
ADVANCE PRAISE

“Connection and Kindness are two themes that Erin embraces in her writing, as well as the way in which she lives. In her first book, Erin artistically and generously blends her experiences of parenting with her professional perspective as a therapist and parent coach, working with foster and adoptive families. She inspires and invites us to take that courageous step into self-aware, conscious parenting, to grow in the understanding of its importance so that we can truly be connected with our children. Readers of this book will be gifted with Erin’s gentle, yet powerful insights on how to authentically honor yourself, your children, and your relationships with them.”

—**Georgia P. DeClark, MA**, PCI Certified Parent Coach®, Preschool Director and Teacher Founder of Georgia DeClark Parent Coaching, LLC

“With original insights that are derived from personal experience on parent-child attachments and how to restore them, this is a book for revitalizing families & preserving self—a must read for every parent.”

—**Karen Ognibene, MA**, Editor South Jersey MOM Magazine

“Erin Taylor has written a book that every parent on the planet should read. There are no parenting tips or tricks in this book. Erin beautifully recognizes how stories touch our hearts and have the power to transform our parenting. Erin’s deep wisdom from years of working with children, parents, and foster parents shines through her personal and professional anecdotes that speak to the soft heart inside each of us, the part of us that yearns for true connection throughout our children’s lives and that knows what to do. Erin Taylor has written a treasure trove of wisdom that no “how to” parenting guide can compare to. She inspires us to be amazing parents by opening us to truly seeing our children’s souls, by slowing ourselves down enough to appreciate the sweet moments with our children, and by caring for ourselves abundantly so that our fulfillment naturally spills over to our families. All this book requires is that you dive in and absorb the stories with a whole heart. When you do, your parenting transformation will happen quite naturally.”

—**Sheila Wenger**, Lead Instructor at The Parent Coaching Institute, PCI Certified Parent Coach[®] at The Parent Partner, LLC

“This book is about much more than kindness. It articulates the simple yet profound wisdom of living in relationship with our children. Erin’s wisdom is packaged in stories of children and parents that could be from any of our life experiences, told with an honesty and vulnerability that makes the wisdom easy to access as we relate it to our own children and our own parenting.”

—**Gloria DeGaetano**, Founder, Parent Coaching Institute

“This book will touch the deepest strings of your heart and invite you into a new level of connection with your child and to life itself. Erin has the gift to transform daily events we all experience as parents into profound opportunities to nurture our children’s souls in a loving, intentional and practical way. Her writing is engaging, honest, and takes us by the hand on a gentle trip into our hearts. *Connection and Kindness: The Key to Changing the World Through Parenting* is a reflection of the beautiful human being and highly experienced professional Erin is.”

—**Patricia Barros, MD (Brazil)**, PCI Certified Parent Coach®

“*Connection and Kindness: The Key To Changing The World Through Parenting* shares stories, wisdom, and good vibes that remind us to make connection and awareness our most important parenting tools. Erin generously shares her personal and professional experiences and inspires each of us to tap into our own compassion and authenticity. This leads to self love, deeper relationships within the family, and eventually, societal change.”

—**Cathy Cassani Adams**, Author of *Living What You Want Your Kids to Learn* and host of Zen Parenting Radio

“In Erin Taylor’s book, *Connection and Kindness: The Key to Changing the World Through Parenting*, parents and caregivers are reminded about the power of kindness. As a teacher, coach, and single mother (Sophie, age 4) I work with children all day long. When working with other people’s children I spend a great deal of time trying to meet their individual needs. Before reading Erin’s book I’d come home to my daughter and often my patience seemed to have vanished. I found myself easily frustrated by the littlest things. After reading Erin’s book I’ve been able to reflect on my parenting practices. As a result, I find myself consciously focusing on how I address my daughter. Recently, we were having a battle over something minute. I walked away from her angry and frustrated. Erin’s book entered into my mind. I went to her and said ‘Mommy isn’t being very kind right now, is she?’ I picked up Sophie and hugged her. We talked through the situation. Erin’s book reiterated what I already knew: my daughter deserves the level of patience and understanding that I tend to reserve for others. From now on, I will let kindness be my guide when it comes to parenting Sophie.”

