. Join a book club, attend local documentary screenings and lectures, or get involved in local organizations whose mission is meaningful to you. Besides, it’s more fun to learn with friends than to do it alone.

5. **Be around people different than you.** It can be challenging, or even intimidating, to spend time around people with different ideas, experiences, backgrounds and approaches than ours. However, it is also challenging to expand our own world views when we insulate ourselves by only spending time with people like us. Try to find people who have a different outlook on life and spend time with them. Listen to what they have to say and learn from them. You might find that you have more in common than you think.
  
6. **Keep up with the news.** This is a hard one for me. I usually do not have time to watch the news, never mind read a newspaper, and frankly I often find the news depressing. However, I know that it is important to know what is going on in the world, which is now made easier by modern technology. I try to read newspapers online as well as blogs that follow topics of interest to me, and I also have a couple of news services that I can check on my iPhone. I think it is important to check international news sources. When I travel I am often struck by how US-centric American news is as opposed to the more global perspective of other news sources such as the BBC and CBC. Lastly, I make an effort to seek out uplifting news stories to balance out the bad stories.
  
7. **Make a list.** You don't want to spend your precious free moments trying to remember what it was you wanted to do when you had some free moments! I used to carry a small notebook with me where I would jot down interesting book titles, movies or websites to check out when I had more time. Now I keep a list on my iPhone.
  
8. **Say "I don't know" to your children.** When your children ask you a question and you do not know the answer, say so. Then find a way to learn the answer together. Look for a website, visit the library, go to a museum, or call someone else who is likely to know. I call my sister, a biologist, at least once a week with some plant- or animal-related question that my daughter has asked that I cannot answer. It is important to show your children that finding answers to their questions is

important, and to give them the tools to be able to do so on their own as they get older.

Giving Your Children a Global Perspective (Adapted from Jamie Martin, Giving Your Children a Global Perspective, <http://simplemom.net>)<sup>xx</sup>

1. **Eat!** If you live in an area that has a diverse population, you likely will be able to find all sorts of ethnic restaurants you can visit to expose your children to different cultures and cuisines. In the rural area where I live, we do not have this luxury. What we've decided to do instead is prepare different ethnic foods at home. We choose something that interests us, like Indian food, and make a day of it. We take Indian music CDs (the Putumayo label puts out a number of excellent world music CDs including some geared specifically towards children) and story books out of the library, listen to the music as we prepare and eat our meal, and read the stories at bed time.
2. **Listen and repeat.** Expose your children to different spoken languages. If you have friends who speak a language other than your child's native tongue, encourage your friend to use the language around your children. Our child care provider is a young woman who grew up in the Ukraine, and frequently speaks Ukrainian to our children, which they love because it is something special they share with their favorite friend. You can also check your library for audio and video recordings designed to expose children to different languages. The goal is not for them to become fluent in the language but simply to expose them to the different sounds.
3. **Discuss.** When appropriate, talk with your children about world events. Visit local ethnic festivals when they are held near your home. Have a map or globe around so that you can locate different places you visit or learn about as your children get older.
4. **Read.** There are many books that are designed to teach children about different cultures and places. Personally, I do not like those books that teach about diversity from a pedagogical standpoint, where there is no plot and the book is simply a collection of photos or drawings of different people. I think these types of books marginalize "other" people and emphasize differences rather than similarities. For my children, I try to choose stories that simply feature characters and locations

different from our family and home, and I especially like books that tell traditional stories from different cultures.

5. **Watch and play.** Likewise, you may be able to find child-appropriate documentaries that teach children about various people and cultures. If you prefer not to go the television route, you can take stories that you read in books and bring them to life with different dress-up items, props and some imagination.

6. **Go!** Travel is not an option for many families, but if you are able, try to bring your children to different places so they can gain a first-hand appreciation of diversity. This need not include international travel; for our children who have always lived in a rural area, a day trip into New York City (about an hour away) to visit a museum is quite an experience in diversity!

## Humane Parents at the Table

The question of food is one of the most fundamental, and the most complicated, issues that we face as humane parents. Everyone eats, and the question of what and how we should eat is one that we must answer every single day, multiple times each day.

Food is not simply nourishment, though it is something that we require and something for which we should be grateful since many people live in a constant state of hunger. For most people who live in relatively affluent Western cultures, food is a medium that we use to socialize, to care for ourselves and our loved ones, to tie us to our culture and to teach us about others. It is also, increasingly, becoming an area that activists are focusing on in an effort to alleviate everything from climate change to the suffering of farmed animals to child malnourishment.

Many humane educators believe that a vegan diet (one that includes no food of animal origin) is the only ethical one. Writer Michael Pollan sums up his views on sustainable and healthy eating as: “Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants (1).”<sup>xxxix</sup> Alisa Smith and J. B. MacKinnon, in their book *Plenty: Eating Locally on the 100-Mile Diet*,<sup>xxxii</sup> describe how they strayed from their formerly vegetarian diet to start eating fish that were caught within one hundred miles of their home on the west coast of Canada in their effort to eat only food that was raised locally. On the other hand, some argue that eating food that may be grown locally, but requires huge energy inputs because it was grown out of season, is worse than shipping the same food in from half a globe away. Some freegans make a statement about the food waste in our culture by only eating things they get free (also known as “dumpster diving”).

At the other end of the spectrum, I have friends whom I consider to be very humane parents who follow a “Traditional Diet” (also referred to as a Weston A. Price<sup>xxxiii</sup> or Nourishing Traditions<sup>xxxiv</sup> diet) that relies very heavily on locally raised, pasture-fed animals and animal products. They visit the farms where the animals are raised, and often are able to witness the slaughter process, and are comfortable that their diet is sufficiently kind to these creatures. Different cultures rely more or less heavily on

animal or plant foods depending on their climate and customs. For example, people living in harsh climates that are not well-suited for agriculture may eat a lot of animal products, while other people living in climates that are well-suited to farming are able to rely heavily or solely on plant foods.

