# Conscious, mindful, awakened

This book holds the vision that every child will stay planted in their true self, for this is their birthright.

We awaken when we become aware of who we truly are. **The mind, then—meaning the beliefs we live by that drive so much of what we think and feel—is the true starting place for change.**

An awakened parent is one who is aware that the traditional paradigms of parenting, where the parent is seen as greater than the child, are obsolete in the modern world, producing dysfunction and disconnection in families. Instead, they are willing to be the architects of a new model of parenthood where parent and child are seen as equal, serving as mutual partners on a path of growth founded on increasing consciousness.

Parents view their children as mirrors through which they are able to see how they themselves need to mature and develop. Instead of fixing what they see as faults in their children, these parents seek to work on themselves, raising their own levels of maturity and presence. **The focus is always on the parent’s awareness rather than the child’s behavior. This is the core insight of the book.**

We act too often through our ego (inner voice, unconsciousness). A child has the ability to bring to our attention just how unconscious much of our parenting is.

# Fear and anxiety as a source of many problems

As parents who are trying our best to do a good job, we don’t realize that it’s precisely our fears for our children, which we think of as concern, that are the problem with most parenting. These fears often take the form of intense anxiety with regard to our children. Whatever its precise manifestation, our fears undermine so many of our good intentions. Fear is the reason our parenting somehow manages to produce results that are the exact opposite of what we were aiming for.

**Our children may be small and powerless in terms of living independent lives, but they are mighty in their potential to be our awakeners.**

Perhaps more than anything, becoming a parent offers us the opportunity to become aware of patterns established in childhood. Because of our children’s closeness to us, they offer us a mirror of ourselves. Through them, we are brought face-to-face with what it must have felt like for us to be a child.

Instead of reacting to our children because of what they are showing us about ourselves, the conscious response is to look into the mirror they are holding up to us, allowing ourselves to become aware of the many ways in which we still behave like children ourselves not in control of our own emotions.

The reason neither traditional (it’s the child’s fault) nor contemporary (be calm and understanding) responses to children’s provocations are effective for long is that they don’t get to the root of the behavior. The focus of the various techniques parents read about or pick up from experts or other parents is on the particular behavior, not on the dynamics that underlie the behavior. These techniques are all about controlling children so their actions don’t trigger us. We tell ourselves that if we could just get the child to “do” or “not do” certain things, we wouldn’t react the way we do. It’s a game in which both parent and child are always trying to stay one step ahead of the other. Needless to say, the game results in anger, anxiety, and frequently disappointment and even sadness.

## Pushing buttons

We are triggered not by their behavior, but by our own unresolved emotional issues. The problem isn’t the child’s behavior, but why it sets us off. Unless we examine why the behavior causes us to react negatively, we will never change the patterns of interaction between our children and us—and this is true of any close relationship.

## Example of conscious reacting

**“Is my child in some way reflecting the way I tend to operate? Are there ways I need to restructure my life so I can be more organized?”**

**Am I trying to protect my child from making the same failure that I made?**

**Am I authentic?**

**Am I controlling my emotions or am I throwing a tantrum?**

**When we ignore the immature ways we sometimes behave toward our children, by making use of the “power” we have over them, which they consistently reflect back to us, we turn down one of the most profound opportunities to grow ourselves up.**

# Creating the right environment instead of controlling

Parenting needs to shift from controlling our children, which is rooted in our fears and serves to impede their progress, to supporting the development of their physical, emotional, and mental capacities. Help your kids to listen to their own desires rather than allowing others to influence their decisions.

## Clash of time zones

Don’t focus on planning, doing and keeping them busy for the sake of it. Parents are oriented to the future, to getting to wherever they imagine themselves to be going. Children, on the other hand, when left to themselves inhabit the present. Most of the disconnection between parent and child comes down to this rupture between a life enjoyed moment by moment and a life that’s focused on moving ahead.

**When children feel seen, believe they are worthy, and discern that they matter for who they are as a person and not just because of what they accomplish, they are able to enjoy their own sense of empowerment.**

I now realize how I had it wrong,

Upside down and outside in,

It is you who is there

to wake me up to my true self.

## Putting too much pressure on your kids

Many of the expectations we have of our children are unspoken. Despite what we don’t put into words, children intuitively sense when we wish them to be other than they are—sense that we want them to fulfill our fantasies of who they will grow up to be and what they will accomplish.

Don’t think your kid is too shy, too much of an introvert or anything else just let them be themselves. Many children suffer from guilt, and in many cases live in a state of shame, because they are unable to perform to their parents’ satisfaction.

Placing expectations on your child instead of allowing the child’s own natural inclinations to emerge spontaneously may well result in an emotional Grand Canyon between you and your child. As the gap widens, a flood of anxiety will rush in to fill it—anxiety not only for your child but also for yourself.