—**Janet Liimatta**, STEM Teacher, Grades K-5

“Kindness: a well known, and one would think, simple word. Who would imagine that this word would be the foundational principle of a book on parenting, yet the concept of kindness is highly applicable and powerful in the experience of parenting. In this day and age of a myriad of books on the subject of parenting, how can one hope to find any real guidance in a parenting book with kindness as its foundational message? I am pleased to report that there are many pearls of wisdom for parents found in Erin Taylor’s book, *Connection and Kindness: The Key to Changing the World Through Parenting*.

In reality, kindness is not so simple a word. Erin does a wonderful job defining and describing the many ways that kindness is personified in effective parenting by helping the reader understand the more complex concepts that underlie it.

The beauty of Erin’s style is that she explains these concepts in a casual, conversational way that makes the reader feel as if she is gaining profound support from a visit with a dear friend.

Some of the pearls of wisdom that Erin passes on to her readers revolve around subjects such as:

- The difference between seeking compliance and seeking connection with our children and the profound connection that happens when we as parents detach a bit. (Paradoxical, I know. But you will understand when you read the book.)
- How a shift in perspective helps parents to respond very differently when dealing with misbehavior. With a newfound perspective that all children want to do well, the parent learns to respond to misbehavior from a place of compassion instead of fear. From this new place of compassion, the response to

misbehavior is to seek connection and show support instead of reacting quickly and doling out discipline.

- The beautiful experience of building connection that endures beyond the boundaries of life itself.
- Why striving to fulfill yourself as an individual is not only important for your well-being but is vital to being the best parent you can possibly be to your children.
- Why negotiating with your teen is much more productive than compromising with them, not only to bring more peace to the parent-teen relationship, but also for instilling tools in our teens that help them have healthier personal and professional relationships in their adult years.
- The deleterious effects of parenting with fear and how important it is as a parent to help a child conquer their own fears. (I especially loved Erin's description of fear as a mirage that evaporates when confronted!)
- Various principles for busy parents to tape up on your mirror and read every morning while brushing your teeth. (My suggestion, not hers... but they are that good.)
- Love as seen through the eyes of kindness. Erin shares her unique reflections on parental love at its best.

While Erin's book beautifully supports any parent in the throes of raising children, she also presents many personal experiences from her work as a counselor of foster families that provide the foster parent reader with the awareness that she really understands their unique experience of parenting as well. If you are looking for a wonderful read that balances presentation of applicable information with the comforting support of a great friend, I highly recommend this book.

As an experienced family counselor, parent coach and mother, Erin has much wisdom to share. I highly encourage you grab a cup of tea and settle in with her after the kids are tucked into bed.”

—**Lisa Kenawell**, PCI Certified Parent Coach®

“Connection and Kindness: The Key to Changing The World Through Parenting is a treat for everyone. This book touches one’s heart from the first page. It is written in such a way as to grab our attention, make us feel alive, emotional and deeply entrenched in the stories. I found my heartstrings pulled in different directions by both the teachable moments Erin so brilliantly shares as well as the heartfelt difference she and her family make in the community. Anyone who purchases this book will be graced with the opportunity to feel the blessings that Erin shares, the extreme power of her writing and the incredible teachable moments, lessons and moving stories that comprise this amazing book.

I guarantee you will not be disappointed. Instead you will be elated, moved and inspired by this authentic and wonderful book. Its inspiring words and stories will make you want to share Erin’s wisdom!”

—**Sue DeCaro**, PCI Certified Parent Coach®

“In the hustle and bustle of non-stop parent pickups and drop offs and our societal views of the perfect family/parent one thing seems to be lacking in our children and ourselves. That is kindness. Erin states ‘from the time our children are born, they are moving toward adulthood every step of the way.’ The questions you ask as the caregiver or parent are: What has your child grown into? What path are they taking? Do they have kindness? Not just towards siblings but towards themselves?

