A COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE FOR CAREGIVERS IN DAY-CARE SETTINGS

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A teacher and counselor of high school students for more than 20 years, Nettie Becker has been working with infants and young *children-at-risk* for the past decade. She holds a Masters Degree in Professional Studies in Dance/Movement Therapy and is a full member of the Academy of Dance Therapists Registered. She has worked as an early intervention movement therapist, has served as a consultant in child development therapy, and has taught parenting courses in the continuing education department at Molloy College, New York. She is currently a Fellow in Early Childhood Group Therapy at the Child Development Center of the Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services.

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A COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE FOR CAREGIVERS IN DAY-CARE SETTINGS

Training Child Care Workers and Parents to Reduce the At-Risk Factor in Infants and Young Children

By

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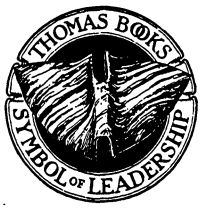

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To

Lynn and Lesley

and

Molly and Jesse

and to a world of security and compassion
that all children deserve.

The hearts of small children are delicate organs. A cruel beginning in this world can twist them into curious shapes.

- Carson McCullers
The Member of the Wedding

If a true measure of a society is how well it treats its children, then America is in trouble.

- from a *New York Times* editorial, June 1, 1996

At a New York City Board of Education meeting, c. 1960, after scores of parent and teacher groups had protested against budget cuts for the schools, arguing that they would be harmful to the children, a speaker representing a local taxpayer group supporting the cuts in school funds responded as follows:

The children! The children! All we've heard people talking about today are the children. Doesn't anyone care about the country any more?

PREFACE

The abuse of children is a topic that has occupied the front pages of newspapers for a number of years. Sensational trials of a few parents, foster parents, child-care workers or nannies charged with sexual or other forms of abuse have echoed through the media. Stories of extreme cases of child neglect rebound from the TV screens almost regularly. Viewers react for the moment with shock and public officials rush to condemn the guilty parties and mete out punishment. Social services administrators wonder how these abused children have "slipped through the cracks." Everyone hastens to investigate.

But as horrible as these most extreme, and most sensationally reported, cases are, they are only a very tiny part of the main problem. A large portion of America's children are indeed in trouble today, but the bigger problem is a much quieter one. Until recently, it rarely made the headlines, although in the last couple of years it has begun to capture the concern of many Americans. It is the fact that millions of American kids are now being categorized as *at-risk* because of the lack of positive experiences–particularly the denial of the basic functions of parenting, of bonding and communication with a caring adult–that they are encountering during the critical first years of their lives. This book is an attempt to deal with that problem.

The reasons for this phenomenon at this particular moment in our history are complex and are discussed in Chapter 1. It is a problem that cries out to be identified and addressed. A major part of the solution, we believe, lies in a commitment of an entire society to the welfare of its children and we discuss this also at length in the first chapter. Only very recently, has there been the beginnings of some recognition of the problem, both at the federal level and among some states, and some proposals have been made to upgrade child care, particularly for working mothers. But even if these proposals were all enacted tomorrow (and very few have been), they would not come close to meeting the enormous crisis in the availability or the quality of child care.

But, short of any large-scale national solution to the problem, an immediate task is the upgrading of early child care as a profession and the proper education and training of tens, or even hundreds, of thousands of workers for the crucial task of infant and early child care. This training must include more than just "managing" children in a day-care setting but a deep knowl-

edge and understanding of the psyche of the child, particularly the child with a troubled beginning in this world. It must include applying the knowledge of child development to the techniques of working, with empathy and patience and skill, with children individually and in groups.