## Parenting is not only about the child

When we buy into the myth that parenting is about the child, we readily take credit for our wonderful parenting when our children match up to our expectations, whereas we just as readily place blame on them when they don’t meet our expectations.

To parent consciously is to turn this approach on its head. The focus shifts to the parent as the one who needs to be “raised.” In other words, we put ourselves under scrutiny, not our children.

As adults, and now parents ourselves, we find ourselves unexpectedly triggered by an experience with our own child. What’s happening is that pain from our past is being reactivated. Conscious parenting stresses how our children act as a mirror for what we can’t see about ourselves. They bring to the surface the pain we haven’t processed but that’s now causing us to react so strongly, and often irrationally, to their behavior. Unless we take seriously what they are showing us about how hurt we have been—and how we have never really faced up to this hurt—we will raise them to exhibit the same immature behavior that reflects our unresolved pain. This is the essence of the profound journey of parenting. Instead of trying to “fix” our children, we are asked to turn inward and examine what in our own psyche needs to be resolved.

“Your child is fine being ordinary. It’s your own sense of lack that needs them to be labeled extraordinary. They don’t have this need—your ego does.” Let your child be average. Most children feel they are on earth to live a life that matches up to their parents’ standards, in return for which they hope to receive their parents’ love.

Instead of seeing her as defiant, they now realized that she was defending herself. Just this small shift in perspective allowed them to work with her in a whole new way. Now they couldn’t just pin all the blame on her but instead had to ask themselves, “Why does our child feel the need to be so defensive? What can we do to help her?” As they examined their part, they were able to release her from the burden of being “the defiant one.”

## Unconditional love

They need us to switch from a focus on molding them in the name of love to one of creating space for them to show up as they need to, even when they are being irrational and unpredictable. Children want nothing more than to feel they have our permission to express who they are at any given moment. No, I’m not talking about mindlessly indulging them, but rather about creating the conditions for them to express their whole self. When we give them this freedom, they experience a vast, unbounded spaciousness in which to discover themselves and ultimately flourish. They feel our love as love, not as control born of our fear.

## Holy grail of happiness

In the search for eternal happiness we don’t realize that this means we are conditioned to depend on life working out in a particular way, we appear helpless when it doesn’t. Only when we separate the internal (ourselves) from the external (things that happen in life) do we realize that who we are internally can continue to adjust, and in fact flourish, despite our external situation.

The challenge is to see the pleasure and the pain of life equal in terms of the opportunity they present us. If we approached life this way, and showed our children how to do so, we would stop searching for happiness, knowing that the process of engaging whatever comes our way holds the greatest fulfillment.

To understand true happiness, we need only to observe young children. hey don’t wait to be happy until they are rich, thin, pretty, or in the “right” social circle.

## Engaging in life “as is” rather than doing – avoidance of unhappiness

Children inherently know how to engage life as it is. They cry and throw tantrums, but they don’t attach their sense of worth to what may be happening. Unless taught otherwise, they are ready to pick themselves up when life doesn’t go their way. Children feel their feelings and move on without being attached or getting a victim of the circumstances or judging life on how it makes them feel.

**By training our children to be outcome-oriented, engaging life based on whether a particular experience makes them feel good or not, we teach them that if an activity doesn’t qualify, they should avoid it and look for an experience that promises happiness. Thus, because of our fear that they might experience some kind of pain, they miss out on the immediate experience of life.**

## Control over children

The only control we have, as parents, involves our own feelings and reactions, together with the conditions we set in our home. Our problem is that we don’t really know how to control ourselves or the conditions we create in our home, which steers us in the direction of controlling our children instead.

## Acting out of fear vs. out of love

We have all experienced moments of sheer panic, when our reactions are all about fear-laden control, as opposed to understanding and connection. Our children stay awake doing homework, but our fear that they won’t get enough sleep causes us to bark or yell at them instead of empathizing with them. Or our child doesn’t manage to master the skill of potty training on time, but instead of entering deep patience and teaching them this skill, we find ourselves riddled with fear that they will be rejected from kindergarten and will wither away at home, isolated and friendless.

**~ The Gift ~**

May you be blessed with a child . . .

Who defies you

So you learn to release control,

With one who doesn’t listen

So you learn to tune in,

With one who loves to procrastinate

So you learn the beauty of stillness,

With one who forgets things

So you learn to let go of attachments,

With one who is extra-sensitive

So you learn to be grounded,

With one who is inattentive

So you learn to be focused,

With one who dares to rebel

So you learn to think outside the box,

With one who feels afraid

So you learn to trust the universe.

May you be blessed with a child . . .

Who teaches you

That it is never about them

And all about you.