Life goes by in an instant and, if we are not careful, our children become adults in a blink of an eye. *Connection and Kindness: The Key To Changing The World Through Parenting* is like having a cup of tea or your favorite latte with Erin. She writes about her passion, her family, the hopes to have others connect with their children, and the kindness to get them there. The relatable stories of her own children from school to sports to her own on-the-job training make the book come alive with meaning. From the moment you are on their cruise with Selvin, *Connection and Kindness* takes you on a self-reflective journey towards your own meaningful connections with your children, spouse, neighbor, friend, or complete stranger.

This journey toward kindness is not perfect. Mistakes are made and triumphs are celebrated but the desire and drive to connect with one another is a bond that once established in truth is forever.”

—**Kimberly D. Mueller, EdD, NBCT**, First Grade Teacher, FL Walther Elementary School

“Erin Taylor’s book about kindness makes it all seem so simple—and it is—yet why does something so simple require us to work so hard? As a parent and counselor who is too often living a hurried life, Erin’s book reminds me about how important it is to take a step back, smell the flowers, be appreciative for what is in front of me and be present in the moment. As parents, it is important to take time for ourselves to rejuvenate and explore what is going on with us too. It is our job to be attuned to our kids and look beyond their behaviors to what those behaviors are trying to communicate to us. Letting go of traditional punitive parenting (which is sometimes based too much on control and too little on trying to actually understand what is going on with our kids) is important. It is truly amazing how far a simple conversation can take you with your kids as a parent if you take the time to have it and don’t just look for that quick fix, which often results in negative interactions and exchanges between parent and child. Erin’s book shows us that being kind to others as well as ourselves can make a profound impact on not only our children’s lives, but also others and our own. It is through teaching our kids these skills that we can bring hope and compassion to others and teach our kids to be well-rounded and less-stressed adults.”

—**Terri Havers, MA**, Mental Health Professional Working with At-Risk Youth & Treatment Home Families

Connection & Kindness

**The Key to Changing the World
Through Parenting**



Erin Taylor

Foreword by Shefali Tsabary, PhD

Copyright © 2015 by Erin Taylor

All rights reserved
Published in the United States of America
First Edition

No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without the written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations used in book reviews and critical articles.

Cover Design by Tina Paparone Lutz

*To **Jay** – my best friend and love of my life.*

*To **Sydney** – my angel in Heaven, and to **Noah, Faith** and
Brady – my beloved children on earth –
you are the apples of my eye and my greatest teachers.*

*There are no words to accurately describe the deep
gratitude and love I have for all of you.*

Contents

Foreword by Shefali Tsabary, PdD

Introduction

Chapter 1.	Did You Know that Your Child Has a Generous Heart?	1
Chapter 2.	Start a Chain Reaction with Your Kindness	1
Chapter 3.	Understanding the "Problem Child"	1
Chapter 4.	Getting to the Root of Bad Behavior	1
Chapter 5.	Bring It Out into the Open	1
Chapter 6.	When Mistakes Are Made	1
Chapter 7.	Building Connection that Endures	1
Chapter 8.	Be Kind to Yourself: Get a Life of Your Own	1
Chapter 9.	A Halloween Lesson for Mom	1

Chapter 10.	Why It's Essential to Develop Your Capacity for Kindness	1
Chapter 11.	The Teen Years and the Fine Art of Negotiation	1
Chapter 12.	Learning to Work Together	1
Chapter 13.	To Instill Fear in a Child Is a Disastrous Technique	1
Chapter 14.	Kindness in the Classroom	1
Chapter 15.	How to Help Children Conquer Their Fears	1
Chapter 16.	Parenting Is a Learning Process	1
Chapter 17.	Parenting from the Bright Side: We CAN End School Shootings	1
Chapter 18.	The Importance of Taking the Rough with the Smooth	1
Chapter 19.	Finding Your Own Center of Gravity	1

Foreword

by Dr Shefali Tsabary

All around the world, in homes of many different kinds and in many different societies, parents are becoming aware that the old disciplinary way of raising children, where the parent is the sole authority and dictates to the child, simply doesn't work well in our more democratic era.

