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**OUR CHILDREN, OURSELVES**

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embracing our life force

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cover story

# the marvel of children

by rebecca amis

wonderment, creativity and play



Children do not come with instructions. What they do come with is an innate ability to be creative, playful, intuitive, wondrous, intelligent and perfect. It is we, the adults in their lives, who must take the advice and instruction that best contributes to a child's very essence. The uniqueness of our children can be encouraged and reinforced without creating a sense that there are any rules about how to be an authentic child of this world, it just takes a gentle, aware and knowing hand.

Encouraging the development of our children as they learn and grow means cultivating the inherent dynamism and genius within each of them. If as parents we can watch and listen, they will clue us in at every turn as to what stimulates them, turns them off and inspires them. There are several ways that we can learn from our children and nurture their emotional and social growth. Even though "the rule is no rule," there are a few things we can think about and implement. So here are your "instructions" to watch, learn and grow!

### be ecstatic about the children in your life

Urie Bronfenbrenner, renowned psychologist and founder of the Head Start program, believes "babies and young children thrive when they are cared for by adults who are 'crazy about them.'"

Bronfenbrenner, along with Hillary Clinton, coined the notion that "it takes a village" to raise a child. When you have this village, you want the caring patterns to be consistent. Children need talkative, respectful, caring, consistent and loving people in their lives to blossom with resilience.

the opposite of play  
isn't work, it is depression.  
-daniel pink

It is said that this resilience emerges when a child knows there are at least five people who love him and truly care about what he is doing. In his book, *Magical Parent - Magical Child*, Michael Mendizza states, "We view the adult-child relationship as the most important relationship. What takes place in that adult-child interface, often before a child learns to speak, determines their personal future and the future of humanity. Optimizing the state of this relationship is the most powerful catalyst for personal, cultural and global change."

### cultivating experts: catching children in the flow

Howard Gardner, a renowned Harvard professor, writes in his new book, *Five Minds for the Future*, that adults must nurture the inner passion in children. Gardner himself knew from a young age it was writing that captivated him. He had mentors around him who nurtured that inner passion, and he is now, among other things, an accomplished writer. When you see your child passionate about a certain interest or hobby, catch it, and cultivate it.

Daniel Pink, author of *A Whole New Mind*, and Michael Mendizza both emphasize the tendency of all human beings to get caught up in the flow of doing what they love. What is it that inspires the kids in your life? When is it that you catch your child caught up in the flow of doing something? Take note of this when it happens. It will help you understand and develop an awareness for his or her growing passions. When we see them in the flow, we see their passion.

## cover story

### the first years last forever

The first several years of a child's life are the most precious as far as cultivating brain development. A new, interactive website, [zerotothree.org](http://zerotothree.org), allows users to play around with the "Baby Brain Map," or BBM, and see what we can expect from an infant or toddler at certain periods of development. It can also show what is going on cognitively, physically, emotionally and socially in a child's brain at various ages. There are many different ways to help develop a child's language and cognition. We can talk to them, read to them, sing to them, play music for them. The more language we can provide them with during the early years of zero to five, the more language they will develop.

### language development

A child's language development is directly related to the amount of words spoken to the child in a given day. Parents who are in a professional vocation, speak three times as more to their child than parents who are on welfare.

few things can transform us  
as quickly as  
the presence of a child.  
—t. hart

If you are interested in how much language your child is bathing in, check out the LENA System at [lenababy.com](http://lenababy.com). LENA is a language environment scale that assesses language exposure. The purpose of the LENA system is to help parents speed along their child's language, cognitive and social development. The environment of children's linguistic ability is measured and then communicated back to the parent, who can then provide them with the richest language environment possible. Researchers at LENA Systems



### let them play!

Children who play make-believe develop a cognitive skill that is associated with low school dropout, drug use and crime. There appears to be a relationship between lack of childhood play and violence in adults. According to Michael Mendizza, play is the child's royal road to intelligence, creative thinking and joy.

easy to get lost in responsibility and unwittingly yank our children around on the reality of our busy lives.

Dr. Becky Bailey in her *I Love You Rituals* suggests having a ritual for taking a few minutes to truly connect and bond with your child when you pick them up at the end of the school day. When you greet your child after school, you can engage this language

recognize the importance of close, daily interactions between parents and children as it helps them reach their fullest potential.

Our busy lives are not always conducive to having extra down-time to engage in long, language-developing conversations with our children. Most parents have experienced days where they have to pick up their children from school, run a jillion errands before going home, walking the dog, making dinner, following up on a few phone calls, etc. It's

### books of wisdom:

*I Love You Rituals*  
by Becky Bailey

*Wisdom of the Ages*  
by Wayne Dyer

*Five Minds for the Future*  
by Howard Gardner

*The Secret Spiritual World of Children*  
by Tobin Hart

*Magical Parent Magical Child*  
by Mendizza/Pearce

*A Whole New Mind*  
by Daniel Pink

*Real Boys*  
by William Pollack

ritual by asking, "What did you bring home from school today?" Then take an inventory of all the things (body parts included) the child brought home. As you name the body parts, touch each one. Make jokes, laugh, engage!

### avoid squashing their wonderment and creativity

I once heard someone tell a story about a famous greeting card company. The long-time creative force of this company would frequently visit schools to talk to students about his profession. He would open his talk by telling kids he was an artist and would then ask the children, "How many of you are artists?" All of the children in kindergarten and first grades raised their hands. However, in second-grade classes about two-thirds of the class raised their hands. And when visiting the third graders, only a few raised their hands. By sixth grade, not one student raised their hand!

Even Tobin Hart in his book *The Secret Spiritual Lives of Children* encourages parents to celebrate their children's sense of wonder at whatever age they may be. He contends, "In schools, for example, we are not interested in tremendous mystery but in tremendous certainty and so activities direct children away from wonder and toward things like multiple-choice examinations...giggles have little place in the typical classroom."

### infancy and mental health

"Infant mental health" can be defined as the "healthy social and emotional development of a child from birth to three years of age." Positive and responsive relationships with consistent primary caregivers helps build optimal attachments, while also supporting healthy social-emotional development. These relationships form the groundwork of mental health for infants, toddlers and preschoolers. A growing field of research is devoted to the promotion of healthy social and emotional development and the prevention of mental health problems. You can learn more about the context of these issues at [zerotothree.com](http://zerotothree.com). ●

Take this all with you and celebrate the child who is in your life!