

Chapter 57

Non-Violent Teaching and Parenting of Young Children: Emulating Optimal Conflict Resolution

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ABSTRACT

Non-violent child development builds a critical foundation for advancing sustainable peace in our troubled and conflicted world. First and foremost, a devoted commitment to non-violence, not only in rhetoric but in day to day action and living, prioritizes informed and responsible procreating of only wanted children with a family and societal vision for deeply integrated wellbeing. It begins a positive and productive cycle requiring societal protection of children, women, and all who are vulnerable from violence. Rather than introduce relevant literature and research separately from pragmatic tools, the chapter introduces scholarship to help explain field-tested skills and empower readers to immediately begin practicing what is advocated here.

INTRODUCTION

A generation ago, non-violence referenced the nonviolent social movements of leaders like Gandhi and Dr. King for the liberation and advancement of Indian and African American people. Simultaneously, the formal academic study of peace began in a small liberal arts college in the Midwest of the United States. Since then, as peace scholars and research grew, some started exploring what they call “positive peace,” or the social conditions needed for systemic peacebuilding, rather than just the study of the absence of war and violence. This book on nonviolent teaching of children is a strong example of what has resulted. The author’s interdisciplinary field of negotiation, conflict resolution and peacebuilding is another. Both ask that we examine our cultures closely to see where and how they nurture and promote violence as well as nonviolence, or cultures of peace.

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This chapter will focus on the power of adults around the world, parents, teachers, media and sports celebrities and others, in influencing the children and youth, particularly with their examples as they relate with each other and children/youth. Authoritarian models in which adults, particularly men, see themselves as superior to others, particularly children/youth and women, and comfortable with exercising power over others emulates a culture where such power is an aspiration for a chosen few. This stands in stark contrast to a truly democratic culture in which power is shared, even with the youngest members of our societies. Historically, most schools teaching children represent the authoritarian model. Children are expected to obey and conform to adult expectations and demands.

Before law school, the author worked for a brief period in early childhood development and for many years encouraging girls, ages 6 to 17, to fulfill their potential. This work encompassed the poorest of local communities, where girls were parenting their younger siblings at very young ages due to parent drug abuse, alcoholism and other hardship as well as girls and those who cared about them in more prosperous circumstances.

In law school, she prosecuted domestic violence, represented wives and mothers leaving violent marriages, encouraged scholarship on child welfare, and published her first scholarship on the sex trafficking of child and young women. This article has been translated into several languages by the United Nations.

As a new litigator and lawyer, the author advised schools and families about violence, weapons and other problems. She began her mediation practice with the Minneapolis American Indian center at their request to help mediate child welfare cases and bridge cultural misunderstanding. After leaving her legal practice, she created a treatment program for female violent offenders, ages 10 to 17. It incorporated non-violent mediation and conflict resolution and dramatically reduced violent behavior by more than fifty percent in less than six months.

The author's aspiration in writing this chapter on nonviolent parenting and early childhood development is to share the best of her field tested experience and wisdom to all readers who share her passion for protecting children and educating them to be their best and most effective selves in this troubled and challenging world. Having worked with clients, colleagues and students from over eighty countries to date, including many from war-torn and violence-ridden countries, the information presented is relevant globally.

BACKGROUND

Building a culture of peace is not easy whether in the home and family, school, other organizations and communities. While the introduction to this chapter has mentioned negative peace, or absence of war and other violence, discussing the family culture as a transition to positive peace is more complex than negative peace. It includes empathy and respect for all human beings equally. The "cultural spillover" theory posits that children's behavior reflects their culture. Cultures of violence nurture violent children. Cultures of peace/nonviolence promote and raise nonviolent children.

Anyone serious about building cultures of peace in young children's families, schools and communities, particularly those needing to transform cultures of violence must invest in serious and extended study of nonviolence and conflict resolution skills and tools. They will benefit in many ways in addition to progressing with nonviolent development. They will also learn how to catalyze social justice against all odds (Erbe, 2003), create effective international and multicultural collaborative partnerships (Erbe,

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