Children are subject to so many more influences today than that of the primary family, so that in nation after nation they increasingly grow up in societies that prize freedom. Now, if we try to raise our children in the old ways, when they reach their teens they simply rebel, and we lose all control along with all possibility of influencing them for the good.

In the global shift that's underway, parents are learning to listen to their children's needs and work cooperatively with them, setting appropriate boundaries where needed, but principally negotiating rather than laying down the law. Connecting with a child, so that both parent and child understand each other, is today the defining element in parenting. When we connect instead of constantly correcting, our children don't resent us. Because they sense that we honor them for the unique individuals they are, they are more willing to listen to us.

I call this approach to raising children "conscious parenting." Instead of dictating, reacting without thinking, and taking the approach of "because I said so," when we

parent consciously, we think about what we are saying and doing instead of just cutting loose. We *use* our head instead of *losing* it.

When we truly begin listening to our children, seeking to understand who they are instead of imposing our will on them, it brings up our own unresolved issues from childhood. We have to face up to our own impatience, tendency to control, untidiness, tardiness, anger, or whatever other ways in which we too lack self-control.

Allowing our children to be a mirror to us of our own emotional immaturity, our refusal at times to listen to them, and our other unconscious behaviors becomes a means of growing ourselves up alongside our children. Raising a child then takes the shape of a partnership that's fruitful for all concerned, the result of which is that our children grow up to be self-disciplined, self-determined, cooperative human beings who are ready to go out into the world and live a fulfilling and productive life.

At the heart of this revolutionary way of parenting is an essential quality, without which all the insight we may have into how to raise a child simply won't work. That quality is *kindness*.

In this beautifully written book, Erin, who is a specialist in counseling and coaching foster, adoptive and biological families, takes us into the lives of her clients as they struggle with extremely difficult circumstances and behaviors. She also invites us into her own home, where we see how she and her husband are learning from their children how to be kind in everything they say or do.

By showing us how kindness makes all the difference in all sorts of everyday challenges, Erin has given us a book

that can help us all to become the loving parents we know
at heart we have always wanted to be.

– **Shefali Tsabary, PhD**

Clinical psychologist, author of the

Oprah acclaimed and

New York Times bestsellers

The Conscious Parent and

Out of Control

Introduction

by Erin Taylor

I have known since I was 11 years old that I wanted to help families—kids and parents—to have better relationships with each other. Growing up, I always liked school, but I could never articulate what my favorite subject was. I enjoyed my teachers and classmates and I enjoyed the schoolwork, but it really did not excite me. However, I did not realize how unexciting it was until I got to 11th grade and took my first Psychology class. I tried to enroll as a 9th grader but was told I was too young. It was so hard to wait those two years, as I was very excited to dive into something that I just knew I would love. So 11th grade Psychology class was where what I had always known about myself became solidified: *I want to help people improve their lives and in the process, change the world.*

Fast forward to college application time. I would be the first person in my family on either side to go to college, and that fact alone was very intimidating. I always knew that I was capable of succeeding in college, but I was still a bit scared. What if the work was too hard? What if I was not cut out for college? And unfortunately, I had no one I could turn to for reassurance that these were (what I would learn later on) completely normal fears to have in high school. When it came to majoring in Psychology, I got serious cold-feet, wondering if I was really "smart" enough to

succeed. Since I was on the yearbook committee my senior year and enjoyed laying out the pages, I decided that I would major in graphic arts, but I made sure that the college of my choice also had a Psychology program.

I want to mention the college of my choice for a moment. I have always been a person who has naturally allowed intuition to guide me, long before I even knew what I was doing. When the time came to apply to college, I applied to several, but met a co-worker at my part-time job over the holidays who went to Drexel University. As soon as she said the name, I knew that was the place I was meant to go, even though at that time I had never heard of it and knew nothing about it. But I immediately set about gathering information about the school and found it was just perfect—a city setting, about two hours from home (not too close and not too far), and having both a graphic arts program and a psychology program—perfect!

