



Building Emotional Intelligence in our Children

Written by Erric Solomon
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Last November, I had coffee with Linda Lantieri, who has an amazing track record for bringing mindfulness and emotional intelligence to kids in really challenging inner city schools. She serves as the Director of The Inner Resilience Program whose mission is to cultivate the inner lives of students, teachers and schools by integrating social and emotional learning with contemplative practice.

After our coffee, she sent her book "Building Emotional Intelligence" to me. Since then, it's been kind of bouncing around my bag traveling with me from France to California to Costa Rica to New York. Somewhere along the way I finally began to read it. This is a really important book.

It begins with the unimaginable 9/11 event in lower Manhattan and its effect on the more than 5000 children and 200 teachers. My mother lives in the same neighborhood as the Twin Towers and told me about how traumatic it was for the children in her building many of whom rushed out of the class room to witness people jumping 70 plus stories to their death.

Linda, who was among those called upon to support these teachers and students, writes about the effect that this event had on her.

"I became more deeply aware that the real tests of life can come a child's way at any moment, and we as adults cannot protect our children from circumstances beyond our control. The question instead has become how to equip our children with the inner strength they need to meet both the intense challenges and the great opportunities that come their way. Can we, in fact, cultivate the "ways of being" that helped both students and teachers at Ground Zero maintain calm and balance in the midst of such profound uncertainty and unknowing?"

Out of that search arose this marvelous book. Designed for as a practical guide for parents, offering ideas and strategies to help both parents and their children appreciate silence and stillness and take regular moments of quiet time together.

One of the important premises of this book is that children are often taught from a young age to deny their intuition and to ignore the often times extraordinary experiences of their inner life. This book gives parents a tool to counter this unfortunate trend and instead send a clear message of recognition and support for the development of the inner spiritual life of our children.

The book focuses primarily on two techniques for building inner resilience and enhancing emotional intelligence: Relaxing the body (through a body scan technique) and focusing the mind (through mindfulness exercises).

Some of the science behind this work is explored as well as establishing principals for creating the right environment for this endeavor.

But, the heart of the book are three chapters which show how to establish a contemplative practice with your children with each chapter focusing on a specific age group starting from age 5. There is even a guided practice CD, led by Daniel Goleman, to make it even easier for you to establish a routine with your kids.

There are practical exercises to begin to bring mindfulness into daily activity such as how to eat a raisin mindfully and lots of tips on what developmental challenges that face each particular age group.

I think what is perhaps most astounding is the way this book consistently stands up for the inner lives and intuitive experiences of young people. Most of the stuff out there looks at either the intellectual or emotional development of the child rather than developing the intuitive life of children. Linda's work is occupying a gray area between secular and religious, by writing about a commitment to developing heart and spirit that treads neither on religious beliefs nor secular. Yet it acknowledges the spiritual dimension of our being and how to help our kids nurture it in themselves.

I wish my parents had this book when I was growing up. This book is a must for every parent. Check it out!

<http://whatmeditationreallyis.com/index.php/lang-en/home-blog/item/338-building-emotional-intelligence-in-our-children.html>