## Pushing and bad intentions

We push our children much more than they ever push us. For instance, when does a child ever start each day with lists and schedules as we do? They don’t make a zillion plans for us and force us to go places we don’t want to go. They don’t threaten us when we don’t eat the food they like or don’t wear the clothes they choose for us. It’s we who initiate such dynamics, rigidly forcing on them our standards. Naturally, we couch these things in terms such as giving them opportunities, promoting good health, exposing them to life’s possibilities, and showing our support for them. If we were honest with ourselves, we would admit that all of this is just manipulation so we can get our way.

When we understand that less-than-desirable behavior is a signal of something else, we are reminded to connect with our children in a more meaningful manner. When we view their behavior through the lens of cause and effect, instead of rushing to judgment about their character, we become curious about their feelings and experiences. This approach does wonders in terms of building trust and thereby drawing our children closer to us.

**Instead of attempting to get our children to change, the challenge is to transform our energy from a state of neediness to one of empowerment based on an awareness of the abundance at our disposal. By asking, “Can I become what I need my children to be?” we start to embody the qualities we wish them to absorb. To shift from believing that life happens to us, to understanding that life happens for us and with our participation, enables us to find the jewel in every experience**

Our instinct is to lash out. If someone irritates us, we don’t think twice but simply react. “Hey, what’s wrong with you? Can you stop what you are doing?” It doesn’t occur to us to say, “Why am I getting so agitated right now? Can I communicate my needs in a respectful manner knowing that the other is not coming from a place of evil intention? Can I remove myself from this situation if it feels unbearable?

**~ A New Commitment to Shedding the Past ~**

Even though I want to cling to what ought to be

And all the ways life should have been,

I know that my resistance to what is

Comes from fear,

Which blinds me to the jewels of the present moment.

If I can let go of my need to control

I can enter the unknown with vigor.

Flowing with grit, resilience, and power,

I can become the agent

Of the transformation I wish to witness.

Resisting nothing,

I greet the present moment with awareness and joy.

## Being you, balance energy rather than mirror (throwing tantrums yourself)

Drawing on the abundant nature of reality begins with accepting ourselves exactly as we are. This is fundamentally different from seeing ourselves primarily in a particular kind of role, such as a mom or dad. Though roles can be helpful at times, they need to be underpinned by the wholeness of pure being. Otherwise, roles can easily end up seriously unbalancing our energy as we become locked into a mental image of who we are “supposed” to be as a mom or dad, instead of being who we truly are.

Embody the principle of balance, try to round out my child’s energy by occupying the opposite end of whatever they experience. For example, if she is anxious, I become grounded in my sense of trust; if she is angry, I enter stillness; if she is frustrated, I enter peace. By resisting the urge to match her energy and thereby amplify it, I try to take on its antidotal properties. This silent but profound shift in my energy allows her to naturally balance out her energy and find her way back to self.

**By remaining grounded in ourselves, we show them that their emotions will pass and they will return to center. But how can they learn this if they have to watch us constantly being pushed and pulled by our own transient moods?**

## Curious rather than furious

**“I’m curious about your thoughts about this. Can you share?”**

**“I’m wondering what you feel about that. Can you tell me?”**

**“I would love to know how you came to that conclusion. Can you share your thinking?”**

**“I’m fascinated by how you think and feel. I would love to know more.”**

**“You sound like you are really experiencing strong feelings. Would you share them with me?”**

## Feelings vs emotions

People often confuse emotions with feelings, as if the two were the same. I look at them as vastly different. Simply put, we react with an emotion when we are unable to handle our feelings.

When we feel our feelings, we don’t have time to engage in reactive emotions. We tune in and allow the feelings to speak to us, wash over us, and transform us. Aware that we are under waves of feeling, we do the opposite of emoting. We hush up, become still, and allow the significance of the feelings to grow us up.

*“I have had a long day and am tired. I have no energy left and need to rest. This is why I am beginning to sound impatient and can barely hold it together. Can you please help me out here? “*

**“Why do clothes on the floor affect my inner sense of stability? Why do I feel personally threatened to the point of lashing out at my child?”**

**Consumed with a mythical standard of “how things should be,” we often feel we have no choice but to react. We are compelled. However, by examining each reaction and identifying which myth is driving it (and often it’s more than one), we can begin to tame our reactivity. All that’s required is to observe what we tell ourselves in such situations. This enables us to recognize which cultural myth or myths we are in the clutches of.**

**Feeling:** You feel impatient with your child for being too slow. You feel helpless, frustrated, and incompetent.

**Reaction:** You want to push them along, perhaps even yell at them.

Entering the fear: Notice that you have been triggered. This is a red light, a warning to halt. Hit your internal freeze button.

Notice your agitation, take a deep breath, then allow yourself to become quiet internally. If necessary, leave the room. Examine your fear by asking:

* What’s the nature of the fear I’m experiencing?
* What am I afraid will happen?
* Is that really such a bad thing?
* Will it be the end of the world?
* Can I own that my fear stems from my past?
* Can I see that it has nothing to do with my child?
* Can I allow the feeling to pass through me and tap into a deeper trust?