As soon as I knew it met all of my requirements, I knew deep in my heart that I was meant to go there. There was even something about the name of the school that sounded so "right" and so very familiar—as if it had been a part of my life forever. People would ask me what I would do if I did not get accepted into Drexel. Whenever they said that, my insides would want to shout that there was no possible way that could happen—that I would not get into Drexel. And I did not feel this from a place of denial—I felt it in my soul; I knew deep in my soul that this was where I was meant to go.

Fast forward to Christmas of my senior year. My dad had an accident at work—a head injury that left him in a coma two days after Christmas. While he was in the

hospital fighting for his life, my mom and I kept a vigil at his bedside for four straight weeks until he came fully out of his coma and spent the next three months in a rehabilitation hospital for head-injury patients. While he was laying there in the coma in the ICU, I got my acceptance letter for Drexel. I was so excited to tell my dad and I wanted desperately for him to be able to celebrate with me, but I took comfort in the fact that even though he was still on a respirator at that point and was not able to open his eyes or talk, he was able to wiggle his finger when we asked him a question. So when I told him my good news, he wiggled his finger like crazy. My heart was bursting with joy and gratitude on so many levels at that point.

So, having chickened out on the major part, I entered Drexel as a graphic arts major. That lasted only two quarters as I struggled my way through introductory art classes and my projects got torn apart in critiques by my professors—I could feel the life draining out of me. Nearing the holidays, I walked to the train station to purchase a ticket to go home. While I was at the station, I became mesmerized by this family who was also purchasing tickets. The boy looked to be about nine years old and he had longish, black, greasy hair. The mom was clearly under the influence of something and could not even walk straight. As the mom said goodbye to the dad who was dropping them off at the station, the little boy became the parent in the situation, for when the bell rang announcing their train's arrival, the boy took his inebriated mother's hand and said "Ok mom, when we go down these steps, I want you to hold my hand and not get lost."

Have you ever had one of those moments in life where the world seems to come to a grinding halt as time stretches out before you in slow motion? This was one of those times. I felt like I was being pulled into their struggle as if being sucked in by a black hole. I watched them, transfixed until they descended the steps out of my sight. Then I turned on my heel, went straight back to my advisor's office, and promptly changed my major to Psychology. I graduated Cum Laude from Drexel in 3.5 years and then went on to get my Master's in Counseling Psychology from Loyola University Maryland.

One other note about Drexel before I continue. Looking back, the two reasons that I was destined (and knew as much in my heart) to enroll there was because of this scene that I witnessed at the train station that would properly set the course for my career, and because I met my future husband there in the spring of our freshman year. Meeting him was another one of those moments where the earth seemed to stop spinning and time stood still as I felt my world aligning as it should. We have been together since then and happily married for 18 years so far.

I have worked for the past 18 years as a counselor with foster and biological families and have loved it. But several years ago, I worked with one family who I was not able to get through to and who was causing me serious burnout. This left me in a bit of a crisis, wondering if I needed to abandon my life's work and begin a different career. A series of events (which I cover later in the book) shifted my life's course to become a PCI Certified Parent Coach[®] which has been deeply fulfilling for me.

Reverse a few years: When my husband and I got married, we immediately set about trying to build our family with no success. Three years and thousands of dollars in fertility treatments later, our precious daughter Sydney was born. But she was born with a very serious heart defect and tragically died at the age of 24 days old. Another one of those time-standing-still moments as I got sucked in by a black hole, only this time it was horrific and gut-wrenchingly painful. But I knew in an instant that I wanted to keep a journal of my first year of grief in the hopes that one day I would turn it into a book to help other bereaved parents survive the death of their child. I faithfully kept that book all through the years—through more fertility treatments and the births of our other three heart-healthy children and my growing up as a parent. As time and circumstance guided me down my life's path, I found myself in a conversation with an editor-friend of mine talking about this book that I had wanted to write for years. By the end of that conversation, he had me convinced that the time did not seem right for that type of book and instead, I should write a book about parenting—a subject I am passionate about. And that is how this book was born—out of a desire I have had since I was 11 years old to help parents and children have better relationships with each other. I hope you get as much out of reading it as I did writing it.



