

**BUILDING
EMOTIONAL
INTELLIGENCE**
Techniques to
Cultivate Inner
Strength in Children
LINDA LANTIERI

Introduction and
practices on CD
by Daniel Goleman

Hardcover
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with audio CD
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BUILDING EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE **Techniques to Cultivate Inner Strength in Children** **Excerpt: Family Rituals and Routines**

Several weeks before doing the activities in the guide or on the CD, you can start to integrate some rituals and routines into your family life to expose your child to the opportunities that stillness and quiet can offer. Your goal with integrating these practices is to pique your child's curiosity, as well as to create readiness for her to learn the skills as they are presented in the guide and on the CD. It is important to wait for the right moments to introduce these new ways of being. By modeling these practices in your own interaction with your child and in how you structure your home you are saying to your child that you value silence and stillness. You'll also be creating a more natural venue for changing deeply engrained habits of how we respond to stressful events and for learning healthful ways that we hope will become life-long habits. It's only through consistent practice that we will learn these skills.

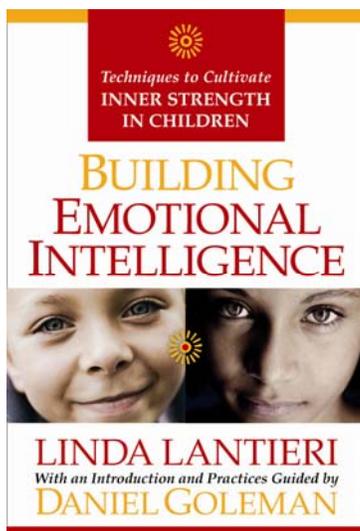
The following rituals and routines can be thought of almost as a prerequisite for learning the specific exercises presented in Chapters 3–5. Perhaps you can take a few minutes now to think through a typical day and, after reading the suggestions below, consciously commit to incorporating a few of the rituals and/or routines. Give thought to how it plays out in practice in your home and set yourself up for success by choosing those rituals and routines that you know you can easily do daily or routinely. There are various materials we mention throughout this book that can enhance the use of these techniques. Some of these items may be hard to find, so we have provided a *Materials Checklist* at the end of this book with information about how to order them.

Have a Dinnertime Quieting Ritual

As part of a family ritual around dinnertime, a candle could be lit for a few moments of silence as everyone focuses on the flame of the candle. Staring can help the mind to move into a deeper state of consciousness. Before you begin eating, you may each want to take a turn expressing one thing you are grateful for about the day.

Create a Peace Corner

A peace or calming corner is a special place that you set aside for members of your family. They can go there whenever they need calm and stillness in order to regain their inner balance and flow. It could also be used when anyone is feeling overwhelmed, stressed, angry, or otherwise out of control emotionally—times when being alone would be helpful. Include your whole family in designing the space. You might include a picture or photo of a child's favorite peaceful place, elements from nature, calming pictures, quiet instrumental music, journals, chime, mandala coloring books, etc. (see Materials Checklist to order these items). Be sure the space is large enough for your child to lie down in, with comfortable pillows and a CD player with quiet, soothing music or recordings of sounds from nature.



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If you have young children, rather than a time-out, give your child a time-in: time to calm down in this corner.

Teach the “Keep Calm” Activity

This simple, four-step breathing activity is highlighted in the book *Emotionally Intelligent Parenting* by Maurice Elias, Steven Tobias, and Brian Friedlander. It can be used whenever your child is upset and self-control is needed. Teach these four simple steps to your child (and try it yourself!). Perhaps you might post these steps in your peace corner or other places in your home as a reminder.

1. Tell yourself, “Stop and take a look around.”
2. Tell yourself, “Keep calm.”
3. Take a deep breath through your nose while you count to five, hold it while you count to two, and then breathe out through your mouth while you count to five.
4. Repeat these steps until you feel calm.

Use Calming Music

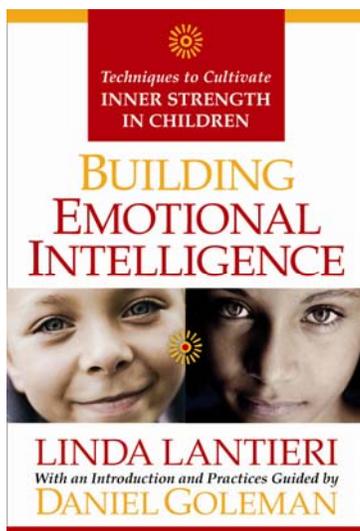
Transitions and other stressful times during the day (such as when you’re getting ready for school or trying to meet the other pressures of time) are great times to stop for a moment and honor the shift from one activity to another. The sound of soft, slow classical music can really help change the way we feel at such moments. While you might use this music as background, it’s even more effective if you take a “music break”—stop for even three minutes to listen quietly to a piece of music. This can be during times of transition when your child is focusing on something intently and needs to stop, or if she starts to feel the signs of heightened stress. It is well known that listening to calming music has a direct correlation with lowering our respiration and heart rate, as well as changing our emotional moods.

