

Compassionate Parenting

Lessons from our Forest Friends

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Welcome to this parenting book. It is the loving outcome of my life's work and I am honoured to share it. I will forever be grateful to the many northern families, educators and children who have generously welcomed me into their homes and classrooms. Thank you for sharing your wisdom and experience.

Parenting is difficult. No one is born a parent. Learning to parent comes from trusting yourself, connecting with the wisdom of others, and repeatedly learning from your own children.

Just as the relationship with your children ebbs and flows, so too will the hard times and the beautiful rewards. I hope that the words and attitudes within this book will add to your strength and understanding along your parenting journey.

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Pause & breathe



Snowshoe Hare will freeze when in danger, remaining calm and focused.

Take care of yourself first so you can take care of your children.

-  **Pause, don't rush. Slow down and become aware of your words and actions.** especially when your emotions run high. We can say things we regret when stressed.
-  **Learn what stresses you.** Notice where you feel tense: jaw, shoulders, stomach or hips. Ground yourself and count backwards from ten. Feel into your feet. Count objects in your surroundings. Remember to breathe.
-  **Practice a daily mindfulness habit.** Slow down and belly breathe. Focus on each step when making your morning coffee, washing your hands or cleaning the dishes. When your mind drifts, bring it back to your present activity. Having self-awareness during periods of stress will allow your thinking brain to come online more quickly.

Be a model



You are the primary role model for your children.

- 👂 **Your children watch you all the time**, especially when you are stressed — like during the morning rush. They learn from you and copy you: your beliefs, behaviours, knowledge and wisdom.
- 👂 Respond with calmness and love when stressed, resisting negative emotions like anger and annoyance. The ability to respond calmly and model healthy behaviour is strengthened through your own self-healing and self-awareness.
- 👂 **You cannot make children do anything, but you can model for them.** As you teach them healthy coping and emotional regulation skills, you will naturally guide them to success.

Connect, connect, connect



*Red fox parents are very attentive, playful,
and affectionate with their kits.*

Invest in your relationship with your children.

-  **Intentionally make time each day to connect** and share joyful moments with your children. It is the small and powerful acts of attention that will strengthen your special bond.
-  Give energy to the relationship. Be present. Play together. Read together. Be together.
-  Deepen your connection by rocking your child, singing with them or rubbing their back. The rhythm of these activities mimics the maternal heartbeat and is deeply soothing.
-  Your children will feel your love when you **put down your phone** or step away from a task and **give them your eyes and full attention**.

Connect Then direct



*Moose calves follow their mother's instructions
because their bond is tight.*

Children respond positively when they feel you care about them.



It is important to show your children that you hear them and care deeply about their needs. Children will listen and respond positively when they feel respected.



In times of conflict and **before giving direction, start with a compassionate connecting statement** like “**I love you.**” Next, reflect back their feelings or mood, for example “**I see you are frustrated.**” Then give them direction, for example “**I need you to use words**” or “**I need you to change what you are doing.**”



Acknowledge your children’s feelings by truly seeing their perspective and your relationship will be strengthened. They will trust you to be fair, and they will be more open to taking direction.

Listen & repair



Owls have superb hearing and take notice of everything their owlets do.

Be present and listen to your children so they can learn to solve problems and grow.

- ↓ Children will make mistakes. What is important is what happens afterwards. Your choice as a parent is to **listen** and bring them back into the family or punish and push them away.
- ↓ Listen and then coach them **to understand the impact** of their actions, which will increase a respect for others and themselves. Encourage your children to take responsibility and give them a chance to offer genuine apologies.
- ↓ **Punishing your children only instills fear.** It may lead to just following “the rules,” but they may not be motivated to change their behaviour.
- ↓ The only time repair and restoration is *not* used is when there is imminent threat to self or others.

Choose your words



Chickadee parents convey important information to their fledglings using a variety of songs and sounds.

Our choice of words and how we say them are critical to how children respond.

- ✎ Trust the power of language to heal, connect and build relationship with your children.
- ✎ **Show understanding with connective and restorative phrases** like “**What do you need?**” or “**How can I help?**” instead of accusatory demands like “*What are you doing?*” or “*Can you stop doing that?*”
- ✎ Be brief. Children don’t hear long sentences. Examples of short phrases:
 - To increase self-awareness, ask: “**Are you mindful or unmindful?**”
 - To put things in perspective, ask: “**Is this a big problem or little problem?**”

Our words reflect our heart

- To encourage task completion, say: “**First** we do things we don’t like, and **then** we do things we do like.”
- To encourage exploration in children who have difficulty trying something new, use “**same**” (as familiar activity) “**but different**” (in a similar small way). For example, putting on a heavy winter coat is the same but different than putting on a light summer jacket.

↘ Be confident and positive when asking for a shift in behaviour. Use “**please**” and avoid using “no” or “don’t”.

