



Building Emotional Intelligence Techniques to Cultivate Inner Strength in Children

By Daniel Goleman, Linda Lantieri

Ways for parents to foster emotional intelligence in children.

Book Review by Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat

Linda Lantieri is an internationally known expert in social and emotional learning, conflict resolution, and crisis intervention with 40 years of experience in the field of education. She is the director of The Inner Resilience Program and a founding member of The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). In this sturdy work Lantieri tells a wonderful story about an old Native American man who was down on the ground interacting with a tiny child. His relatives said to him, "Grandfather, what are you doing crawling around on the ground like a little child?" He responded, "I am very old and some time soon I will be going to the spirit world. This child is very young and has just come from the spirit world. I am down here seeing what I can learn from this sacred being."

Parents and anyone working with children know how important it is to help them achieve a heightened sense of self-awareness, the ability to deal with stress and volatile emotions, and a deeper sensitivity to how others feel. Lantieri shares elements of a curriculum she developed for children in the schools closest to the former World Trade Center designed to enable them to calm the body, quiet the mind, and pay better attention.

CASEL lists five basic sets of skills which comprise emotional intelligence. They are:

- Self-awareness
- Social awareness, which includes empathy and taking the perspective of others.

- Self-management, such as handling emotions and dealing with problems.
- Responsible decision-making, such as considering the long-term consequences of one's actions.
- Relationship skills, such as resolving conflicts, saying no to peer pressure and being connected with groups.

All of these skills are building blocks of character, and it behooves parents to see themselves as "emotional coaches" who are there for their kids as they face the stresses and conflicts of the day. As Gandhi, reminded us, "We have to start with the children."

In the chapter "Calming the Body and Focusing the Mind," the author counsels parents on how important it is for families to make room for stillness and silence. She suggests the following exercises:

"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 and 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."