That is the basic purpose of this book. It has been written both as a call for attention to be paid to this national problem and a guide in developing the parenting skills critically needed by today's parents and child-care workers. The opening chapter states the problem, describes what we mean by *children at-risk*, and advocates suggestions for a national solution. The chapters that follow include one on what a parent should look for in a quality child-care facility, parenting skills and techniques for children beginning at birth and going up to five years of age, and a special chapter on a positive approach to discipline, since the techniques of discipline are so important in children whose *at-risk* status usually creates special problems in this area. We believe the book will be particularly useful in advancing the training of workers in infant and early child-care settings.

The path that led me to writing it has taken many turns. After more than twenty years of teaching and counseling high school students, I became interested in the field of early child development. My training in modern dance had always made me aware of the special role that body movement plays in human expression. I went back to graduate school, took a Master's Degree in Dance/Movement Therapy, which combined psychology with movement and seemed to be particularly valuable when working with children. All children are movement oriented. They express themselves through movement long before they are able to speak. I changed my profession and began to work with younger children, particularly children with disabilities and *children-at-risk*. In many of these children where early problems have often led to speech delays, gestures and body movement are the only ways they can usually convey their feelings and communicate with adults. As I worked with them, I began to employ other disciplines in the field, combining movement therapy with early childhood development, education and psychology. Some of the children I have worked with over the past decade came from foster homes, some were homeless. Others came from middle-class homes, some with one parent, some with two. It is now more than ten years that I have been working with infants and young *children-at-risk*. It has become a second life career for me.

In approaching the writing of this book, I am aware that much of the literature in this field is in technical language, often replete with the jargon of the profession. A major task of mine here is precisely to avoid doing this. Throughout these chapters, we have based our explanations of the techniques of working with children upon the major scholarship and research in the field, but to the greatest extent possible, we have tried to use the every-

day language of people in order to make this as understandable and as readable as possible.

My greatest hope is that this book will help to make some contribution to the enormous job facing us, a job that amounts to nothing short of preventing the loss of a large portion of a generation of America's children.

N.B.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The old admonition that "children should be seen and not heard" was once a hallowed doctrine in child rearing. That children–and even infants–had feelings and emotions that are as important as those of adults seemed like thoughts from an alien world not too long ago. So, too, was the idea that their interaction with other human beings practically from their first hours on earth are of profound importance in shaping their lives.

In the face of a complete lack of knowledge–and even caring–about what children were thinking or what they really felt, and long before the issue of child care and development began to arouse such deep concern in our society, there were a number of doctors, psychiatrists, psychologists, and other professional personnel who played a pioneering role in helping us to understand the minds and the emotions of infants and children. The author is deeply indebted to them for shining the light of scientific understanding on this area. They have provided the basis for her study and work.

Some of the work of the earliest pioneers has been re-thought in light of more recent research and understanding, but much still remains valid today. Their writings are classical musts in the field of child development. In this connection, the author is deeply indebted to the work of D. W. Winnicott, Anna Freud, Margaret Mahler, John Bowlby, René Spitz, Arnold L. Gesell and Erik H. Erikson.

In more recent years, as pressures in our society have mounted and have had a terribly unsettling effect upon our children, other pioneers have devoted themselves to broadening public understanding of the importance of early child care and development. By mentioning some of them here, others will inevitably be left out, a risk I indulge in only because those that come to my mind are so deserving of mention for their years of devoted scholarship and struggle in the field, and because they have had such a profound influence upon my work with children. Following in the physician-activist tradition of the legendary Dr. Benjamin Spock, there is the work done by the noted pediatrician, Dr. T. Berry Brazleton, whose lectures and writings have sharply alerted us to the problems we face. There is the clinical research and teachings of child psychiatrists Dr. Daniel N. Stern and Dr. Stanley I. Greenspan, and the observations of Professor Selma Fraiberg, the child psychoanalyst whose book *The Magic Years* popularized for parents the mysteries inside the minds of their children.