Make Room for Silence and Stillness

One gift you can give yourself and your family is the gift of silence and stillness; it is simple to do, but rare in most of our homes. Try to find times in your day to take a quick break. Pause. Be still, be quiet, and take a few deep breaths together. Be present to the moment. For example, if you have a habit of turning on the radio for car rides, you can make it a family practice to have a few minutes of silence at the beginning and end of the car ride and ask children to notice what they see, hear, feel, etc., during that time. You can go on walks on your way to or from school or other errands and decide to be silent for some of the time. You can also decide to bring more moments of silence into an engaged activity such as preparing food together or wrapping presents. Or, in your rare, but precious one-on-one moments, simply be present to who your child truly is. These kinds of moments can actually help us keep in touch with our inner lives.

Address Violent or Disturbing Events Your Child Witnesses

If your child is unexpectedly exposed to something disturbing during the day—maybe she is watching television when a violent or frightening news story plays, or perhaps you’ve even come across a traffic accident or you



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see an ambulance rushing with sirens blaring— make it a practice to pause for a moment and send positive thoughts or healing to those in need. Rather than integrating the fear and stress reaction, your child will release much of the stress of the moment through having such a positive outlet. Being able to talk about your child’s concerns and being fully present as you listen to her questions are also crucial in how your child will remember any particular scary event.

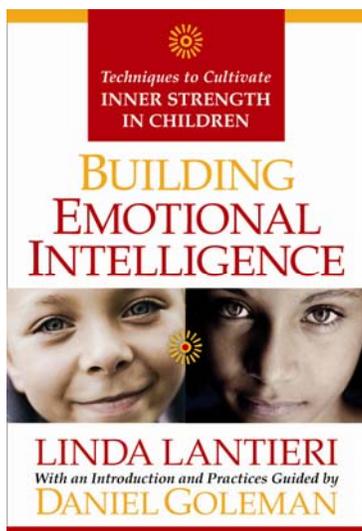
Honor Nature and Provide Opportunity to Be Outdoors

Nature provides important moments for stillness as we connect to something larger than ourselves. Being in nature calls upon us to be in our bodies and reconnects the mind/body split. At the most basic level, out of doors, there is room for children to run, shout, and play, releasing pent-up energy from their bodies accumulated through various stressors. We can breathe more deeply outdoors, simply because there is often more oxygen than indoors. And looking at a far away horizon or sky can help us gain needed perspective on our small world, bounded by our bodies and lives. A relationship with nature is like any good relationship. It needs to unfold over time, moving towards intimacy and respect. We can perhaps then take on our challenges with a new, more optimistic attitude and cognitively restructure our attitudes about certain stresses. Sometimes all it takes is a new perspective to shift us out of the bad habits that keep us from being our best selves.

In addition to providing opportunity for your child to be in nature, help her to be present by engaging her senses. Your child will come to know whatever place she is outdoors through her body, not just her mind. Focusing on one sense at a time can be a very useful way to do this. Or simply notice changes in the season or in the night sky. You can help your child choose a peaceful place outdoors and then study that one place over time. For example, she could find a favorite tree near where you live and notice the changes that occur with it in each season of the year. The goal is for your child to develop a mindful presence outside—that is, one of being aware of her surroundings at a level of detail that transcends the relatively detached way we often experience nature.

Help Your Child Check into Her Body Cues

When children are younger, they often have the ability to tune in to their body’s signals. As they grow older, they get messages from the outer world to turn off their natural sensitivity. However, before you can release stress, you need first to be aware that you *are* stressed. Help your child to learn the signs of stress through the checklist, “What Do I Feel When I’m Stressed?” in Chapter 5. You can model this awareness yourself by making a note of times when your heart is beating fast, your breathing has become shallow, or you notice other signs of stress. You can also help your child to become more aware of her body’s cues by using the biodots that are recommended in this book (see Materials Checklist to order this item). These dots respond to the temperature of our bodies and through color changes tell us just how stressed (or calm) we are. Remember it is equally important for you to notice your own stress triggers as well.



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Use Story Time Effectively

Reading a story out loud together with your child can be a wonderful way to experience a contemplative moment—especially if it is done with intention. When reading a book, the pace immediately slows down, providing moments to pause along the way. You also experience each other's voice and can notice the various emotions that are stirring in both of you. There can be lots of unplanned moments where the story can take either of you to a deeper place. You might learn about a concern or deep question either of you has.

Children also love the repetition of reading a book many times. The effects of this are quite similar to what we are cultivating in the contemplative practices you are about to teach your child. Repeating something—such as reading a book out loud or listening to the CD that accompanies this book—helps to strengthen a set of neural pathways in the brain that stores this memory for future use.

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