Personally, I believe that it is incumbent on each of us to thoroughly examine our own situations and determine the most humane diet for us. Most obvious and significant is the impact of our food choices on non-human animals, particularly if we choose to include animals or animal products in our diets. Nearly as obvious is the impact on the environment of the way the food was grown, harvested, processed, packaged, transported, sold, cooked and consumed. We must also consider the human toll of the foods we eat. For example, is it highly processed, requiring people to work in unsafe or unhealthy factories? Was our produce harvested by migrant workers who were paid unfair wages? It is only in thoroughly researching these issues and determining what your personal values are that you can decide the best way to feed yourself and your family.

### Choosing Children's Literature

As part of my research, I spent hours in the children's section of the public libraries in my area, which is fairly affluent and not very diverse. I just sat on the floor, pulling books off the shelf one after the other, after the other, and looked to see if the story represented the ideals of humane parenting, including kind treatment of humans and other animals, responsibility for the environment, and diversity among the characters. I would estimate that I looked through at least five hundred books during the course of my informal survey. I was disappointed to find just a very few books that included human characters who were not able-bodied, middle-class, suburban Caucasians and families that were not the traditional nuclear, heterosexual family. I did find a few books about single mother families and families with other individuals (such as a grandmother) as the head of the household, but I did not find a single book about a single father, or two-mother or two-father families. Non-human animals were often characters in children's books, but the themes of the stories usually had nothing to do with animal protection; the non-human characters were simply acting out a human drama. Similarly, "the environment" was often present but not the focus of the story, unless the book was a didactic treatment of topics such as littering and recycling.

In his book *Should We Burn Babar? Essays on Children's Literature and the Power of Stories*,<sup>xxxv</sup> Herbert Kohl describes his experience of reading the Babar stories as an adult. They were among his favorite books when he was a child, but as an adult he was able to recognize the themes of colonialism, materialism, militarism, anthropocentrism and sexism that run throughout the story. Neither Kohl, nor any of the other people he asked about the Babar stories, remembers it this way from their childhood. They view these stories as ones of Babar's triumph over the tragedy of his mother being shot by hunters in the beginning of the book. That is Kohl's point: "It is not developmentally inevitable that children will learn how to evaluate with sensitivity and intelligence what the adult world presents them (18)."<sup>xxxvi</sup>

If we accept the premise that we consider children under the age of three to be too young for a critical discussion of these and other topics of social justice, the question becomes that of finding appropriate books for our children that allow us to nurture their

developing literacy while ensuring that they are receiving the types of messages we want them to hear. Different libraries and bookstores will offer different selections that may be more or less attractive to a humane parent. Independent bookstores often have a more diverse book selection, and are more open to feedback from customers, than the chain bookstores

Children's librarians can sometimes be helpful in this respect, and they may benefit from input from parents who have concerns about the availability of children's books that represent the entire range of social justice issues. For example, when my daughter was a baby and we attended story time at our library together, I expressed concern that all the stories the librarian read during the family-themed session depicted nuclear, middle-class, heterosexual families of a mother, father, and a child or two (or three). She was grateful for the feedback, since she had not considered the idea of including stories about non-traditional families, but was unable to locate any such books to include in future story times.

If you are unable to find books that fit your exacting standards, you will still be able to find useful volumes in your local store or library. Lisa Lipkin, author of *Bringing the Story Home: The Complete Guide to Storytelling for Parents*,<sup>xxxvii</sup> offers the following advice: Don't worry too much about the content of a story. If you don't like it, change it! You can use the story, or just the illustrations, as a jumping-off point to make up your own story. Lipkin also includes lots of prompts to help parents make up their own original stories to tell to their children, such as fantasizing about inviting a favorite storybook character to dinner or making up stories about how various features of nature came to be, such as the ocean, sun or moon.

My favorite resource for finding good picture books is Vandergrift's Children's Literature Page: <http://comminfo.rutgers.edu/professional-development/childlit/ChildrenLit/index.html>. Not only does this site include suggestions for specific books, but it also includes questions that parents, caregivers and educators can ask themselves when trying to select children's books. Some other websites humane parents can visit to get ideas for choosing children's books include:

- Amelia Bloomer Project for Recommending Feminist Literature:  
<http://libr.org/ftf/bloomer.html>
- Children's Books for Promoting Vegetarian-Friendly Attitudes:  
[www.ivu.org/congress/2008/texts/Children's%20Books%20for%20Promoting%20Vegetarian-Friendly%20Attitudes.doc](http://www.ivu.org/congress/2008/texts/Children's%20Books%20for%20Promoting%20Vegetarian-Friendly%20Attitudes.doc)
- The Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Student Support Services Library:  
<http://www.indiana.edu/~glbtlib/wp/>
- Picture Books with African American Characters:  
<http://www.rainbowkids.com/expertarticledetails.aspx?id=189>
- Picture Books and the Environment:  
<http://www.ferrum.edu/thanlon/ecology/ecopicbks.htm>,  
<http://www.ferrum.edu/thanlon/ecology/OtherPicBks.htm>
- Teaching Love and Acceptance Through GLBT-Themed Children's Literature:  
<http://www.afterellen.com/archive/ellen/Print/2006/1/literature.html>
- Universal Peace Federation Children's Peace Books:  
<http://www.upf.org/children-books>
- Vegetarian-Friendly Books for Children and Parents:  
[http://www.vrg.org/family/Vegetarian-friendly\\_Kids\\_Booklist.pdf](http://www.vrg.org/family/Vegetarian-friendly_Kids_Booklist.pdf)

The above list is intended to be used as a reference only. I have not personally reviewed every book mentioned on each of these websites, though I have looked at many and have extensively reviewed the websites themselves. These references are a starting point for parents looking for children's books that contain humane themes. Many times, books that are good in one category, such as featuring diverse characters or strong animal themes, will fall short in another category, so parents and caregivers should use the suggestions above with discretion.

## **Making Media Choices**

We live in a world where we are drowning in media messages. There are advertisements everywhere: not just on television and in newspapers and magazines, but on billboards, on the sides of buses and subways (inside and out), on every web page we visit, on placemats at our local diner, even on the doors of public bathroom stalls. If we wish to raise our children with an ethic of voluntary simplicity and resistance to mass media messages, it is easy to feel overwhelmed by the ubiquity of advertising.