There's the wonderful job being done by Zero to Three, the organization of child care professionals that has sponsored conferences, printed and distributed materials, and done so much to call national attention to the problems discussed in this book. There is the deep commitment to working with inner-city children and parents by the Early Childhood Group Therapy Program of the Child Development Center, sponsored by the Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services. In her association with this program, the author is deeply indebted to two of its outstanding professionals, its director, Dr. Rebecca Shahmoon Shanok, and Senior Fellow Carole Lapidus, CSW, for their incisive critiques of her work with children and their consistent encouragement.

And on the political side, one cannot neglect to mention the constant battle that has been waged by the Children's Defense Fund under its indefatigable director, Marion Wright Edelman, on behalf of American children of all ages. Or the voice of the former teacher, Jonathan Kozol, whose impassioned writings for thirty years on behalf of poor and minority children has called national attention to their struggles in the face of incredible adversity and inequality. Our country owes them a great debt of gratitude.

I am also grateful to my graduate school teacher, Bette Blau, for helping me to see the possibilities that dance/movement therapy could accomplish in working with special children.

On both a personal and professional note, this book would not have been possible without Paul, my husband, partner, and collaborator, who worked on it with me from the very beginning. A skilled writer and editor with a deep sensitivity and love of children, he was able to take my voluminous material on working with *children-at-risk* and the notes of my experiences, organize them, and give them shape and form. This book is truly the product of both of us.

And finally, I owe no small debt to my own two children. My memories of their experiences in growing up have given me the insight that set down in human and concrete terms all the things I learned from my professional training. Their development into mature, caring adults who are now making the world a better place by their presence is the best gift a parent, or for that matter, anyone in the field of child care can have.

N.B.

Note

While all the children and adults cited in this book are real, their names have been changed to protect their identities.

CONTENTS

A COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE FOR CAREGIVERS IN DAY-CARE SETTINGS

Chapter 1

LIONEL'S STORY

Do ye hear the children weeping, O my brothers. . .
They are weary ere they run;
They have never seen the sunshine, nor the glory
Which is brighter than the sun.
They know the grief of man without its wisdom;
They sink in man's despair, without its calm-

- Elizabeth Barrett Browning

I remember feeling that he was shorter and stockier than most young children his age. I remember how he was dressed–a T-shirt, with some nondescript logo on the front, and jeans. I remember the intense look in his deep, dark eyes. They were eyes that could have belonged to a wise old man, eyes that seemed to understand so much more than was possible for all of this child's mere ten months on this earth. But, most of all, I remember his sadness.

It was a sadness that poured forth from the depths of his soul, through those deep eyes and out onto the world of his experience. It took you in and enveloped you. His eyes told the story of his very young life. A sadness that seemed untouchable.

I first met Lionel one February day a couple of years ago. He still had two months to go toward his first birthday. He was with a group of children in a program for homeless mothers and their young children at a well-known shelter in New York where I had served for eighteen months as a part-time consultant and staff trainer. Virtually all the mothers at the shelter were school dropouts with minimum literacy and skills. Many had been the victims of abuse by their spouses or boyfriends. Some had drug problems. By the time they came to the shelter with their children, they had already gone through a program at another shelter branch where they had received some health services and some education toward a high school equivalency diploma. When they came to this branch, they had to be drug free. Here they stayed for up to 18 months, either working at a job they obtained or that the program was able to get for them (usually one that paid the bare minimum wage), or seeking employment. Their children were taken care of in the

child-care program. Lionel had come there only a week before.

Most children at the age of ten months will pull themselves up to a standing position and walk around while holding onto a piece of furniture. They can reverse the process and sit themselves down. Not so with Lionel. He didn't move from the waist down. As they faced the task of caring for the other children in the group, it became easy for the child-care personnel just to put him into a walker and let him stay there. Not that he walked. He didn't even move his legs. He just stood there in one place in his walker and cried. . . . and cried. . . . and cried. It was the only sound he made.