## From judgement to empathy

When we truly feel empathy for another, there is no agenda. A genuinely empathic response immediately recognizes that the other is in a state that’s vastly different from our own, and that in order to connect with them we will have to forgo completely our own agenda. This swift letting go requires an alive presence that understands how connection with another is an engagement in which energy flows back and forth moment by moment with no guarantee of how things will end up. We understand that it’s about the process of communicating, rather than where we need to end up or whose agenda needs to be met. It fully recognizes the importance of walking every step of the process together, with both parties engaged and empowered.

Empathy is the ability to connect with what the other is feeling. This requires us to accept that it’s okay for our child, partner, or friend to feel a certain way. Of course they do, since we are two distinct beings. This is the natural order of things in a healthy relationship. We don’t need to change the other, any more than we need to change ourselves. We simply need to recognize the validity of the other’s feelings, even as we want our own feelings to be recognized. Initially, holding the space within ourselves for both perspectives is extremely challenging. We can do this only if we aren’t under siege from our own emotions. Anxiety constricts our inner space, causing it to quickly morph into control, which soon becomes anger.

* Do” sit close to your child in complete silence.
* “Do” look into their eyes and keep your gaze on them.
* “Do” softly echo back their feelings to them.
* “Do” show them with your body posture that you are there for them.
* “Do” try to understand their experiences without being intrusive.
* “Do” keep your opinions, sermons, and lectures to yourself.
* “Do” assure them that their feelings are important.
* “Do” give them the space to sit quietly and feel what they are feeling until it becomes integrated.
* “Do” validate that their feelings are just fine simply because they are theirs and not something to be ashamed of.
* “Do” tap into your own anxiety and work through it.

**~ A New Commitment to Shedding Judgment ~**

My judgment against others

Erupts from a place of lack within,

From an old blueprint

Where I was judged by others in the same way.

Though judgment is far easier than introspection,

I realize that it keeps my heart closed.

It is only when I can enter compassion for others

That I ultimately can forgive myself.

# Affirmations

I fully accept that parenting is about raising myself, not my child.

Instead of:

* Seeing a child, I will see a spiritual being.
* Holding my child to my standards, I will help them create their own.
* Holding them in dependency, I will liberate them to autonomy.
* Treating them as “mine,” I will help them to be themselves.
* Obsessing over conformity, perfect behavior, and outward appearances, I will encourage genuineness in my child.
* Praising compliance, I will praise the courage to be authentic.

*Open the Heart*

**Allow** the image of your child’s face when they sleep to enter your heart. Feel your heart opening. Enter this well of warmth. From this place, share yourself with your child.

**Remember**when your child was sick or in the ER or hospital? Or remember when another child you knew was ill or suffering? How everything that you thought was important suddenly wasn’t? All these thoughts make you realize how blessed you are right here, right now. From this place go to your child and let them know what they mean to you.

**Savor** your child’s moods, sulks, and tantrums. They are children for only a short time. Embrace their tears, fears, yells, and falls. Childhood doesn’t last forever.

*Enter Presence*

**Detach** from the urge to ask your child a single question today. Simply observe and follow their lead.

**Allow**your child to enter your embrace without any words or judgment, just heart-to-heart connection.

**Create** the space for your children to “be” today. Watch them as they unfold into themselves. Notice their body language. Try to connect to their feelings beneath the words. Do the same for yourself.

*Enter a No-Judgment Zone*

**Commit** to being judgment-free today, no matter what the triggers.

**Be curious.**Don’t make statements out of impatient judgment.

**Pause** and take a step back. Before you react with judgment, ask, “Does this really matter in the long run?”

*Express Feelings Safely*

**Open** conversations with observations, not questions; with comfort, not control.

**Invite**your children to talk to you by letting them know they don’t have to talk at all.

**Validate** them to feel exactly what they feel at any given moment.

*Let Them Lead*

**Empower** your child to create their own schedule today, and you be their assistant.

**Harness** your child’s inner guide by allowing them to make decisions for the family appropriate to their maturity.

**Hand over the reins** of your child’s unstructured time to them. Let them govern themselves today.

*Be Spontaneous in Play*

**Drop** what you are doing and join your child in whatever they are doing—be it on their iPad, on their computer, or doing homework. Just sit by them and enter their world for a little while.

**Invite** your child to choose one game or to lead in any one activity—baking a cake, making cookies, gluing pictures, taking a walk, throwing a ball—of their choosing that doesn’t involve a screen. Just for fifteen to thirty minutes. Be present through it all.

**Be attentive**for a moment to laugh with them, be it over a joke, a memory, or a riddle. Create the glue of laughter and good times, knowing that these will last lifetimes.