Chapter 1

Did You Know that Your Child Has a Generous Heart?

We were packing up at the end of a weekend ski trip, when my daughter found a quarter on the floor of our hotel room. “Can we give it to the cleaning people for a tip?” she suggested.

“Sure,” I replied, delighted she wanted to do something nice for the housekeeping staff, who I’m quite certain rarely receive positive feedback for all the necessary and yet not much fun work they perform.

As my daughter was writing *For the Housekeeper* on an envelope, it occurred to my husband that to leave only a quarter could be seen as an insult. Of course, I realized he was right.

But what if it was understood that the quarter was coming from a young child? Realizing it came from her heart might just make the housekeeper’s day. I suggested she leave a note, and that she include her name and her age. She wrote:

Dear Housekeeper,

Thank you for cleaning my room. You did a very nice job.

From, Faith, Age 8

Where did this desire in my daughter to give her precious find to someone else come from? She certainly wasn't urged to do it by me. Rather, as I think back, it's clear she was *born* with a generous heart.

As we left the hotel that morning, I explained to Faith that one of the best parts of giving is the joy we feel when we imagine how good our actions will make the other person feel. Even though she wasn't going to be there when the housekeeping staff showed up in our room, she could imagine their faces when they discovered her small but thoughtful gift.

Now here's the real magic in this incident. It isn't that Faith is in any way an unusual child, but rather that her generous heart is a reflection of the way *all* children start out. It's how you and I began life. However, the extent to which a particular individual's natural capacity for generosity manifests itself depends on a variety of factors, ranging from their specific genetic makeup to their circumstances.

I believe that, above all, what influences whether a child grows up to retain the generosity that's innate is the family culture they are exposed to in their formative years.

Show Kindness When a Need Crosses Your Path

Our family had just returned from seven days of pure magic. During our cruise to the Bahamas, we had been made to feel like royalty.

My husband and I had been on two previous cruises, and on both occasions I had been deeply moved by how hard the ship's crew worked. I actually felt uncomfortable seeing how well the crew treated the passengers, knowing how difficult their daily lives had to be to make this happen. With twenty additional years of life experiences, I was prepared to feel that same discomfort on our latest cruise though I also expected it to feel a little different now that I'm a wife and a mother.

At dinner each evening, the wait staff were particularly attentive, affording us an opportunity to become quite friendly with Selvin, our head waiter. Following dinner one evening, we asked about his life. From Guatemala, he had a wife, a daughter of fifteen, and two sons who were eleven and four. For six months, he was away from home working on the ship, following which he spent two months at home before repeating the pattern. His workdays were twelve hours at a stretch, seven days a week, without a single day off for the entire six months. This had been his life for the past thirteen years.

"Why do you have to work so hard?" I asked.

"It's the only way I can provide a better life for my family," he explained.

This heart-breaking story of dedication and personal sacrifice touched me deeply, for I can't begin to fathom having to be away from the people I most love for six months at a stretch and not just for a year or two, but throughout my children's entire childhood.

“So when will you next see your family?” I asked.

“Well, it depends how much money I can save up,” he said with a sigh. “This particular ship is going to be dry-docked in October, which means any crew who want to go home will be permitted to do so.”

“Do you think you’ll be able to make the trip?” I inquired.

“I’ll have to wait and see,” he responded.

Even though we had only met this man a few days earlier, he had such a sweet spirit and pure soul that it was as if we had known him forever. However, half-way through our trip, we sensed something was bothering him. Looking into his eyes and seeing the genuine kindness there, I asked what was wrong. It turned out he had only just rejoined his ship two weeks ago after two months at home, but earlier that day he had spoken with his four-year-old son and learned he was having a rough day and crying for his daddy to come home.

