

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

Introduction and
practices on CD
by Daniel Goleman

Hardcover
5 ½" x 8 ¼" / 128 Pages
with audio CD
ISBN 978-1-59179-789-0
U.S. \$22.95 / APRIL 2008

BUILDING EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE **Techniques to Cultivate Inner Strength in Children** **Excerpt: What the Research Has to Say**

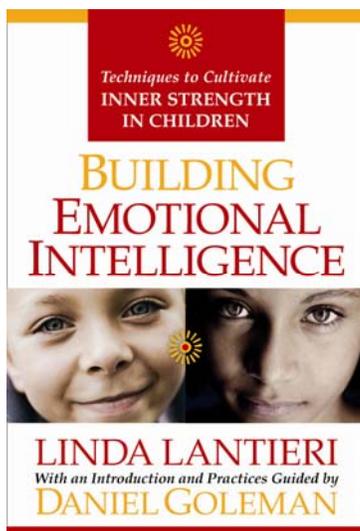
The severity of unmanaged stress in our society is evident. Seventy to ninety percent of all doctor's visits in the United States today are for stress-related disorders. In a ten-year study, people who were unable to manage stress effectively were shown to have a 40 percent higher death rate than non-stressed individuals. Our society is bent on quick fixes when life challenges come our way. We medicate ourselves and our children. Americans consume 5 billion tranquilizers every year in an effort to control their stress.

Children's lives are so much more stressful today as well. When adults in children's lives are experiencing a hurried, frenetic pace, our children become the receivers of that behavior. Our society itself in the United States has also changed in many ways so as to increase pressure on children and compromise their childhood. Many parents are working longer hours and are allowing work to intrude on their lives anywhere and everywhere. As a result more children are spending substantial amounts of time with multiple caregivers. There is a constant push for children to achieve at academic skills earlier, and so school becomes a big source of stress in their lives.

Too many young people today are experiencing mental health and adjustment difficulties, and our society just doesn't have the resources to provide appropriate help and attention. It is estimated that one out of five nine- to seventeen-year-olds has a diagnosable mental disorder. The fact is that an increasing number of children are entering schools in crisis, unprepared cognitively and emotionally to learn. At the same time, educators confront the challenge of higher public expectations while dealing with diminishing internal resources to do their jobs well.

We then often mistake the symptoms in our children of unmanaged stress as inappropriate behavior that needs to be stopped. Children are reprimanded by teachers and parents for things they do that are really "stress reactions," rather than intentional misbehavior. The situation becomes a downward spiral of one stress reaction after another, and both adult and child are caught in it.

A poll conducted by the national Kids Poll surveyed 875 children, ages nine through thirteen, about what caused them stress and what coping strategies they used the most to deal with the stress in their lives. The top three sources of stress that they reported were: grades, school, and homework (36%); family (32%); and friends, peers, gossip, and teasing (21%). The top three coping strategies were: play or do something active (52%); listen to music (44%); watch TV or play a video game (42%). Out of 10 top coping strategies listed as being chosen the most, not one of them was one that involved going within or being contemplative, such as the



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

Introduction and
practices on CD
by Daniel Goleman

Hardcover
5 ½" x 8 ¼" / 128 Pages
with audio CD
ISBN 978-1-59179-789-0
U.S. \$22.95 / APRIL 2008

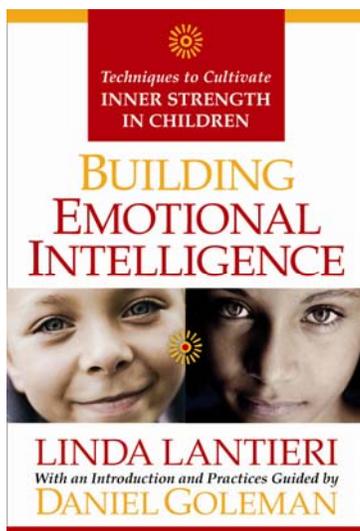
strategies we have mentioned in this book. The good news, however, is that 75% of those surveyed reported the need for their parents to spend time with them when they are going through a difficult time. This may help as you approach your child in trying out some of these techniques. These strategies will not only help manage their stress better but also provide them with some quality time with you.

Our experience as children is vastly different from the world our children face. Today's world includes all kinds of stressors that didn't even exist when we were growing up. As an elementary teacher during the 1970s and later as an administrator in New York City schools, I started to notice that young people's social and emotional development seemed to be on a serious decline. I was seeing children coming to school more aggressive, more disobedient, more impulsive, more sad, more lonely. In fact, psychologist Thomas Achenbach, from the University of Vermont, confirmed my observations. His groundbreaking study of thousands of American children, first in the mid-1970s and then again in the late 1980s, proved this to be true. America's children—from the poorest to the most affluent—displayed a decline across the board in their scores on over forty measures designed to reflect a variety of emotional and social capacities.

The dominant paradigm in response to this decline in children's social and emotional capacities focused on trying to identify the "risk factors" that caused this anti-social behavior. There were almost two decades of school-based "prevention wars" like the "war on drugs" to help reduce the negative. In the last two decades we have witnessed a healthy paradigm shift. Researchers and practitioners are studying the concept of "resilience"—an innate ability we all have to self correct and thrive in the face of life's challenges. Bonnie Bernard, a pioneer in the field of strength-based approaches, has helped us take a look at how young people's strengths and capabilities can be developed in order to protect them from the potential harm that these circumstances represent. This body of research has direct relevance as we think about cultivating inner strength in children through giving them a regular practice of quieting their minds and calming their bodies.