In 2001, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) issued a statement in the journal *Pediatrics* recommending that children under the age of two view no television at all, and that screen time be limited to one or two hours a day for children over the age of two.<sup>xxxviii</sup> However, extensive reviews of the literature on media viewing in young children find very little research on the topic that is publicly available, since much of the research done in this area is by private media corporations and is considered a trade secret (and could hardly be considered unbiased in any event). The research these reviews have uncovered yields mixed results and offers little definitive empirical support for the AAP recommendations, which are based largely on common sense and caution.<sup>xxxix, xl</sup>

It seems intuitive that keeping our children from exposure to commercials and corporate characters will go a long way toward raising children who are not swept up by the latest consumer crazes. However, many parents do not choose to completely abstain from media viewing for many different reasons. Personally, I think there is some benefit to exposing children to limited television so that parents can be aware of what their children are likely to see and can coach their children in media literacy. If you are going to allow your children to watch television, Lisa Guernsey's book *Into the Minds of Babes: How Screen Time Affects Children From Birth to Age Five*<sup>xli</sup> offers some suggestions on how to make smart media choices:

1. **Limit media time.** Allowing your child to watch a half-hour program while you take a shower or make dinner is entirely different than parking your child in front of the screen all day long.
2. **Have rules about when it is okay to have the television on.** Good rules to consider include no television during family meals or when friends visit.
3. **Control the content your children watch.** Watch with your children whenever possible to make sure you approve of the content. Do not assume that because the program is animated or appears on a certain network, or that you like certain episodes from a particular series, that you will approve of the content of any given program.
4. **Limit exposure to commercials and big-business marketing.** Choose to view DVDs without heavily-marketed characters or commercial-free stations.
5. **Be careful about where screens are located in your home.** Have them in family areas (not your child's bedroom, please!) and put them in a place where you can cover them with a door or curtain when they are not in use.
6. **Limit background television.** If no one is watching, turn it off.
7. **Talk to caregivers and babysitters.** Make sure everyone who is responsible for your children is on the same page. Consider having a written media policy available for caregivers.
8. **Make good use of TiVo, DVR and other video-on-demand systems.** If there is a game or a program that an adult in the family really does not want to miss, record it so it can be viewed when the children are not around.

## Options in a Consumer Culture

Birthdays, winter holidays, and other gift-giving occasions are often among the more difficult situations for humane parents to navigate. Personally, I have found that when I ask people to refrain from giving gifts to my children, I am seen as depriving my children of the pleasure of receiving them. The giver also feels deprived, because gifts are one of the ways that people use to express their affection for others, particularly with family who do not live by and do not get to see my children very often.

Unfortunately, it is difficult to teach young children to have an attitude of gratitude for the gifts they receive because they are simply not old enough to really understand. I want my children to appreciate that receiving toys, art supplies, clothing and other gifts is a privilege and an expression of fondness from the giver, and not something to be expected. I also want them to use gifts as a way to express their own love for others, rather than a chore that needs to be done on Mother's Day, Valentine's Day, or whatever other Fill-in-the-Blank Day the corporate machinery has invented to make us feel obligated to buy things to give to other people.

Some strategies I have developed for dealing with this pressure include:

1. **Give or ask for services instead of items.** If the grandparents ask you what your child would like as a birthday gift, ask for art lessons, swimming lessons, or a membership to your local children's museum.
2. **Make a donation.** Instead of sending a tie to your father on Father's Day, make a donation in his honor to her favorite charity. On your child's birthday, ask people to bring one board book each which your child will donate to your local library.
3. **Make an investment.** Ask faraway relatives to purchase a savings bond for your child for birthdays or other holidays. Purchase stock in a socially responsible company as a wedding or baby gift for others.
4. **Make a family "investment."** Instead of feeling like you need to purchase gifts for everyone in your immediate family, decide together to purchase one "memory"

for the holidays. Take a day trip or a longer vacation, or set aside a day to spend together close to home doing something you enjoy like baking or hiking.

5. **Make it yourself.** Everyone loves to get a gift that you made with your own time and hands. If your child is old enough to help, make cookies or preserves together. If you have a skill such as woodworking or sewing, make a birdhouse from scrap wood or an apron for one of the cooks on your list.

6. **Check out sources for used items.** You can often find great gifts using Internet resources such as EBay, Craig's List and Freecycle, or at consignment stores and garage sales.

7. **Make it useful, make it last.** If you feel that you simply must purchase a new item as a gift, make sure it is something the recipient needs and will use. Consider giving a gift certificate to a grocery store or other favorite store, or a certificate that can be used anywhere (such as those available at most banks) so the recipient can pick out something they really want for themselves that is less likely to eventually end up in the trash.

How to be an Anti-Racist Parent (Adapted from New Demographic, *How to Be an Anti-Racist Parent: Real-Life Parents Share Real-Life Tips* e-book, [www.newdemographic.com](http://www.newdemographic.com))<sup>xlii</sup>

Although the suggestions given in this booklet apply to being an anti-racist parent, I think they represent valuable advice for dealing with a broad range of topics. I am reminded of a visit I made with my son and daughter to a children's museum. One of the docents had a birth defect from prenatal exposure to the teratogen thalilomide, and one of her arms was much shorter than the other. My daughter was staring and pointing at her, and though I have spent much time working with people with disabilities, and have spent much time studying parenting and diversity, I was completely unprepared and unsure of what to do. I was embarrassed and am ashamed to report that I reacted by whispering to my daughter that pointing is rude.

The docent overheard us and came over to introduce herself. She asked Bess if she noticed anything different about her, and Bess pointed to her arm. The docent told Bess that she was born with her arm like that, and even though it looks different she can still perform a lot of the same functions anyone else can do, like clap. The docent put Bess completely at ease, and I was immensely grateful to her for helping me out of a difficult position. My daughter came out of that situation with a much richer understanding of diversity, and I came out of it with a much clearer understanding of the need to be prepared for conversations about such complicated topics as disabilities, ethnicity, religion and homosexuality to arise at any time, in any place.