↘ Encourage the use of “**I**” and “**we**” in family conversations to promote community building. Using “you” puts others on the defensive.

↘ Avoid absolutes of “you always” or “you never.” There are exceptions to every view point.

↘ Avoid hesitant language like “I think,” “sort of” or “just” as it suggests you are unsure.

Praise all the way



Porcupine mothers have only one summer with their young and attentively teach them all they need to know.

Applaud every small step forward your child makes.



Every **small** positive behaviour or attitude **change** by your children **must be praised** and applauded.



Learning happens when your children feel safe and are praised to explore new ideas and behaviours, not when they are corrected and punished. Praise generously and your children will feel recognized and empowered by you to take exploratory steps toward becoming loving, responsible and independent family members.



The rule: **Praise more than you correct.** Try this: Put some beads in one pocket and every time you give a praise move one bead to the other pocket. At the end of the day, how many beads do you have in your praise pocket?

Routines & structure



Red squirrels learn from their parents the repetitive behaviour of collecting pine cones.

Routines and structure build consistency and predictability.



Consistent limits and predictable schedules or routines **all provide a sense of well-being** for the family.



Make your expectations clear and your children will know what to expect. Their stress levels will be reduced and they will feel comfortable to **not worry about what's happening next.**



Create morning, bedtime and other routines to make your week run smoothly. Bring everyone together with regular family rituals, such as games night or a special Friday meal. Predictability **conserves your energy** levels. Plus, if you are constantly reinventing your schedule, your children will feel unsettled.

Pick your battles



Ravens will playfully fight over resources and cooperate to solve problems.

Decide what is really important and what to let go.

-  Your highest priority as a parent is probably for your children to be safe and to come to you if they have a safety concern. Pick your battles wisely. Maybe messy bedrooms aren't a big deal. **Ignore small or annoying behaviours.**
-  **Don't make demands that you cannot control.** The last thing you want is to look powerless by making directives you cannot follow through on.
-  You want your children to see you as a caring and respectful parent, not an annoying one.
-  Remember, you can't make children obey, but you can build connection so that they will turn to you in need.

Boundaries & respect



Wolf pups quickly learn their role in the pack and what is acceptable behaviour.

Never overlook the crossing of important boundaries, such as safety or lack of respect.

-  **Always follow through on your word. Otherwise, you communicate to your children it is okay to not listen to you.** If you don't follow through, your children won't respond to or respect your requests.
-  All groups require a caring leader and a family is no different. **Strong leadership provides an anchor** for the group to feel comfortable, and if you don't assume the role, your children may rise to the alpha position.
-  You must set the limits and boundaries. **Offer your children choices** within these restrictions, and you will empower them with a sense of control and they can develop decision-making skills.

Build resiliency



Bear cubs learn to be persistent and adaptable in foraging for food.

To build resiliency in your children, help them develop skills to overcome adversity.

 Resiliency comes from seeing yourself as independent, empowered and successful. Provide opportunities for success through finding what your children's gifts are and supporting them.

 Be proactive and watch for signs of agitation in your children. If you catch it before they are out of control, they can calm themselves and successfully adjust their behaviour before it escalates.

Resiliency comes from accepting the mistakes we make



You can't teach someone to swim when they are drowning. Develop and practice managing strategies before they are needed. Have a preferred calming technique like **"stop & breathe"** or a confidence booster phrase like **"You can do hard things."**



Use distraction to shift your children's attention away from emotional struggles when things are not going their way. The distraction of a shared laugh or a tickle will allow them to feel and manage their stress with more ease.



If a full-blown escalation does happen, remember that an activated brain cannot easily process language. It is best to repeat a short restorative statement like **"I am here,"** or **"We are safe."**

Community matters



Beaver families rely on each member to contribute and live peacefully together.

Strengthen your family bonds to build healthy community.



The desire for connection is innate. Your **children want to belong** and contribute to something larger than themselves. If they don't engage or if they retreat, it is because *they don't know how* to join in. Support their involvement in the family by deliberately drawing them in with words and touch, and by being emotionally present.



Each family member must have compassion for and responsibility to others in the family unit. **Show your children how their actions can have positive or negative impact on others.**

Together we can do so much



Everyone has needs and when you take time for yourself, you will confirm to your children that your needs also matter.



You have the opportunity to build relationship in every moment. There will be numerous **bids for connection** each day by your children, and not all of them will be positive. Will you move toward your children even when they have hurt you, or react and push them away? If you believe **your children are doing the best they can**, it will be easier to come together. Be generous and assume everyone is always coping in the best way they can in that moment.



The family you build together will be bigger than the sum of its parts.

“When a child walks in the room, your child or anybody else’s child, do your eyes light up? That’s what they’re looking for.”

— Toni Morrison

We believe that parents are the best teachers for their children.

For more information on building positive family relationships, and for parenting resources and coaching opportunities, visit:
www.cloudberrywellness.com

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