When Selvin choked up as he related what was happening back home, I knew in an instant what I needed to do. We happened to be pulling out of Port Canaveral in Florida, so we still had use of our cell phones and therefore access to the internet for a few more minutes before we passed into international waters. No sooner had Selvin left our table than I made inquiries concerning how much a round trip airfare would cost from Baltimore, our city of departure, to Guatemala. Once I had ascertained the price, I told my husband, “We simply have to give him an airline ticket as an additional tip so he can go home in October.” My wonderful husband agreed without question.

I shared our plan with our three children and my

mother-in-law, though we said nothing to Selvin. All six of us looked forward to the final dinner of the cruise, when it's customary to tip the service people who have taken such great care of their guests. That final afternoon, my daughter and I wrote letters and placed them in an envelope along with the airfare. My daughter could hardly contain herself as we were seated in the dining room. Even my older son, who normally rushed off after dinner to hang out with his "cruise" friends, wanted to be there when we handed Selvin our surprise.

As dinner came to an end, my daughter called Selvin over, and I got up and walked around to her side of the table. Placing my hand on his arm, I looked into his eyes and told him how deeply touched we all had been by his story of sacrifice and dedication to his family. At this point, my daughter handed me a napkin as I started to tear up. Then, when I explained that there was an airfare in the envelope, Selvin began sobbing, hugging us each in turn, with a look in his eyes none of us will ever forget. Overwhelmed with gratitude, he told us, "I can't wait to call my wife and tell her the wonderful news." Then he asked for a photo of us all so he could show her the family who had made his trip back home while the ship was in dry-dock possible.

"It's more blessed to give than to receive," Jesus taught. Through our tears of joy on this occasion, every member of my family can attest to the joy of giving. Nothing equals the feeling we experience when we are moved to express generosity in a way that impacts someone's life in a meaningful way.

Our collective experience as a family mirrors a truth

articulated by Marshall Rosenberg, an American who for many years engaged groups of Palestinians and Israelis, helping them share their fears until the hostility between them melts. Rosenberg maintained that what we want above all things as human beings is *to be the cause of joy in another*.

Kindness Is a Personal Experience

The experience of bringing joy to a family carried with it several lessons our children learned, the first of which is how transformative kindness can be.

Actually, even though I say our children “learned” this lesson, as you already know from what I’ve recounted about Faith and the hotel staff, it’s more a matter of understanding how a family culture either crushes or reinforces what’s already innate. To be generous is our fundamental nature, and the part that’s learned is how to express it both meaningfully and wisely.

Many people don’t take the opportunity to affect someone’s life in the way we seek to as a family because they have seen how bottomless is the need in our world. Anything we do therefore feels like a drop in a bucket. Also, a lot of people give to charity, only to discover that in many cases much of their donation ends up siphoned off by administrative costs. This is one of the reasons it’s so rewarding to help an individual in a direct manner. You get to share in the joy, thereby promoting a culture of kindness.

If you’re tempted to think you can’t make any real difference, I’d like to draw your attention to an image that

sticks in my head from a story I once heard. A young woman and her husband decided upon his graduation from Princeton Seminary that they wanted to spend their lives in some place where there was great need, and so they set sail for Formosa, which is today known as Taiwan. Upon their arrival, one of their first endeavors was to talk to a government official about how they would like to help the people of his country. The official told them they were young and idealistic, but that the needs were so great, they were wasting their time and ought to go back home to America.

As the story goes, the official said to them, “Look at that ocean. If you take a bucket of water out of the ocean, it doesn’t make any difference. Well, you can spend your entire lives here, and it will be like taking a bucket of water out of the ocean.”

“If that’s the case, I’m just going to start filling my bucket!” declared the feisty young woman, who was in her twenties. “The ocean may not know the difference, but the bucket will.” Lillian Dixon lived until well over ninety, and during her lifetime established over a thousand hospitals, schools, and churches.

Most of us aren’t inclined to travel to the other side of the world to help people, and neither do most of us need to. There are abundant invitations to express kindness all around us if we but open our eyes. When we see a need, if it’s within our capability, it’s both our responsibility and our privilege to try to meet it.