1. **Step outside your comfort zone.** If something is making you uncomfortable, look closely at it and figure out where your own biases are.
2. **Being anti-racist is a journey, not a destination.** The topic of racism is not a one-time conversation. Racism is a difficult subject that must be looked at closely and talked about in relationship to real life.
3. **Seek out professionals of color.** If possible, find a physician, attorney, dentist, artist, etc. of color and do business with them so that your child does not assume

that people of color only do certain types of job (often low-paying, low-prestige ones).

4. **Never stop dismantling your own racist beliefs.** We all have them, and we need to look at them carefully and frequently.
5. **Speak truthfully and proudly.** Answer questions in a straightforward way without making excuses or acting as if the subject of race is taboo.
6. **Make conversations about racism relaxed and frequent.** You want your children to be comfortable coming to you with questions, concerns and stories.
7. **Lead by example.** I don't think this one requires any additional explanation.
8. **Don't let others decide your child's ethnicity for them.** If your child is of a minority ethnic group, don't be afraid to describe her ethnicity in any way you choose.
9. **Have an answer prepared.** This is always better than being caught off guard.
10. **Your children will face racism, so prepare them for it.** It does you, and your children, no good to pretend that racism does not exist, so it is best to prepare them ahead of time rather than allowing them to get caught unprepared in a difficult situation.

## Considering Your Child's Developmental Age

Many frustrations that are part and parcel of parenting can be avoided if we take the time to examine what is and is not reasonable to expect from our children. For example, going back to the idea of sharing, this is not a natural behavior for most young children. During the toddler and preschool years, when children are in what developmental psychologist Jean Piaget calls the Preoperational Stage, they are egocentric, meaning that they are only able to consider situations from their own perspective.<sup>xliii</sup> Due to their limited knowledge of the world, they tend to think in very concrete terms and overgeneralize from their own experience. During this stage, children engage in *parallel play* where they play next to each other but rarely engage each other. They need to learn from experience, and no amount of telling can compare to the educational value of doing.

Piaget's theories remain very influential, though some researchers question the validity of his conclusions. Some scientists have found that, when given a task that is socially relevant, children are actually quite adept at recognizing the difference between their own perspective and the perspective of other people. Children as young as twelve months old have been found to look at an object that is being looked at by an adult. Verbal children often adjust their speech to ensure that their adult conversation partners are able to understand them.<sup>xliv</sup> However, regardless of whether children are primarily egocentric or sociocentric, it is clear that they need lots of practice and experience with the world in order to learn what they need to know.

Russian psychologist, Lev Vygotsky, offers some ideas about how we can best help our children gain the skills they need as they grow. Vygotsky described the distance between the most difficult task a child can perform alone and the most difficult task a child can perform with help as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).<sup>xlv</sup> He argued that parents are able to very accurately define the ZPD through their observations of and interactions with their children. Through what he termed *scaffolding*, parents and other caregivers can help a child reach new concepts and skills by offering support as they build on already-acquired knowledge and skills in order to learn something new.



## Keeping Relationships On Friendly Terms With the “Other” People in Your Life

1. **Find a group of like-minded parents who support your choices.** Nothing is as empowering as being surrounded by other mothers and fathers who have made unorthodox parenting choices and raised happy, healthy children. This may take some effort, and your “community” may consist of a far-flung group of cyber-friends, but the effort is well worth it.
2. **Make an effort to stay educated.** Staying abreast of current research and expert opinions on various aspects of parenting makes it easier to feel confident about your choices. This allows you to educate others, when appropriate, and helps to understand different aspects of the issues involved.
3. **Do not feel obligated to discuss your choices with everyone who asks.** I am not comfortable lying about my parenting, but neither do I necessarily share the details of every aspect of our lives with anyone and everyone. It is important to balance our role as ambassadors for humane parenting with our need to maintain our sanity. If our audience is not receptive, they are not going to hear what we have to say, regardless of how well-informed and articulate we are.
4. **Try to understand where your critics are coming from.** For example, some people honestly believe that a vegan diet is dangerous. Healthcare providers, agribusiness, food manufactures, the US government and the media perpetuate these beliefs. The fact that critics may be misinformed or ignorant does not negate the fact that their criticism is likely coming from a place of general concern for your child’s health and safety. It helps to deal with the critics when we remember that their attacks are not personal, but are borne of their worry for our children’s well-being.
5. **Work hard to have compassion for those who disparage your parenting.** Often, criticism from others comes from their own wounds and may have nothing to do with us. For example, our parents’ disapproval of our parenting may come from

their own belief that we are rejecting them as parents when we make different choices than they did when they were raising us.

6. **Make an effort to find creative solutions to conflicts.** If you value voluntary simplicity and your family wants to give your children lots of stuff for birthdays, talk with the relatives about some of the ideas in the section on Options in a Consumer Culture. If food is a big issue when you visit, offer to cook or seek out local restaurants that will satisfy everyone.

7. **When necessary, hold your ground.** Sometimes it seems like it might be easier to relax our parenting and lifestyle standards in order to keep the peace, particularly with family members we only see rarely. However, I have found that relationships can be damaged far more by the resentment that builds from having my values ignored and belittled. I have had to decide where I am willing to compromise and where I am not, and then stick to those decisions. When dealing with these types of situations, I find it helpful to first acknowledge the other person's feelings. Then, I reassert our expectations. I explain the reasons for my choice and describe an acceptable compromise, if there is one. Lastly, I explain the consequences of failure to respect my wishes.

## Suggested Resources

### Selected Books

Abdullah, S. (1999). *Creating a World that Works for All*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

Amabile, T. M. (1989). *Growing Up Creative: Nurturing a Lifetime of Creativity*. New York: Crown Publishers, Inc.

Barasch, M. I. (2005). *Field Notes on the Compassionate Life: A Search for the Soul of Kindness*. Emmaus, PA: Rodale Press.

Berk, L. E. (2001). *Awakening Children's Minds: How Parents and Teachers Can Make a Difference*. New York: Oxford University Press, Inc.

Carson, R. (1998). *A Sense of Wonder*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers.

Currey-Wilson, E. (2007). *The Big Turnoff: Confessions of a TV-Addicted Mom Trying to Raise a TV-Free Kid*. Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books.

De Graaf, J., Wann, D. & Naylor, T. H. (2002). *Affluenza: The All-Consuming Epidemic*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

Docents of Nursery Nature Walks. (1992). *Trails, Tails & Tidepools in Pails*. Santa Monica, CA: Nursery Nature Walks.