The resiliency-building research also points to one of the most important "protective factors" a child could have—the presence of at least one caring and supportive adult (ideally several) who believes in the worth of the child. Children need the adults in their lives to be steady anchors who never give up on them. They also need to learn concrete social and emotional skills that are taught both in the home and at school, and they need lots of opportunity to practice those skills so they become available to them whenever they need to use them. These materials strengthen all three of the above conditions.

What do we know specifically about the benefits of systematically teaching adults and children to relax their bodies and focus their minds as a way of building resiliency? There actually have been hundreds of studies published, some in peer-reviewed journals, of the benefits in particular of



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

Introduction and
practices on CD
by Daniel Goleman

Hardcover
5 ½" x 8 ¼" / 128 Pages
with audio CD
ISBN 978-1-59179-789-0
U.S. \$22.95 / APRIL 2008

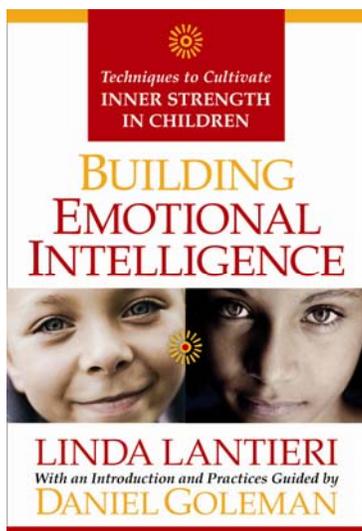
the calming technique called Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) through the work of Jon Kabat-Zinn, who founded the Stress Reduction Program at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. He first studied the use of mindfulness technique with adult patients suffering from chronic pain. Kabat-Zinn found that patients not only reported a decrease of pain but it also lowered their blood pressure and they reported an increased sense of well-being. Today, forms of MBSR are being used in more than 200 medical centers around the country for not only treating chronic pain but also cardiovascular disease and the effects of cancer therapy.

Kabat-Zinn also conducted a study with psoriasis patients and found that those who were taught a mindfulness meditation practice healed four times faster than the control group. In 2001, Kabat-Zinn studied people who did not have a major medical problem but certainly had their share of the every day stresses of life. In this study, the volunteers were randomly assigned to either the control or treatment group. The treatment group was taught and asked to practice exercises that included the two calming strategies presented in this book and CD: mindfulness meditation and body scans. The intervention also included yoga. After three months, the group who practiced these calming strategies regularly showed a 46% decrease in medical symptoms such as colds, headaches, etc.; a 44% decrease in psychological distress; and a 24% reduction in the stress response to every day hassles. The control group showed no significant change in their levels of stress.

Dr. Richard Davidson, professor of psychology and psychiatry at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, has also been adding to the research about the benefits of teaching these calming strategies to adults. Through various studies he has conducted over the years on the effects of meditation, we now know these strategies increase the gray matter in the brain; improve the immune system; reduce stress; and promote a sense of well-being. However, a more recent study conducted by Dr. Davidson attempted to examine how meditation affects attention. Since meditation can be thought of as a certain kind of mental training of attention, he decided to examine whether meditation could have a significant impact on performance requiring attentional abilities.

He found out that attention seems to be a flexible trainable skill. Those participants who had three months of intensive meditation experience were able to do better at a certain test of attention called "the attentional blink." He decided to use the "attentional blink" to explore the connection of meditation to attention because it was considered to be a fixed property of the nervous system. However, Dr. Davidson's beginning research points to the idea that attention can change with practice. This new discovery can have some profound effects on children and learning.

Until a short time ago, most of the research about the effects of these kinds of practices has been conducted on adults. More rigorous scientific research began in approximately 2006 using measurable data that could



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

Introduction and
practices on CD
by Daniel Goleman

Hardcover
5 ½" x 8 ¼" / 128 Pages
with audio CD
ISBN 978-1-59179-789-0
U.S. \$22.95 / **APRIL 2008**

produce reproducible results on the effects of these calming techniques on children. Today several studies are underway throughout the United States and Canada. *The Inner Resilience Program*, which I founded and direct, is one such research effort. Through the services of Metis Associates Inc., we are conducting original empirical research using an experimental design that will examine the impact our services have on a select group of New York City teachers, students, and classrooms. Sixty participants are in the study—half of whom are in the treatment group and the other half is in the control group. As part of our intervention, teachers are exposed to the calming techniques included in this book, and then they are taught how to teach these skills to their students, using our curriculum, *Building Resiliency From the Inside Out—Grades k–12*.

Several of us who are embarking on this more rigorous scientific research are encouraged by preliminary anecdotal findings. Many of us who have been teaching these skills to children have been heartened by some of the subjective evidence we've noticed. For example, Kimberly Schonert-Reichl, from the University of Columbia in Canada, observed that children exposed to learning a mindfulness technique similar to the one in this book were, "less aggressive; less oppositional towards teachers; more attentive in class; and reported more positive emotions including more optimism."

Susan Smalley, Director of the Mindfulness Awareness Research Center at UCLA, also found positive results teaching these techniques to teenagers with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). She found that learning mindfulness techniques reduced their anxiety and increased their ability to focus. Several other more rigorous scientific studies are underway. In the meantime, many of us are continuing to experience firsthand the benefits this kind of approach can have with children.

CONTACT: **Beverly Yates**
303-665-3151 ext. 153
beverly@soundstrue.com

Sounds True
413 South Arthur Avenue / Louisville, CO / 80027
www.soundstrue.com