The second lesson my children received as reinforcement for their natural proclivity for kindness, and the generosity it can trigger, was that no matter where we

live on this planet, as human beings we are all interconnected. In fact, in a very real sense our cruise ship was a microcosm of the world in which we live. People the world over want to enjoy life not necessarily by taking a cruise, but through the simple pleasures of home and hearth, with good food, drink, music and dance, and meaningful relationships.

Third, our children were repeatedly exposed to a practice I consider a central facet of a healthy family culture. This practice of mine is so simple, and yet in the context of the cruise it conveyed a powerful reinforcement of the importance of being kind to our fellow humans. What was this practice? Simply that, whenever I saw a passenger drop trash on the deck and leave it for the crew to clean up, I picked it up and disposed of it in the appropriate receptacles.

I wanted our children to realize that just because the crew's job was to wait on the passengers didn't mean they were any different from those they were serving and certainly not in any sense inferior to their passengers. Even though it was their responsibility to keep the ship clean, they weren't our slaves. As passengers, each of us was perfectly capable of disposing of our own trash. Seeing the crew as our equals, it was only appropriate to return the kindness and mutual respect they showed us during the duration of our voyage by picking up whatever trash crossed our path.

Fourth, I wanted our children to know how incredibly blessed we were. Throughout our vacation, I commented often on the many ways in which we were so fortunate to be able to sail on this beautiful ship, be recipients of such

thoughtful service, and visit the heavenly places at which we stopped off. Part of the culture of our family is that I never want my children to take things for granted. When we take things for granted, we deaden our natural inclination for kindness.

Life is to be savored, enjoyed, and appreciated. I think we all did a pretty good job of that on this cruise. But I wanted the children to know that wherever the opportunity arises to help someone else to savor, enjoy, and appreciate life just that little bit more, it's our responsibility to make it happen.

The greatest gift from this cruise was the joy of being able to help Selvin and his family enjoy life in a way that might not otherwise have been possible. As Marshall Rosenberg expressed, we have learned as a family that what we desire above all things as human beings is *to be the cause of joy in another*.

Kindness Is Contagious

When an article appeared on the CNN website concerning one of the year's CNN Heroes, I thought back to Selvin. The article related how Guatemala, which was of course Selvin's homeland, is still reeling from decades of civil war, resulting not only in poverty but also continued violence. Indeed, Guatemala has the fifth highest homicide rate of any country. The CNN article featured the ways in which Juan Pablo Romero Fuentes is making a difference in the lives of children in his country.

It was against this backdrop of an impoverished and

strife-torn nation that I came to understand why Selvin had elected to live such a difficult life. It's why he's one of my heroes. I'm not sure I could make the kind of long-term sacrifice he's making for his family.

All during the month of October, I wondered about our waiter and whether he did in fact go home. Faith and I smiled often as we imagined him with his wife and their three children. Then, in November, we received an email telling us he and his family were having a great time together, although his visit was coming to an end. He also sent a photo of himself with his wife and children.

I realize that going home one extra time isn't going to directly change any of their lives, but hopefully it will show this family that there are caring people in the world, and in so doing evoke in all with whom they share the story a similar desire to be kind to people in need with whom they come in contact.

It makes me so happy that we were fortunate enough to be in a position to help this kind man and his family spend additional time together. My sense is that they will each magnify the kindness they received with a ripple effect, spreading it in their own unique ways. Through one small act of kindness at a time, we can all help change the world. We can create a world that reflects who each of us really is in our deeper self.

So often we teach our children by talking, talking, talking. Much of the time, we talk *at* them rather than *with* them. If we can avoid talking at them, and simply share, communicating is indeed important. And yet, I'm persuaded of the truth of the old adage that "actions speak louder than words." I've seen how children learn best by

osmosis, picking up the importance of building on their innate kindness, with its accompanying desire to be generous, from a family culture.

In a nutshell, the really powerful teacher isn't what we say and definitely not our tendency to lecture. The really powerful teacher is a *way of being* practiced by the adults to whose care a child has been entrusted.