Goodall, J. (1999). *Reason for Hope: A Spiritual Journey*. New York: Warner Books, Inc.

Gopnik, A., Meltzoff, A. N. & Kuhl, P. K. (1999). *The Scientist in the Crib: Minds, Brains, and How Children Learn*. New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc.

Gordon, T. (2000). *Parent Effectiveness Training: The Proven Program for Raising Responsible Children*. New York: Three Rivers Press.

Guernsey, L. (2007). *Into the Minds of Babes: How Screen Time Affects Children From Birth to Age Five*. New York: Basic Books.

Hart, S. & Hodson, V. K. (2006). *Respectful Parents, Respectful Kids: 7 Keys to Turn Family Conflict Into Cooperation*. Encinitas, CA: Puddledancer Press.

- Hill, J. B. (2000). *The Legacy of Luna: The Story of a Tree, A Woman, and the Struggle to Save the Redwoods*. San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers.
- Hill, J. B. (2002). *One Makes the Difference: Inspiring Actions that Change our World*. San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers.
- Kielburger, C. (1998). *Free the Children: A Young Man Fights Against Child Labor and Proves that Children Can Change the World*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers.
- Kohl, H. (2007). *Should We Burn Babar? Essays on Children's Literature and the Power of Stories*. New York: The New Press.
- Kohn, A. (2005). *Unconditional Parenting: Moving from Rewards and Punishments to Love and Reason*. New York: Atria Books.
- Kriesberg, D. A. (1999). *A Sense of Place: Teaching Children About the Environment With Picture Books*. Englewood, CO: Teacher Ideas Press.
- Linn, S. (2004). *Consuming Kids: The Hostile Takeover of Childhood*. New York: The New Press.
- Lipkin, L. (2000). *Bringing the Story Home: The Complete Guide to Storytelling for Parents*. New York: W. W. Norton and Company Inc.
- Lovejoy, S. (1999). *Roots, Shoots, Buckets & Boots: Activities to Do in the Garden*. New York: Workman Publishing.
- Menzel, P. (1994). *Material World: A Global Family Portrait*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.
- Miles, K. (2006). *The Power of Loving Discipline*. New York: Alpha Books.
- Miller, A. (1990). *For Your Own Good: Hidden Cruelty in Child-Rearing and the Roots of Violence*. New York: The Noonday Press.
- Nelsen, J. (2006). *Positive Discipline*. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Pollan, M. (2007). *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals*. New York: Penguin.

- Quinn, D. (1992). *Ishmael: An Adventure of the Mind and Spirit*. New York: Bantam Books.
- Rosenberg, M. B. (2003). *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*. Encinitas, CA: Puddledancer Press.
- Rowe, M. (Ed.). (1999). *The Way of Compassion: Vegetarianism, Environmentalism, Animal Advocacy and Social Justice*. New York: Stealth Technologies.
- Sears, W. & Sears, M. (2001). *The Attachment Parenting Book: A Commonsense Guide to Understanding and Nurturing Your Baby*. New York: Little, Brown and Company.
- Sherlock, M. (2003). *Living Simply With Children: A Voluntary Simplicity Guide for Moms, Dads and Kids Who Want to Reclaim the Bliss of Childhood and the Joy of Parenting*. New York: Three Rivers Press.
- Smith, A. & Mackinnon, J. B. (2007). *Plenty: One Man, One Woman, and a Raucous Year of Eating Locally*. New York: Harmony Books.
- Sobel, D. (1996). *Beyond Ecophobia: Reclaiming the Heart in Nature Education*. Great Barrington, MA: The Orion Society.
- Solter, A. (1989). *Helping Young Children Flourish*. Goleta, CA: Shining Star Press.
- Thomas, S. G. (2007). *Buy, Buy Baby: How Consumer Culture Manipulates Parents and Harms Young Minds*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Vargas, R. (2008). *Family Activism: Empowering Your Community, Beginning With Family and Friends*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.
- Ward, J. (2008). *I Love Dirt! 52 Activities to Help You & Your Kids Discover the Wonders of Nature*. Boston: Trumpeteer.
- Weil, Z. (2003). *Above All, Be Kind: Raising a Humane Child in Challenging Times*. Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers.
- Weil, Z. (2009). *Most Good, Least Harm: A Simple Principle for a Better World and Meaningful Life*. New York: Atria Books.

## Print Periodicals

*Mother Jones* ([www.motherjones.com](http://www.motherjones.com)): *Mother Jones* is a reader-supported monthly magazine full of outstanding investigative pieces.

*Mothering* ([www.mothering.com](http://www.mothering.com)): *Mothering* is arguably the premier magazine of the natural parenting community. It is full of articles on topics from natural birth to alternative education, and all advertisers are thoroughly vetted.

*Natural Life* ([www.naturallifemagazine.com](http://www.naturallifemagazine.com)): *Natural Life* is an editorially-independent, self-published magazine containing articles about simple living, including alternative education and homeschooling, homesteading, and sustainable building.

*Skipping Stones* ([www.skippingstones.org](http://www.skippingstones.org)): *Skipping Stones* is a nonprofit, ad-free magazine for youth of all ages that celebrates human and environmental diversity. Much of the content in this publication is art, poetry, essays and short stories submitted by young people. Annually, they publish an issue devoted to reviewing the best children's literature of the year.

*World Pulse* ([www.worldpulse.com](http://www.worldpulse.com)): *World Pulse* is written by women around the globe who describe their personal experiences. This magazine is new, and an incredible resource for learning about a wide range of women's issues.

*WorldWatch* ([www.worldwatch.org](http://www.worldwatch.org)): *WorldWatch* contains in-depth articles on the challenges of climate change, resource degradation, population growth, and poverty that include solid data and innovative strategies for achieving a sustainable society.

*YES!* ([www.yesmagazine.org](http://www.yesmagazine.org)): *YES!*, a publication of the Positive Futures Network, is an ad-free, nonprofit publication that shares and celebrates a wide variety of constructive choices.