He had an older brother, born 13 months before him to a mother in her mid-twenties. It was obvious to the workers in the child care program which child she favored. Her life was a hard one, but it was Lionel that she always complained about. A deep probing into the complexities of the human mind might unravel the reasons for her feelings–the bitterness of her life, or some special circumstances surrounding Lionel's birth, or perhaps, a combination of these and many other factors. Whatever they were, he was the burden she had to carry and her plaint was heard by everyone who took care of Lionel. He was the bad one. He didn't do anything he was supposed to do. He just cried. And carried on. And made everyone miserable. Bad, from the beginning! Bad!

I worked along with the members of the staff as they cared for the other children, but I knew something had to be done with Lionel. Was there a physical disability? No one seemed to know. A neglect? Physical abuse? It didn't appear that way. I mentioned that he had a stocky little frame and he appeared to be well-fed with no physical signs of maltreatment.

I began where all human relationships begin, where a mother's interaction with a child from the earliest weeks must begin, with the need to get eye contact with him. I got down to his eye level by sitting on the floor (an absolute essential in working with all children). At first, I couldn't get too close to him; it would have been an invasion of his "space" to do so. With children, as with life, things progress slowly. I smiled at him and looked into his eyes. He looked back into mine and I had accomplished my first task, in less time than I had imagined it would take.

I touched his hands and he didn't move away. I spoke his name softly. Then I talked to him about other things, gently, always gently. I told him how nice he looked and what beautiful eyes he had (an absolute truth, if ever there was one) and other soothing and complimentary words. Then I noticed him glancing toward the other children in his group. I asked him if he would like to go out and play with the other children. He continued to look toward the other kids. I took him out of his walker and put him down on the mat on the floor and placed a toy in front of him.

He was no longer crying as he reached for the toy. He began to move

around by dragging himself on his stomach moving his arms. He even tried to move up to another level formed by a second mat, but he couldn't make it. I took his legs and moved them, bending his knees as I said, "This is how you crawl, Lionel. This is how you can move around."

He began to respond to my touch. I touched his head, his fingers and his hands and he began to smile as he gave me eye contact. Lionel smiled! The kid who was nothing but trouble, whose cries had filled the room for about a week from the time he arrived in the program until that day. Lionel smiled!

When I left, I hugged him and kissed him on his forehead and said, "Goodbye, Lionel, see you next week." Each week, when I came to his group, he smiled in recognition. Two weeks after my initial encounter with him, I came into the room and noticed that he was standing, holding on to a toy shelf and I was told that he now consistently pulled himself up to a standing position. I made such a big fuss over this. I smiled and hugged him and told him how nice it was to see him standing." His smile told it all. Of course, he still cried and showed frustration, I was told, but less than before. And he also smiled from time to time.

Within a month, Lionel was walking, holding on to furniture for support, just like the other children his age. Nothing physically wrong with him–this kid who didn't even move his legs a couple of weeks before. His problem was not physical. He just had to be worked with. . . and loved a little. Something all of us need. Something we've known about since Adam and Eve had children, but somehow, in the crush of our lives, we often forget.

I saw him every week for several months until the summer when I left for about two months. I returned in September to find a different Lionel. He was walking alone now; his once physical problem was no longer there. But other problems were lurking in him; the life of a child like Lionel is consistently shaped by the experiences he encounters, and he expresses himself in all sorts of ways.

Now the complaint was that he was a very angry child. He still cried a lot. I asked about him and was told, "We don't know what we're going to do with him. He constantly hits and bites the other children." His actions engendered the inevitable, and quite understandable reaction. "We can't let him play with the others," was the refrain, "he'll hurt them."

Some of the child-care workers sought refuge in the explanation always used when children behave in an inexplicable way–genetics. "Nothing you can do," said one. "that's his personality. That's the way he is."

Most were very abrupt with him. Lionel's actions, begat by the circumstances of his first encounters with this world, were in turn producing the reactions in adults of hostility and rejection, which could only produce more of the same behavior in him. The circle of his life was beginning. The