

RAISING OTHER PEOPLE'S KIDS

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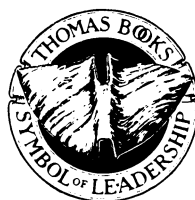
A Guide for Houseparents, Foster Parents, and Direct Care Staff

By

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and

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To Mr. Phillip Wilson, my junior high band director, mentor, and friend, who by the way he loved and disciplined his students, taught me all I'll ever need to know about raising other people's kids.

M. C.

To Rosemary, who taught me about love and raising kids.

E. C.

PREFACE

R*aising Other People's Kids: A Guide for Houseparents, Foster Parents, and Direct Care Providers* is a down-to-earth, practical guide to child development and interpersonal relationship skills. Theoretical work in child development and interpersonal relationships is translated into plain, everyday language and illustrated by a rich variety of houseparents' and foster parents' personal experiences.

The book covers development of the whole child: intellectual, psychological, and moral development. Specific techniques for creating an environment which nurtures the development of the whole child are offered. The learning theory of Vygotsky is carefully explained to assure that care providers can more effectively teach the children in their care. Particular attention is paid to nurturing moral development in children who may have had little training in ethical behavior.

Drs. Camerer and Capps also address the stresses of living in the fishbowl environment of the group home, and they offer techniques for improving communication skills. Dr. Capps, a trained mediator, explains how care providers can become mediators in order to help residents and colleagues learn conflict resolution skills.

Readers may be particularly interested in the chapter in which the authors report the results of a survey of houseparents across the country. Institution supervisors selected their best houseparents to answer these questions: What is your best piece of advice to other houseparents? And what pitfalls would you warn other houseparents to avoid?

Finally, Dr. Camerer and Dr. Capps outline simple methods of preventing and reducing the stress which shortens the tenure of many direct care providers.

M. C.
E. C.

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RAISING OTHER PEOPLE'S KIDS

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Standing in the door between the kitchen and the yard, seventeen-year-old Travis raised his BB gun to his shoulder, took aim, and shot the window out of the barn. He looked back at his foster parents and grinned. His foster mother dropped the Blue Willow dish she was washing. It shattered on the floor.

I know. I was there. I was his foster mother.

Although I have been a housemother, a foster mother, and a school teacher, kids still find ways to leave me feeling like Elmer Fudd when Buggs Bunny has once again dumbfounded him. I've taught elementary school, junior high school, and high school and I still haven't learned all the tricks. But I have learned some of them, and this book shares the answers to those tricks that I have learned.

Some of the answers came to me through practical experience: I tried this or that and it worked. Many of the answers came to me through my husband. He had spent many years as a policeman and he knew how to handle people (particularly teenage boys) more skillfully than anyone I have ever met. Still other answers came to me through reading and research. And still others from my colleagues, such as Dr. Emerson Capps, who has co-authored this book.

Before we begin to get into the nuts and bolts of discussing the business of raising other people's kids, however, I want to answer some questions that you may be asking.

First: No, houseparenting and fosterparenting weren't what I thought they were going to be either.

Second: Yes, I did want to run away and hide seventeen times a day.

Third: Yes, I was amazed by the paperwork and the bureaucracy.

Fourth: Yes, it was my absolute faith in the belief that I had been called by a higher power to serve in this way that kept me sane.

Fifth: No, I never killed any of my kids and buried them down by the creek.

As you read this book, I urge you to read interactively. By that, I mean

that as you read, read slowly and *really think* about what you're reading. When you read a section, stop and recall a similar incident in your experience. Think about the similarities and differences between the two incidents. Discuss it with your colleagues.

Take lots of notes in the margins of this book. It will help you to remember important points and help you to find information again if you want to refer to it later.

As you read and think, devise plans for future action. For example, tell yourself, "Okay, I just read about a particular technique for resolving conflict. Next time that Teresa and Lonnie get into an argument, then I am going to do such and such."

Before we go on, let me explain who is speaking when in this book. You will find that sometimes a passage is worded, "*We say* thus and so." Sometimes a passage is worded, "*I did* thus and so." When we use "we say," it means that both authors agree with a perspective or a statement. When we use "I did," it will usually be me (M. C. Camerer) speaking about a houseparenting experience that I have had. However, in Chapter 14, "I" refers to Emerson Capps, who is a trained mediator. In this chapter, he will be talking about specific mediation experiences that he has had. But just roll with the flow and don't worry about who is speaking when.

One final thought: When you are (1) washing the sheets that Alyson threw up on last night, (2) Tory has just told you to drop dead because you aren't his mom/dad and you can't tell him what to do, and (3) your senior houseparent griped you out for letting the kids raid the refrigerator before bedtime, know that you are not alone and unappreciated.

How can I say that? Because the co-authors of this book go to bed every night and thank God that there are people like you out there, devoting their lives to the high calling of raising other people's kids.

Chapter 2

HOW LITTLE KIDS THINK

The most embarrassed I ever was in college was over a Swiss guy named Jean Piaget. He wasn't in my child and adolescent psychology class; he was a guy we *read about* in my child and adolescent psychology class. His first name is pronounced *Zh-ah-n*, with the J sounding like the J in Jacques Cousteau's name. His last name is pronounced *Pee-ah-zhay*, with the g sounding like the J in Jacques Cousteau's name.

My professor, Dr. Natividad Mascarenas, asked me to stand up and read aloud out of our book. Never before or since have I ever been asked to stand up and read aloud in a college class. I don't know whether that's because it's really rare for college students to have to do that or whether it's because my reputation for being a dunce preceded me. Either way, here's what happened.

Dr. Allen asked me to stand up and read aloud. Now, we'd been talking about Piaget for quite some time, so the entire class knew what his name was, but when I came to it, I blanked out for a second and pronounced it exactly like it looks: Jean Piaget. All hundred or so people in that class busted a gut laughing, and I wanted to crawl out the door and never be seen again.

So much for that. In spite of our poor start together, I became interested in Jean Piaget the man and in his work on kids.

Piaget was a Swiss scientist who was one of those one in a zillion geniuses. When he was only twelve years old, he had an article published in a prestigious scientific journal. He was a bird-watcher, and he had spied a bird in the park near his home that was rare and never before reported in his geographic area. The publication of his article won him fame throughout the scientific community, and the scientific community nodded its gray head and eagerly anticipated hearing from the child prodigy again.

When Piaget was completing the doctorate degree at a rather young age, he wrote his doctoral dissertation on a certain species of mollusk.