## Websites & Weblogs

(Note: I find weblogs [blogs] and other frequently updated web resources to be particularly thought provoking and informative, and there are several that I read daily. However, recent estimates place the number of blogs currently in existence in the hundreds of millions. Writers start new blogs daily, and many blogs go inactive as writers' interests and circumstances change. Therefore, this list may become quickly outdated, but, as of this writing in December 2009, these are some of the most useful sites that I have found.)

- Animal Ethics (<http://animaethics.blogspot.com>): Philosophical discussion of the moral status of nonhuman animals
- Change.org's Blog Network ([www.change.org](http://www.change.org)): Raises awareness about important causes including human rights, animal protection, environmentalism and education, and empowers people to take action
- Corporate Babysitter ([www.parentsforethicalmarketing.org/blog](http://www.parentsforethicalmarketing.org/blog)): Raises awareness among parents about responsible marketing standards and practices
- Diversity Rocks! (<http://diversebooks.blogspot.com>): Reviews books by ethnically diverse authors
- Education Revolution (<http://aeroeducation.org>) : Advances student-driven, learner-centered approaches to education
- Fake Plastic Fish (<http://fakeplasticfish.com>): Details the author's efforts to eliminate all plastic from her life
- Global Goodness Blog (<http://blog.globalgiving.org>) : Connects donors with community-based projects needing support
- Humane Connection (<http://humaneconnectionblog.blogspot.com>) : Living, learning and teaching for a better world
- Love Isn't Enough (<http://loveisntenough.com>): A blog about parenting and race
- Max Gladwell ([www.maxgladwell.com](http://www.maxgladwell.com)): A blog about social media and green living

- No Impact Man (<http://noimpactman.typepad.com>) : A blog describing Colin Beaven's efforts to live a zero-impact lifestyle
- Slow Family Living (<http://slowfamilyliving.com>) : Offers suggestions for living a simple, meaningful life
- The Green Phone Booth ([www.greenphonebooth.com](http://www.greenphonebooth.com)): Extraordinarily well-written, witty essays on green family living
- World Outside My Shoes (<http://worldoutsidemys shoes.org>): Blog of Carl Wilkens, who speaks about his experiences during the genocide in Rwanda and works to raise awareness of "The Other"
- WorldWatch Institute's Blog Network ([www.worldwatch.org](http://www.worldwatch.org)) : WorldWatch maintains a number of informative blogs on the topics of climate change, green economics, and cultural issues
- YES! ([www.yesmagazine.org/blogs](http://www.yesmagazine.org/blogs)) : A blog of powerful ideas and positive actions

## Organizations

Alternative Education Resource Organization ([www.educationrevolution.org](http://www.educationrevolution.org))

Mission: Alternative Education Resource Organization's mission is to help make student-centered educational alternatives available to everyone.

Attachment Parenting International ([www.attachmentparenting.org](http://www.attachmentparenting.org))

Mission: Attachment Parenting International promotes parenting practices that create strong, healthy emotional bonds between children and their parents for life, so the children can take those bonds with them into their adult lives and share them with their children. And their children can do the same – a life cycle of compassion and connection.

Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood ([www.commercialexploitation.com](http://www.commercialexploitation.com))

Mission: Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood's mission is to reclaim childhood from corporate marketers. A marketing-driven media culture sells children on behaviors and values driven by the need to promote profit rather than the public good. Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood works for the rights of children to grow up, and the freedom for parents to raise them, without being undermined by commercial interests.

Central Asia Institute ([www.ikat.org](http://www.ikat.org))

Mission: Central Asia Institute's mission is to promote and support community-based education, especially for girls, in remote regions of Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Free The Children ([www.freethechildren.org](http://www.freethechildren.org))

Mission: Through leadership training at home and community development projects abroad, Free The Children empowers youth everywhere to make a difference.

Global Footprint Network (<http://ecofoot.org>)

Mission: Global Footprint Network is committed to fostering a world where all people have the opportunity to live satisfying lives within the means of Earth's ecological

capacity. The Global Footprint Network is dedicated to advancing the scientific rigor and practical application of Ecological Footprint, a tool that quantifies human demand on nature, and nature's capacity to meet these demands.

Holistic Moms Network ([www.holisticmoms.org](http://www.holisticmoms.org))

Mission: The Holistic Moms Network's mission is to generate national awareness, education, and support for holistic parenting and green living by providing nurturing, open-minded, and respectful local community networks that encourage families to share these ideals and learn from each other.

Institute for Humane Education ([www.humaneeducation.org](http://www.humaneeducation.org))

Mission: The Institute for Humane Education envisions a world in which people live humanely, sustainably, and peaceably. To create this change, the Institute for Humane Education trains people to be humane educators, advances the field of humane education, and provides tools and inspiration for living an examined, meaningful life.

Mothers Acting Up ([www.mothersactingup.org](http://www.mothersactingup.org))

Mission: Mothers Acting Up is dedicated to ending poverty, preserving the planet, and promoting child security through direct aid and fighting for systemic change.

New American Dream ([www.newdream.org](http://www.newdream.org))

Mission: New American Dream helps Americans consume responsibly to protect the environment, enhance quality of life, and promote social justice.

Northwest Earth Institute ([www.nwei.org](http://www.nwei.org))

Mission: Northwest Earth Institute offers innovative programs to empower individuals and organizations to protect the Earth by emphasizing personal responsibility, the importance of community, and the need to walk lightly and take action for the Earth.

Parents for Ethical Marketing ([www.parentsforethicalmarketing.org](http://www.parentsforethicalmarketing.org))

Mission: Through parental awareness, public pressure, and legislative initiatives, Parents for Ethical Marketing encourages corporations to adopt responsible marketing standards and practices that sustain the health of children and families.

The My Hero Project ([www.myhero.com](http://www.myhero.com))

Mission: The mission of My Hero is to use media and technology to celebrate the best of humanity and to empower young people to realize their own potential to effect positive change in the world.

## Notes

<sup>i</sup> Weil, Z. (2003). *Above All, Be Kind: Raising a Humane Child in Challenging Times*. Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers.

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid.

