

Preface

The key to world peace and sustainability lies in the way we collectively relate to our children. I am aware, of course, that this has been said before. Until recently however, whenever this idea has been expressed, it has been either downplayed or resisted. Perhaps we are afraid of the responsibility it entails. Today however, groundbreaking research has brought new confirmation to this ancient idea. Our understanding of early childhood development has grown so rapidly in recent years, that we can now say the following with unprecedented confidence: *the human brain and heart that are met primarily with empathy in the critical early years cannot and will not grow to choose a violent or selfish life.*

The fact that scientists and politicians have so easily dismissed the importance of childhood as sentimentality, has enabled them to sideline some of the most critical reforms that are needed to improve children's emotional lives. This is costly for all of society. Early childhood emotional development does not matter too much, the hardliners reason, for children are 'resilient' and their characters are built-in at birth. This grim, genetic-deterministic view of human relations has historically underwritten societies lacking in compassion.

But science has opened up new vistas. New technologies have unlocked many secrets about how early life experiences direct the course of the growing brain. We have witnessed an explosion of interest in 'emotional intelligence' as we begin to recognise the critical role it plays in all levels of human relations. International research has shed new light on infant bonding and attachment. For the first time in history, the idea that a society's destiny rests on how it treats its children has concrete foundations, and the implications demand our attention. As this portentous new knowledge begins to burst its banks, I cannot imagine that society will remain unchanged. What developmental psychologists are telling us today is going to revolutionise our approaches to child

rearing and education — in fact, a quiet revolution has been taking place already — with far-reaching social results.

These new discoveries have opened up a realm of possibility beyond what many of us may have imagined. And it is time that this information became far more widely available.

If you are a parent, carer, health professional or educator, I have designed this book to help you to tune in to the emotional needs of children in your care, in order to support their developing emotional intelligence. However, I would also invite you to use this book to gain insights into the origins of your own unique emotional make-up, and thus illuminate your own path of healing and growth. (Parts IV, V and VI are particularly geared towards the latter purpose.)

It is my hope that this book will also be used as a resource for policy makers whose decisions chart the course of families' lives and social destiny.

I do have some concerns about how the information contained in this book and others like it might be used. There is a risk that the kind of knowledge we have gained about the links between child rearing and society will result in the politicising of childhood. The idea of manipulating children for the purpose of creating little 'pacifists' bothers me a great deal. Whenever we impose our own purpose on our children, our plans tend to backfire. Children want to be seen for the totality of their being — they resist (and rightly so) our fervent hopes that they become good doctors, lawyers, humanitarians, or nice people. We smother them with our expectations. Our children do not want to be our 'projects'. They want to be enjoyed and related to for who they are at any given moment, as if who they are now, and who they are becoming in this instant, is all they will ever be. They want to get to know us as real people. And they need us to remain open to whom they are as individuals: almost always, they will surprise us, and confound our expectations. Children are not adults-in-the-making; they are not clay to be moulded. They are children, and that is that. Our task is to wonder at them, to learn about ourselves through our relationships with them. It is also important to remind ourselves that children are not 'them' — they are 'us'. We have felt what they feel, yearned for what they yearn for — and if we are honest with ourselves... we still do.

So, the purpose of this book is not to list what we 'should' do for children. This book is my way of arguing that *all of us are parents to society's children*, and that societies must, as a matter of top priority, support parents so that they can fulfil their nurturing potential.

I would caution that no text dealing with child development

should replace consultation with well-researched, trained child health professionals. As Parts VI and VII do not cover medical or nutritional issues, or norms of physical or intellectual development, I recommend that they be used in conjunction with other relevant books, and the advice of sympathetic child health practitioners. This book should not be thought of as a child-rearing manual.

While making some suggestions, this book does not tell parents how to be parents. It tells parents and health professionals what science and clinical experience have taught us about what babies and children need for optimal emotional development. Parents are free to adapt their own abilities and resourcefulness to meeting these needs to the best of their ability and based on the support available.

My perspectives on early-childhood emotional development have been gained from 15 years of personal experience as a psychotherapist, and from countless hours as a client of psychotherapists. Beyond my own, personal observations I draw upon the collective wisdom of clinicians from a range of psychotherapeutic modalities. I also rely on research findings in areas including (but not limited to) prenatal and perinatal psychology, mother–infant attachment and early brain development. My views have been strongly influenced through several years’ of training with psychologist Chris Campbell PhD, and his unique and innovative insights into childhood and human relations.

Some readers may wonder why I have included recently uncovered accounts of child rearing through history, and across many cultures (Parts II and III). Reading the history of childhood has been life-changing for me, and has, I believe, helped to make me a better parent. This history offers us all immense understanding and compassion, while providing new-found and tangible causes for optimism regarding our future.

To compile this book I have ventured beyond my own field of expertise and drawn upon findings from a variety of fields of study, including psychohistory and neuropsychology. Though I have taken every care in collecting my research, I may be found wrong on some details and specifics. However, I am confident in my central message: that healthy emotional development for children is critical for a peaceful and sustainable world.

Since we have each travelled such unique and different life-paths, I suspect that this book will evoke quite different feelings and thoughts in each reader. Whatever your personal experience is when you embark on your course through these pages, I thank you for taking this journey with me.