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## Chapter IV

### *Summary*

This Independent Learning Project, “Developing a Humane Ethic Towards People, Other Animals and the Environment in 18- to 36-Month-Old Children: A Handbook for Parents,” examines the principles of humane parenting. The five elements of humane parenting are discussed: 1. gathering accurate information, 2. the Three Rs of reverence, respect and responsibility, 3. the Three Cs of curiosity, creativity and critical thinking, 4. providing positive choices, and 5. respectful parenting. Within the context of these elements, research regarding the moral development of children, promotion of creative and critical thinking, and autonomy-supportive parenting were considered.

After introducing the elements of humane parenting, this handbook looked at several common concerns for humane parents. Among these concerns are dietary choices, media and literature choices, introducing diversity to children, and observing an ethic of voluntary simplicity. A number of books, print periodicals, Internet resources and organizations are listed so that interested readers can further research the topics introduced in the handbook.

Since humane parenting starts in the home, humane parents must first ask how they can best raise their children to be compassionate, peaceful, resourceful and motivated adults. Research shows that the skills necessary, such as high levels of moral development, critical and creative thinking, and independence, can be taught. Parents who promote complex thought, encourage independent decision-making, and offer limits in a supportive and empathetic way can expect to see their children exhibit more creativity, better critical thinking skills, and a higher level of moral reasoning than parents who value conformity and obedience. (Amabile, 1989, pp. 103-107)

The number of parenting resources available has risen exponentially in recent years, especially those resources aimed at teaching children about environmentalism. However, the sheer number of books, periodicals, websites, blogs and organizations makes it that much more difficult for parents to critically evaluate the available information. For example, a book, program or product that markets itself as “environmentally friendly” does not necessarily meet the strict standards of a humane parent. As the words “green” and “organic” have become popular marketing tools, their meaning has been diluted to the point that they are nearly meaningless. In the best case scenario, it can be frustrating to thoroughly research each daily choice made in a family. Oftentimes, it is simply impossible to gather all pertinent information on a product or choice since most corporations are not inclined to share their trade secrets with the public.

I did not expect to find many resources that were particularly well-suited to humane parenting of toddlers, but I was still surprised by just how few there were. As I began to research websites and weblogs that had promise, I found that many of them were simply vehicles intended to market “green” consumer goods. Many writers spent the majority of their web space reviewing books and products. Many of the books I read seemed to merely be efforts to capitalize on the “green” craze rather than serious examinations of issues or useful guides. Many of the early childhood curricula that I expected to be useful turned out to be highly theoretical and did not contain much practical advice, or the curricula were heavily commercialized and did not fit with my goals for this project.

Luckily, although most parents, experts, and media outlets continue to favor coercive and conformity-valuing parenting techniques, the popularity of positive parenting is rising. Support groups, publications and organizations dedicated to promoting autonomy-supportive parenting

are easily found in many parts of the United States and other parts of the world. Not all of these resources are of equally high quality, but parents looking for validation of their positive parenting choices are more likely to find support than even a decade ago. The fact that scientific inquiry provides further support for humane parenting gives parents even more reason for confidence.

In current American culture, difficult choices and ambiguous circumstances are common for parents and other caregivers. In particular, decisions about media can be difficult and may cause considerable conflict. On the one hand, there are a few valuable programs on television and on DVDs, and it is difficult to overstate the value of having a few quiet moments while the children are occupied by the television to accomplish important tasks or to simply take a break from the demands of child care. To many, the recommendation of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) to allow no television for children younger than two, and no more than one or two hours of television for children older than two, is extreme. (Guernsey, 2007; Thomas, 2007) This is especially true given the fact that the empirical evidence supporting the AAP's recommendation is mixed and often performed by those with a vested interest in the outcome of the research, leading some to conclude that the AAP recommendation is based on a desire to err on the side of caution and common sense.

However, parents who reject the culture of consumerism and wish to protect their children from harmful and frightening messages on television feel conflicted about whether any television is too much. Few programs offer positive views of the environment and of non-human animals. Oftentimes, images of non-human nature are simply used as allegory, implying that they have no function other than that of their use to humans. The portrayal of the range of human experience is also very limited in the media. Though the frequency with which we see

images of individuals of diverse ethnicities is increasing, it is still lacking, and the images of people of color often perpetuate harmful stereotypes. Individuals with disabilities, who come from non-traditional, gay or non-middle-class families, or who do not fit the commonly accepted cultural images of youth and beauty are almost never shown.

What is true of the media is also true in most children's literature. Parents are told that reading to children and cultivating a child's love of the written word is the key to their future success. Many families spend considerable time reading to their children and entire books are devoted to strategies for integrating literacy into every facet of a child's life. However, if the content of the books available is questionable or even objectionable, a humane parent is in a quandary. Many librarians do not have the resources available to offer humane book choices to parents, and it can take considerable effort to find volumes that show all humans, non-humans and the environment in a positive light. However, parents do have the option of producing their own home-made books, or designing their own stories to go along with illustrations they enjoy.

The importance of seeking out like-minded friends, preferably those who are parents, is vital to the success and sanity of the humane parent. It is helpful to have people with whom to discuss questions, problems and concerns as they arise in order to get an independent perspective. There is considerable value in having a group who shares the responsibilities, if not explicitly then implicitly, of researching various issues and sharing findings with others. Speaking for myself, I know that my knowledge and understanding has been greatly enriched, and completely new areas of inquiry opened, through my association with other open-minded and dedicated humane parents. Spirited and intelligent discussion with supportive friends is helpful when it comes to clarifying thoughts and values. Some places where parents can find such

kindred spirits is through some religious institutions, parent support groups in person and on-line, and schools.

### *Conclusion*

It is essential for humane parents to speak up for themselves and their children. Though it is usually not appropriate to involve young children in direct political action, it is vitally important that children see their parents involved in something meaningful and larger than themselves. It is not enough to raise children to be humane if they are not also taught to bring their values out into the greater world. The issues we face need every voice and mind working together if they are going to be solved.

Parents need to share their strategies with others, and work together to support each other along the path of parenthood. Much is made among “Mommy Bloggers” of the animosity felt by parents towards other parents. Parents are prime targets for everyone’s criticism, and it seems that everyone knows how a child should be raised except that child’s own parents. In addition to treating children with compassion, parents must make the effort to treat other parents with compassion as well. Each has a personal path to travel, but no one travels alone.

Humane parenting is a huge, and hugely important, topic that should be the subject of much discourse. This Independent Learning Project, “Developing a Humane Ethic Towards People, Other Animals and the Environment in 18- to 36-Month-Old Children: A Handbook for Parents,” is a very modest contribution to the dialogue, but it is a contribution that is intended to move the conversation forward. This handbook is a resource for individual parents, but I would like to see it also used as a study guide for groups of humane parents who are trying to support each other on their journeys. Ideally, this project represents the beginning of a more in-depth examination of social justice issues and how they can most effectively be addressed in the

context of parenting, child care and education. My hope is that this handbook will grow into a larger and more comprehensive guide for humane parents, and that I will have the opportunity to turn it into a book in the future.

In a world of specialists, more big-picture thinkers are needed to approach problems and generate comprehensive and creative solutions. It is hoped that anyone reading this Independent Learning Project will have a clearer understanding of the interrelatedness of the challenges faced in the areas of environmentalism, human rights and animal protection and how all these challenges are informed and perpetuated by the dominant culture. Further, readers should come away with the knowledge that everyone has the power to affect change, and that parents especially have an opportunity and a responsibility to work for a better future.

Children today are growing up in a different world from that of their parents and grandparents, and it is vital that the way children are taught at home and in school is adapted as necessary to keep up with rapidly changing circumstances. Peace, security and sustainability are the vital interests of this time, and they will require novel solutions. Humane parenting is one element of a broad approach to creating wide-spread cultural changes, but it is undoubtedly one of the most important elements of creating change. There are many writers, thinkers and organizations working on different aspects of the problems of concern to humane parents, but few are looking at all these smaller elements as simply parts of an overarching problem that requires nothing short of a paradigm shift to solve.

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## Resume

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### Education

Cambridge College, Cambridge, MA - Master of Education, 2010

University of Medicine & Dentistry, Newark, NJ - Master Level Studies in Neuroscience, 1997 - 1999

Seton Hall University, South Orange, NJ - Bachelor of Arts, Major in Psychology, Minor in Liberal Arts, 1997

### Awards, Fellowships, Grants

Summa Cum Laude, Seton Hall University

Psi Chi Psychology Honor Society, Seton Hall University

Recipient of Psychology Department Award, Seton Hall University

Honors Program, Seton Hall University

### Experience

Facilitator, Wellspring Community School 2010  
 Responsible for publicizing the Seedling + Sprout program (parent-child class), designing classroom activities, sharing parent education materials, and maintaining a classroom environment conducive to the development of curiosity, creativity and critical thinking among children age three and under

Administrator, New Jersey Devils Youth Hockey Club 2000 - present  
 Responsible for public relations, customer service, bookkeeping, budgeting, marketing, scheduling, human relations

Instructor, Bergen County Zoo 1999  
 Responsible for delivering instruction to summer camp attendees age three through ten years

Laboratory Technician, East Orange Veterans' Administration Hospital 1998 - 1999  
 Responsible for scheduling experiments, designing protocols, executing experiments, collecting and analyzing data, assisting the primary investigators in preparing manuscripts for publication

### Publications

“Overcoming Fear and Moving Forward”, *Education Revolution Magazine*, Summer 2010

“Developing a Humane Ethic Towards People, Other Animals, and the Environment in 18- to 36-Month-Old Children: A Handbook for Parents”, unpublished master’s thesis, January 2010

“Every Birth is Natural”, *The Attached Family*, Spring 2009

“On Being a Parenting Original: Strategies for Maintaining Your Courage - and Sanity - When Your Choices are Out of the Ordinary”, *Mothering*, March/April 2009

“Stress Facilitates Acquisition of the Classically Conditioned Eyeblink Response at Both Long and Short Interstimulus Intervals”, *Learning and Motivation*, May 2001

“Restraint Stress”, Chapter from *The Encyclopedia of Stress*, Second Edition, 2009

### **Fields of Interest**

I am interested in early childhood development, positive parenting practices and parent education, progressive education, and the development of critical thinking and creativity among young children.

### **Professional Organizations**

I am a member of New Jersey Educators Exploring the Practices of Reggio Emilia (NJEEPRE) and North American Reggio Emilia Alliance (NAREA).

### **Hobbies**

I enjoy spending time with my family, reading writing, learning about Far Eastern religions, hiking, needlework and ceramic arts. I have led workshops and given lectures in the United States and Canada on humane parenting, consumerism and voluntary simplicity. I write for a number of blogs including Ahimsa Mama (<http://ahmsamama.blogspot.com>), Rhythms: The Blog of Wellspring Community School (<http://wellspringcommunityschool.blogspot.com>), and Your Woman in Washington, the blog of MOTHERS [Mothers Ought to Have Equal Rights] (<http://yourwomaninwashington.blogspot.com>). My writing has also been featured on the blogs of Moms Rising, Fem 2.0 and Go Green Street. I am an accredited leader of an Attachment Parenting International Support Group and a retired leader for the Holistic Moms Network.

### **Volunteer Experience**

I have worked for a number of volunteer organizations, including Attachment Parenting International, Holistic Moms Network, Emerson Lily Free School, Mount Pleasant Animal Shelter, and West Orange Welfare League. I am an active parent volunteer at Wellspring

Community School in Gladstone, New Jersey, where I assist in the classroom, manage the blog and help organize special events.

**Computer Skills**

I am familiar with Blogger, Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel, and Microsoft Publisher, and a number of Apple software applications including Pages, Keynote, iTunes, iPhoto and iMovie. I have used Microsoft Power Point and enjoy working with a number of social networking platforms including Twitter, Facebook, Mail Chimp, You Tube and Pod Bean.

Child and animal protection professionals are aware of this connection, and recognize that both child and animal abuse are linked in a self-perpetuating cycle of violence. [7] One reason for this is that individuals who witness abuse or other violence become desensitized to it. Research shows that the more often someone is exposed to a certain situation, the more comfortable that person becomes with it.Â There is a significant correlation between acts of cruelty to animals as a child and serious, recurrent aggression towards people as an adult. [18] In fact, one of the most reliable predictors of future violence as an adult is having committed animal abuse as a child.